

Minnesota Agriculture

Voice of Rural Minnesota



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March 2024

Standing for Agriculture, Working for Farmers. www.mfu.org





Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack visited Miller's Market in St. Charles to talk about REAP, the Rural Energy for America Program, and to highlight area residents who utilized the program. Pictured on right is Gov. Tim Walz, who spoke about the importance of renewable energy.

Vilsack visits St. Charles to promote REAP

Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack visited family-owned Miller's Market, a grocery store in St. Charles, on Feb. 1 to highlight the Biden-Harris administration's efforts to lower energy costs, generate new income and create jobs in rural communities.

Vilsack was joined by Gov. Tim Walz and they met with a farmer and small business owners that have received funding from the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Rural Energy for America Program (REAP), which helps agricultural producers and rural small businesses access renewable energy infrastructure and energy efficient upgrades.

Vilsack participated in a discussion with several recent REAP recipients, including:

- Miller's Market, which received a \$64,000 grant to install a 50-kilowatt solar array that is expected to replace 102,500 kilowatt hours of electricity per year, enough energy to power nine homes and the equivalent of 12.6 percent of the store's annual energy consumption.
- Mark and Karen Goldberg of Stewartville received a grant of nearly \$78,000 to install a wind turbine on their farm, which will save them \$11,520 per year. The turbine replaces more than 103,000 kilowatt hours of electricity each year.
- Four Daughters Winery in Spring Valley received a \$167,500 REAP award

to install a 207-kilowatt solar array. This project is expected to save the business \$53,000 per year in electrical costs and replace 287,000 kilowatt hours of electricity, which is enough energy to power 26 homes. This is 58 percent of the winery's annual energy consumption.

- The locally owned Ace Hardware Store in St. Charles was awarded \$52,000 to install a 39-kilowatt solar array. This project is expected to replace 78,850 kilowatt hours of electricity per year - 85.5 percent of their total annual energy usage.

"Thanks to President Biden's Inflation Reduction Act, producers and rural communities have more opportunities to participate in the clean energy economy than ever before," Vilsack said. "Minnesota communities have taken full advantage of these opportunities, leading to lower energy costs for business owners, savings and more income for producers, and vibrant Main Streets."

USDA has invested more than \$1.6 billion in 5,457 projects through REAP, including \$53.8 million for 495 projects in Minnesota, more than any other state in the country. The Inflation Reduction Act provided the funding for 145 of those projects, totaling nearly \$11 million. The Inflation Reduction Act made about \$1.4 billion in additional funding available for REAP from 2022-2024 to help meet the demand.



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President's message

GARY WERTISH, PRESIDENT

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With each passing day, it seems less likely that a farm bill will be enacted in the first quarter of 2024. In November, Congress voted to extend the 2018 Farm Bill through September 2024 and many farm groups, including Farmers Union, hoped that would give policymakers ample time to enact new legislation.

Now, with another continuing resolution expected to be voted on this month to keep the government running, there is little remaining floor time to discuss other issues.

Once the first quarter passes, it will be even more difficult to get a farm bill passed in 2024.

Jonathan Coppess, an associate professor and director of the Gardner Agriculture Policy Program in the College of Agricultural, Consumer and Environmental Sciences at the University of Illinois, gives a good overview of the challenges that are ahead for the farm bill.

"It doesn't look good in 2024 because there are three fundamental problems in the way of getting a farm bill completed in this Congress," he said.

The first problem is the reference prices for corn and soybeans, which are going to automatically increase for 2024. However, under budget law, Congress can't increase the statutory reference price.

"Any change to the statute has to be scored by the Congressional Budget Office against the existing projection for spending, otherwise known as the baseline," Coppess said. "That cost projection is over 10 years into the unknown future."

The reference price increases could cost from \$20 billion to \$50 billion over 10 years and that must be offset with cuts in other programs.

"There are really three places you can take it — crop insurance, which is pretty much off the table," he said. "Some are reporting that the House is looking at cutting the



MFU Outreach Organizer Lee Johnson and FUA insurance agent Joel Harmoning at Minnesota Ag Expo in Mankato on Jan. 17.

Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program or conservation spending."

The second problem involves money for conservation and the Inflation Reduction Act.

"In 2022, Congress passed this act which is a massive piece of legislation that includes roughly \$18 billion for conservation," Coppess said. If it's cut, money now available for farmers to implement conservation practices goes away and it's a gamble on whether the money would be used to increase reference prices.

"Problem No. 3 is the 118th Congress has not been the most productive and one of the reasons is it is a divided Congress," Coppess said. "The Republicans control the House, the Democrats control the Senate, there's not a lot of agreement and the majorities are narrow."

He says it's unlikely anything will happen on the farm bill from July to November, which kicks the legislation to the lame-duck session after the election.

Right to Repair

In Minnesota, the legislative session is in full swing. We're working hard to pass

Right to Repair for farm equipment this year. At Minnesota Ag Expo in Mankato, both the state corn and soybean organizations passed resolutions in support of Right to Repair legislation and we look forward to working with them to get this important legislation passed. Last year, we worked with these organizations to pass a grain indemnity fund.

When farmers pay thousands of dollars for farm equipment, they should be able to repair the equipment themselves or go to their favorite local repair shop to get it fixed. As implement dealerships have consolidated, they are further away from farmers and busier, which adds headaches when trying to get a timely repair done during planting or harvesting season. It's just like when I get my farm truck serviced. I can take it to the dealership where I bought it or go to the independent shop in town. Farmers should be able to do the same thing with their equipment. Additionally, for some farmers, fixing equipment could be a way to diversify their income. Right to Repair is a win-win for rural communities and rural economic development.

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At the time of writing this, lawmakers are preparing to kick off the 2024 legislative session on Feb. 12. This is the second year of the biennium, typically reserved for assembling a bonding package and passing no-cost changes to policy. That said, together with members, MFU leadership and staff are ready to make a strong case for continued progress on key priorities.

To help him hear directly from farmers ahead of what could be a consequential session, MFU hosted a listening session with Senate Ag Chair Aric Putnam, DFL-St. Cloud, in Zumbrota on Jan. 24. MFU partnered with other farm organizations and commodity groups to get the word out about the convening and packed more than 100 farmers into the local VFW for a lively conversation that helped preview issues lawmakers will grapple with in the coming months.

Rep. Steve Jacob, R-Altura, welcomed attendees to his district and kicked off a discussion about nitrates and water quality that would be a throughline of the nearly two-hour session. This was unsurprising given the recent Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) letter mandating new action on the part of state agencies charged with ensuring water quality. Jacob highlighted his service to his local Soil and Water Conservation District and the fact that he was the sixth farmer to be certified by the Minnesota Agricultural Water Quality Certification Program (MAWQCP) that MFU has championed at the legislature.

In addition to concerns relating to the EPA, Putnam heard about deer damaging crops and stored hay—a growing issue in the southeast—the need for relief for dairy farmers, healthcare costs, the shortage of veterinarians and property taxes.

Listening session held, Public Option report released and solar siting discussed



Olmsted County Farmers Union President John Larsen speaks about the shortage of veterinarians during a Jan. 24 Listening Session at the Zumbrota VFW.

He also heard about Right to Repair for agricultural equipment and took an informal 'poll' as part of his closing comments. Broad support in the room was clear, which will be meaningful as we renew that debate this session.

In all, it was a meaningful way to not just preview session, but also recap the 50-plus farm tours Putnam completed this summer and fall. If you hosted lawmakers this year, know that it was meaningful.

State budget outlook

In past issues, I've described the state's budget picture, which will help define this session. Lawmakers are faced with a \$2.4 billion budget forecast according to the latest forecast. That said, over the long term the state is spending more money than it is projected to collect. So, while there is no deficit, this structural imbalance will leave lawmakers resistant to any new spending that isn't paid for by new revenue or a cut to another program.

An unfortunate reality is that this could mean proposed cuts to programs MFU worked hard to establish in past years. We will need to keep one eye looking forward toward proactive priorities and another

looking back at the work we already completed. This is another reason it never hurts to say thank you to lawmakers for work they did on our behalf.

Of course, this is all a forecast. An updated projection will come out mid-February and give new insight into what funding lawmakers have to work with this session.

Last month, I also wrote about the narrowed timeline coupled with the upwards of 3,000 bills already eligible for consideration this session. We now have confirmation that the first committee deadline will be on March 22 by which committees in both the House and Senate need to approve most bills. If they don't get a hearing by then, they are likely dead for the year.

This deadline is a big reason MFU chose to host its Lobby Day early in session on Feb. 20—more on that to come.

MinnesotaCare Public Option

On Feb. 1, the Minnesota Department of Commerce completed the next big step toward establishing a MinnesotaCare Public Option, a move MFU has advocated for since 2016. With urging from our members and others, the legislature authorized a

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ARIEL KAGAN
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Last fall, Minnesota passed a major milestone – one million acres of land is now certified through the state’s Minnesota Agricultural Water Quality Certification Program (MAWQCP). The program also celebrated the ten-year anniversary of the first acres certified in 2014. These two accomplishments reflect years of work, farmer leadership, and partnerships, many of which members of MFU have led since the beginning.

MAWQCP is a voluntary, farmer-led certification program run through the Minnesota Department of Agriculture. When farmers reach out about certification, they work with a certification specialist to assess each field of their farm, and figure out the risks and opportunities specific to their operation. Brad Jordahl Redlin, the program’s manager, reflected on the progress of the program, “One thing we’ve seen is the bearing out of the obvious reality that every farm, every field, is different. That’s certainly the lesson learned after 10 years.”

While the focus of the program is water quality, the program has added several endorsements that producers can add to their certification. These include Integrated Pest Management, wildlife, soil health, climate-smart, and the most recent addition, Irrigation Management. Each endorsement has been developed with experts in the topic, and provides farmers with opportunities to improve their operations and to be recognized for their stewardship practices. The climate-smart endorsement also includes access to a \$1,000 payment for new practice adoption.

As I’ve written about previously in this magazine, huge investments from the private and public sectors are targeting climate

Minnesota’s Ag Water Quality Certification Program celebrates one million acres



solutions on working lands. The Minnesota Agricultural Water Quality Certification Program is a valuable resource for farmers looking to enter a climate-smart market. With the one-on-one technical assistance, producers enrolled in MAWQCP can get connected to resources and other certified farmers in their area to figure out what makes the most sense for their operations.

With one million acres now certified, there’s also new opportunities for market development and continued growth of the program. Minnesota’s Soybean Research and Promotion Council has found there’s big interest in our certified acres in export markets including the European Union. Farmers who direct market their products can also find value in certification, sharing information about their environmental practices with their customers. “We’re seeing more opportunities for people to take the certification and run with it,” said Jordahl Redlin.

“The Minnesota Agricultural Water Quality Certification Program hitting one million acres is a huge accomplishment for farmers across the state of Minnesota as well as the dedicated staff at MDA. It is a clear sign that farmers are embracing opportunities and tools to make their farms more efficient and environmentally sustainable,” said MFU Vice President and MAWQCP-certified farmer

Anne Schwagerl. Schwagerl and I both serve on the MAWQCP Advisory Committee which gives strategic advice and helps to champion the program.

Interested in becoming certified, or adding an endorsement to your certification? Visit the Minnesota Department of Agriculture’s website for more information: www.mda.state.mn.us

Soil health equipment grants

The MAWQCP team at the Minnesota Department of Agriculture is now administering the Soil Health Financial Assistance Grant program, which is in its second year. Funded through both the general fund as well as the Clean Water Fund, the department has invested millions of dollars in grants for farmers to buy equipment to achieve their soil health goals. The program is competitive and in high demand. MDA received an incredible 286 applications in the 2023 fall round, for over \$8.5 million in requests. There will be another round of grants available in July.

Applicants are asked to describe their soil health goals, and then explain how the equipment they’d like to purchase will help them achieve those goals. The process allows for creativity, flexibility and site specificity for farmers. In the last round of grants, no-till drills, drone seeders and manure spreaders were funded. The program is a first in the nation pilot that addresses one of the key challenges to implementing climate-smart practices: the high cost of equipment.

For more information, see <https://www.mda.state.mn.us/soil-health-grant>



ATTENTION MEMBERS!

Do we have your most recent email address?

If not, email claudine@mfu.org with your new address.



Membership Award winners say community is greatest benefit of Farmers Union

CLAUDINE ARNDT, MEMBERSHIP AND MINNESOTA COOKS DIRECTOR

claudine@mfu.org

Every year National Farmers Union (NFU) hosts an award ceremony at the NFU Convention to recognize counties and individual members for their contributions to Farmers Union, especially as it relates to membership engagement. This year Minnesota Farmers Union will be taking center stage at the award ceremony, as 10 of our ambitious counties that earned the NFU Leadership Achievement Award are recognized, as well as two of our rockstar members who earned individual membership awards: Linda Larson (Dakota County) and Kelsey Zaavedra (Chisago County).

Linda and Kelsey will be presented with Membership Awards for their enthusiasm and success in recruiting and renewing Farmers Union members. Each will be awarded a \$100 credit toward a Farmers Union event registration for earning 20+ points in NFU's Membership Award point system. (Please see the sidebar for more information about the point system.)

I chatted with Linda and Kelsey to learn more about what drives their enthusiasm for Minnesota Farmers Union and how and why they invite others to check out our organization.

Linda Larson, Dakota County President

Claudine: Why did you join MFU and how long have you been a member?



Linda Larson

Linda: The Dakota County President at the time said to Brian (Linda's husband), 'I'd like you to join Farmers Union, and we're having a county convention on such and

such date.' After the county convention, Andy (the Dakota County President) said, 'Congratulations, Brian - we elected you president.' Then stuff started coming in the mail from Farmers Union. After a while, I started opening the mail and I said, 'Brian, this is really good stuff!' And that launched us. My dad was a Farmers Union member when I was a child, though he wasn't active in it. In the portfolio of my parents' estate was CHS stock. I'm proud to have that in my heritage. I've been a member about 20 years, since sometime right after 2000, and I was elected to the Executive Committee in 2019.

Claudine: What do you say to people when you're inviting them to be a member of MFU?

Linda: I tell people, 'You're going to find out that we're your people. You will find your alliance with what your own purpose is and values are. We advocate for family farmers. The more we stand together the stronger our voice is and the stronger influence we have with policymakers. It's not a political movement. It's a policy movement. It doesn't matter what party you belong to as long as you support our policies. You can support farmers without being a farmer just like you don't have to be a teacher to be on a school board.' I just make it easy for people to say yes.

Claudine: In your opinion, what is the greatest benefit to being a MFU member?

Linda: For me, it's having a community of like-minded people. I come from the farm, but I don't live on the farm. Being in the suburbs, many people are far enough removed from agriculture now that they don't engage. Farmers Union is my neighborhood and Farmers Union members are my neighbors. I love that we can have conversations, that I can learn from those conversations, that I can advocate for the needs of our members. I love that we lead in the policy world in the legislature and Congress. I love that we have access to our

elected officials. I give credit to Farmers Union for that. It's an instant connection with policymakers when they know that we are connected to Farmers Union. I live vicariously through the stories that our farmers tell. I always thought I'd live on the farm. This is my plan B.

Claudine: What is something MFU has brought to your life that you otherwise might not have experienced or learned?

Linda: A broader appreciation of the environment, the global economy and a great commitment to standing together for what we need, like health care and education and true representation in government. Those are all really important to me and I don't know if I would have had a channel for them if I weren't a Farmers Union member.

Claudine: Any final thoughts to share?

Linda: If somebody ever asked me about how I get new members to join, I say, 'Get to know them, find out who they are, show them how connecting to the Farmers Union can benefit them.' And I always tell them, 'Farmers Union works to support the future of farming.'

Kelsey Zaavedra, Chisago County President

Claudine: In a relatively short time, you've become quite an ambassador for MFU. Why did you join MFU?



Kelsey Zaavedra

Kelsey: Joining Farmers Union was always on my radar, and then what pushed me over the edge was that I was in crisis and everyone I talked to said, 'Join Farmers Union.' When I asked why, they told me, 'Because they have more power than you have alone; it's a large group of people who have come together.' So I joined Farmers Union because I didn't have the community I needed to survive – a physical community that I needed and didn't have in North Branch - and then I

found it in MFU. Peter came out and visited, then I met you (Claudine) and started getting involved, and as soon as I started engaging, I was like, 'Oh, this is what I needed.'

Claudine: Why is it easy for you to encourage others to join MFU?

Kelsey: It's easy to share Farmers Union with people because my experience has been very authentic and impactful. I can show up and be me. I'm surprised by the number of times people in MFU haven't told me, 'You can't say that,' because I am pretty outspoken. But I am respectful, so I can be authentically me and I won't be shamed. I'm not selling anything. I'm just sharing my positive experience. I really appreciate the resources shared in Farmers Union and having access to people and information.

Claudine: What do you say when you're inviting someone to be a member?

Kelsey: I ask them, 'Are you a member yet?' I wear my experience with Farmers Union on my sleeve - and on Instagram. Then other people usually end up approaching me and asking about it, and I tell them, 'Give it a go or come to a meeting.'

Claudine: When you promote MFU on Instagram, what do you say?

Kelsey: I've said, 'For everyone who's heard the rumor...it's true: free memberships for newbies. @mnfarmersunion has brought wind back to my sails after the last year. They are a voice for farmers, eaters and the future generations of both. If you were thinking about joining, the time is now. You can find a link in my bio for details. #mfu #farmersunion #minnesota'

Claudine: In your opinion, what is the greatest benefit to being a member of our organization?

Kelsey: It's community. Having good people in my corner that understand my

life experiences and respect them. I look at the friendships I've made and grown through Farmers Union and how my relationships have strengthened being a Farmers Union member... as a person who lives in a rural space and has an agrarian lifestyle, it comes with a lot of perks, but it can be isolating as well. When you're out in rural spaces, you need good friendships. Creating that common ground and sharing space with like-minded people has been really meaningful, both personally and professionally.

Claudine: Any final thoughts?

Kelsey: At some point, I realized that the sky's the limit in this organization. It's been really fun and inspiring and encouraging to explore and understand what Farmers Union does, what it means to our members and how we work together.

Editor's note: Look for a feature on MFU's 10 Leadership Award-winning counties in the April issue of Minnesota Agriculture.

Membership Award

When you recruit a new member or bring a lapsed member back into the Farmers Union family, the National Farmers Union recognizes your enthusiasm and initiative through the Membership Award Program.

Recognition

Every individual earning the NFU Membership Achievement Award will receive a certificate during a special recognition ceremony held at the National Convention.

Point system

One-year renewal – ½ point

One-year new membership – 1 point

Multi-year renewal – ½ point per year renewed

Multi-year new membership – 1 point per year joined.

Rewards

10 points: Farmers Union logo cap

15 Points: Farmers Union shirt

20 Points: \$100 credit toward a Farmers Union event registration

40 Points: The Blue Star Award; \$200 Visa gift card & Farmers Union swag

50 Points: The Silver Star Award; \$350 Visa gift card

Timeframe

Points for the 2024 award were given to volunteers who recruited members between Jan. 1, 2023, and Dec. 31, 2023.

New MFU members

Welcome to the new members. We look forward to getting to know you. We encourage experienced members to invite new members to events in your area. Working together we make a stronger Farmers Union.

Edwin and Kara Amundson, Amundson Farms, Lincoln County

Heather-Marie Bloom and John Hatcher, Rising Phoenix Community Farm, Pine County

William and Melanie Bomier, Carlton County

Jenna Crabtree, Clay County

James Fox, Lyon County

Laverne Franke, Sibley County

Michael and Carolyn Helstrom, Helstrom Farms, St. Louis County

Tim Ignaszewski, Waseca County

Matthew and Amber Jensen, La Ferme, Otter Tail County

Ben and Meredith Johnson, Goodhue County

Peter Kennedy and Teresa Clarke, Swift County

Kelly Rae Kirkpatrick, The Garden Lab, Olmsted County

Roger Kittelson, Goodhue County

Drew Maxson, Double D'S Custom Processing, Aitkin County

Abby Moffitt, Ramsey County

Todd Ostrow, Sherburne County

Rick Schultz, Waseca County

Brady Swanson, Pennington County

Adam and Jenae Ulbricht, Minnesota Bison Association, Todd County

David and Patra Wise, Native Wise LLC., Carlton County



Membership Engagement and Education Advisory Committee members are invaluable assets

WILL TEACHOUT **EDUCATION ASSISTANT**

will@mfu.org

When people notice my last name, they often think to themselves; “Wow! This guy was destined to work in education with a name like that!” While I didn’t think that was going to be the case, I unexpectedly found myself running the Education Department here at MFU after only a few short months on the job. Overwhelmed is an understatement when it came to describing how I felt when I had to suddenly step up to the plate, but I quickly realized that I had a great team and an incredible group of members cheering for me.

One of my duties here is to facilitate the meetings of the Membership Engagement and Education Advisory Committees. Some of the greatest people I have ever had the privilege of working with serve on these committees. In the first committee meetings of the year, these committees empowered me to take a potential rough season for this department and turn it into an opportunity to make something great. Now, I’m overwhelmed not by the workload, but by the support and genuine care that these members have for both me as a person and the vision of the education and membership programs here at MFU.

In these committee meetings, members have a chance to give feedback on staff projects and initiatives and stay up to date on what is happening at the MFU office. These meetings are also time for the staff to have brainstorming sessions with the members who will ultimately be benefitting from these programs. These committees are keeping the cooperative principle of our organization alive and well.

When folks outside of our organization think about what we do at Farmers Union, many immediately go to the great feats that

our organization does on the legislative side. While it is true that we do a ton of work at all levels of government, it is only one-third of the Farmers Union core principles.

The three core principles of Farmers Union are legislation, cooperation and education. What makes this model and organization great is that one side cannot exist without the others.

On the legislation side, we could not do the outstanding lobbying work that we do in St. Paul and Washington, D.C., without the cooperation and support of our members, who consistently turn up as leaders and active voices in their communities and regions.

The education side of the model is no different. We are devoted to growing the next generation of leaders through cooperative education, leadership camps and programs like the New Leader Academy and FUEL.

These programs cannot happen without your support and engagement, which is why member participation and cooperation is so vital to all our work. The ideals of working together to achieve common goals through the cooperative model are grown and fostered in our education and leadership programs and strengthened in our legislative work.

The two committees that I facilitate have overlapping goals rooted in cooperation and education principles but are both vital to the organization in their own ways. Below are brief descriptions of these committees.

Membership Engagement Committee

The Membership Engagement Committee’s purpose is to build upon the strength and potential of Minnesota Farmers Union membership through:

- Forward thinking: creating new opportunities for current and future generations of Minnesota Farmers Union members.

- Education: engaging members through education and leadership building opportunities.
- Inclusivity: making space for all family farmers, rural community members and agricultural supporters to be a part of Minnesota Farmers Union.

Education Advisory Committee

The Education Advisory Committee’s purpose is to connect with members and key stakeholders about the education programs and initiatives offered by MFU, and to generate ideas and opportunities to keep our education programs strong, relevant and accessible to all Farmers Union members, through:

- Active Advisement: key initiatives and programs are pitched to the committee to discuss the major components and feasibility before implementation.
- Educational Program Development: committee members work together in either adult or youth education subcommittees to advance the development and quality of our programs and curriculum.

The power of these committees comes from the members themselves, who give their time and energy to ensure that the principles that make our organization great continue to flourish for future generations of agriculturalists. I’m truly honored to help facilitate these committees and work with these rockstar members.

If you’re interested in joining or learning more about these committees that help me and the MFU staff continue to hit homeruns for you all, reach out to me at will@mfu.org or **651-468-7510**. Let’s work together!



JUSTIN STOFFERAHN,
ANTIMONOPOLY DIRECTOR
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Amidst the gridlock that often characterizes Congress, a little-known change from 2022 is starting to have an impact. That year Congress passed bipartisan legislation spearheaded by Sens. Amy Klobuchar, D-Minn., and Mike Lee, R-Utah, called the State Antitrust Enforcement Venue Act. The legislation allows state attorneys general to control the venue where antitrust cases are heard, a seemingly dry procedural change with a lot of potential to make state antitrust enforcement more effective.

While not the stuff of headlines, the boring process of litigation is important as corporate monopolies use procedural tactics and their vast legal resources to try and avoid accountability. In the case of state antitrust lawsuits, those cases can get moved around at the urging of dominant companies via an entity called the Judicial Panel on Multidistrict Litigation.

That panel used to be able to combine state antitrust lawsuits with private ones and move them to different courts. In addition to often being moved to a monopoly friendly court that is far away from the state where the case was originally filed, this process also dramatically slows down litigation. As a result, state attorneys general have powerful incentives not to file antitrust cases, contributing to the severe lack of antitrust enforcement we have experienced in recent decades.

The State Antitrust Enforcement Venue Act changes this by giving states the same right that federal antitrust enforcers have to determine the venue where a case is filed, which also can prevent cases from being combined into complicated and lengthy litigation. The early results of this new law have been encouraging.

In January a judge determined that an antitrust lawsuit brought by Arkansas

State Antitrust Enforcement Venue Act starts to have impact

against dominant pesticide manufacturers Syngenta and Corteva could proceed in that state instead of being combined with a similar lawsuit against the companies in North Carolina. The lawsuit, like one brought by the Federal Trade Commission and 12 states including Minnesota, alleges that these dominant pesticide manufacturers have used so-called loyalty programs to stifle competition from generics in the pesticide market leading to increased costs for farmers.

The decision in Arkansas, which cited the new law, was the second instance of this legislation being used to thwart attempts by companies to stifle a state antitrust lawsuit. Last year a judge allowed Texas to refile an antitrust case against Google in that state instead of being combined with a lawsuit in Brooklyn. That case alleges Google has abused its digital advertising dominance.

Procedural changes like this are not a substitute for more ambitious federal and

state antitrust reforms that will address the way our antimonopoly laws have been weakened or become outdated. However, it does eliminate a key hurdle to enforcement and should further empower state attorneys general to increase antitrust enforcement. Tackling our monopoly crisis will not happen overnight and is not just a job for federal officials.

This is why MFU has been a leader in Minnesota and across the country in bringing attention to the powerful potential of state-level competition policy. From our innovative antitrust fellowship program in the Minnesota Attorney General's Office (AGO), our work to build a broad antimonopoly coalition in Minnesota, to successful legislative efforts like cracking down on anticompetitive hospital mergers and increasing funding for the AGO's antitrust team, MFU is showing states can lead in protecting fair and competitive markets.



Membership application

Name: _____ Spouse's Name: _____

Address: _____

City: _____ State: _____

County: _____ Zip code: _____

Email: _____

Home phone: _____ Cell phone: _____

Type of farm: Check all that apply

- | | |
|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Crops | <input type="checkbox"/> Organic |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Beef | <input type="checkbox"/> Poultry |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Dairy | <input type="checkbox"/> Sheep |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Hogs | <input type="checkbox"/> Vegetable or fruit |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Horses | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Other please list: _____ | |

Membership: Fee includes family unless student is checked.

- | | |
|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> New member | <input type="checkbox"/> 1 year - \$75 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Renewing member | <input type="checkbox"/> 3 years - \$200 |
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First-generation farmer calls attention to veterinarian shortage

By Janet Kubat Willette

Brittney Johnson didn't grow up on a farm, but she was drawn to the country.

"I love farming. I wanted to do it ever since I was little," said Johnson. "I just think farming is like an experiment. You can try so many things to see if they work. You always have a problem to fix. It's really fun, you're never bored. It's also really rewarding."

Johnson, who grew up in Shoreview, put an ad on Craigslist looking for 40 acres and a house. A person responded and she bought the farm in 2017, investing her inheritance.

"I don't know if it was a good investment, (the farm) hasn't paid me a cent back yet," she said, chuckling.

Johnson raises sheep on her farm near Underwood in Otter Tail County. She started with five head and was up to 40, but she cut back to 10 ewes because of the drought. She supports herself and her farm with an off-farm job.

Her ewes are Landrace, and she breeds with terminal sire rams. Her lambing percentage is 180 percent. The sheep are grazed on pasture and housed in a three-sided shed. They are fed supplemental hay as needed. Ewes are fed grain for three or four weeks prior to lambing.

Johnson markets her sheep for meat and wool. She sells through direct markets and livestock auction markets.

As a first-generation, beginning farmer, all her challenges are money related. Johnson used to work two jobs to support her farm and is now down to one job and making more money, which gives her more time and money to spend on the farm.

Veterinarians needed

Early in her farming career, Johnson had a ram with a hernia. She found a wonderful veterinarian, but she lost his number, and he didn't have a website.

Then she had a ram lamb with worms. The veterinarian she found online and called told her he couldn't help her and that

she'd have to go to another veterinarian an hour away. Johnson was working two jobs and didn't have the time or money to travel that far to treat her animal. Instead, she called her sheep mentors and treated the lamb.

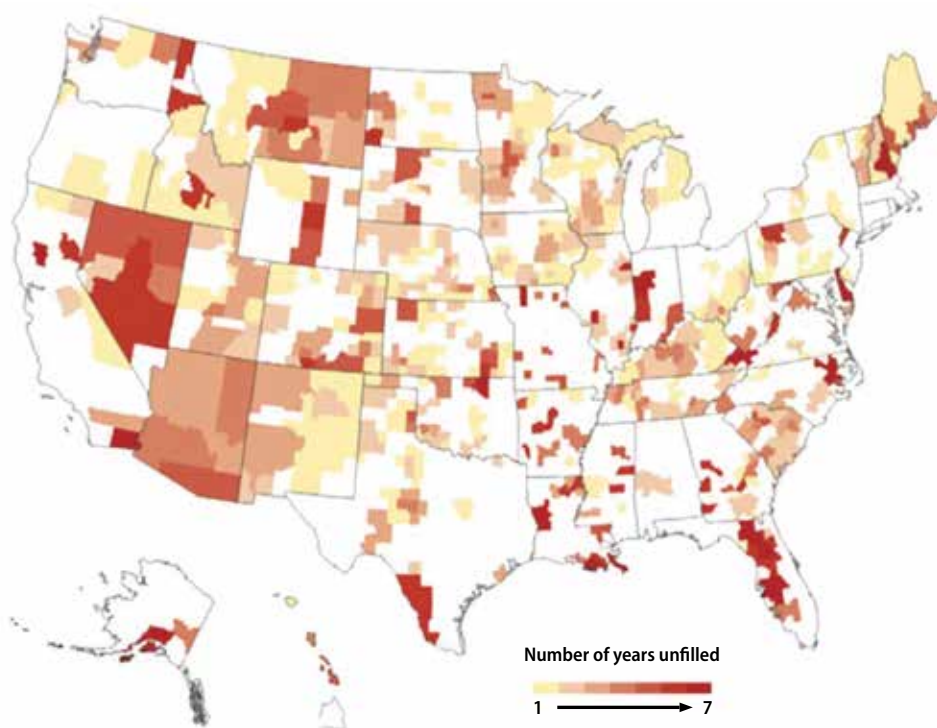
About once per year, Johnson would need a veterinarian to tend her sheep, be it for a difficult birth or hoof disease.

She found another veterinarian and called him when needed.

Then came the Food and Drug Administration's Veterinary Stewardship Plan, which is designed to keep antibiotics safe for human and animal use by preventing misuse in livestock. As part of the plan, the over-the-counter sale of livestock antibiotics ended on June 11, 2023. Now, these antibiotics require a prescription from a veterinarian licensed in the state where the animals are housed.



Brittney Johnson with her sheep. Johnson raises sheep near Underwood in Otter Tail County. Photo by Carol Stender



Source: Farm Journal Foundation

The number of years a VMLRP private sector shortage situation has been left unfilled by a veterinarian between 2010 and 2016 (Tack, 2018). This map only represents what was reported, and the findings are likely underreported.

The Veterinary Stewardship Plan requires livestock producers to have a valid veterinarian-client-patient relationship (VCRP) with a food-animal veterinarian, who must issue a prescription for antibiotics.

Johnson supports the effort to safeguard antibiotics, but she's concerned. She realized that if the veterinarian she was using retired she would be without veterinary care for her livestock.

She called the Board of Animal Health and University of Minnesota College of Veterinary Medicine for help finding a veterinarian. She received a list of veterinarians and discovered the phone number for the first veterinarian she had first used and lost, but also discovered many of the numbers on the list no longer worked. She figured if she was having trouble finding a veterinarian that others must be too and began investigating. Johnson discovered the problem is widespread. Addressing the shortage of food-animal veterinarians was adopted as one of the special orders of business at the 2023 Minnesota Farmers Union State Convention.

Widespread shortage

In 2021, USDA identified more than 200 areas with unfilled veterinarian positions across 500 counties, according to a report,

"Addressing the Persistent Shortage of Food Animal Veterinarians and Its Impact on Rural Communities," by Farm Journal Foundation.

The report found that while food-animal veterinarians make up 5 percent of all veterinarians in the U.S., only 3 percent to 4 percent of veterinary school graduates over the past 20 years have entered food-animal practice. One reason for the shortfall is that the education debt for a food-animal veterinarian is outpacing income potential.

Another factor is that only 20 percent of the American Veterinary Medical Association members who graduated between 2010 and 2019 were male. The 80 percent who were female tended to come from urban and suburban areas and return there upon graduation to practice medicine on small animals. Food-animal medicine is one of the least diverse areas of veterinary medicine, the report said, with most food-animal veterinarians being age 50 or older, white and male.

Possible solutions

The report offers three recommendations to address the shortage:

- Strengthen existing debt repayment programs for students pursuing food-animal veterinary medicine.

- Expand programs that offer business support for food-animal practices.
- Enhance training opportunities and actively recruit students from rural backgrounds.

Other ideas that have been floated include creating a mid-level licensure program similar to those in the medical field and allowing video calls like those farmers have with their doctors. Allowing the mid-level licensure creates a path for veterinary technicians to increase their knowledge and earnings, which will hopefully keep them in the veterinary medical field. Another idea is to set up a certification program for livestock farmers like the private pesticide applicator training for farmers who apply pesticides to their crops.

Johnson said the lack of food-animal veterinarians will disproportionately impact small and beginning farmers as they are less likely to have established relationships with veterinarians. She's thankful for the veterinarian 25 miles south of her but wants to be sure there's someone to take his place when he retires. She doesn't want to raise livestock in a veterinarian desert.



Brittney Johnson raises Landrace ewes, and she breeds with terminal sire rams. She has a veterinarian but wants policymakers to act on ways to increase the number of food-animal veterinarians serving rural Minnesota. Photos by Carol Stender

Canosia Grove leverages past to grow for the future with heritage apples trees

By Lisa Holm

Ten years ago, Bob and Meg Blair acquired a farm outside Duluth with a rich history as a former 40-acre dairy farm and apple orchard. Now Meg is committed to preserving the legacy of the farm and sharing it with others.

The original farm was destroyed in the Cloquet Fire of 1918 (caused by railroad sparks in dry conditions), but the family survived.

"In 2018, one of the relatives brought us a recording of the grandma that survived the fire on the farm. People still stop by and tell us stories, like how they went sledding at the farm," Meg said.

The Blairs collaborated with the Canosia Township Historical Society to organize an "open-barn" event, a farm tour of the property open to the community in recognition of the 100-year anniversary of the devastating fire.

"When we moved in, the property had a 25-30 tree orchard that had been growing for decades. The family wrote us a letter about the farm and the house and how to manage the apple trees," Meg said.

Since then, they started Canosia Grove, expanding the orchard through grafting to propagate hardy heritage-variety apples, raising bees and Icelandic sheep, and making cottage cider and honey.

"We are trying to leverage the existing orchard to plant out using the same genetics that are proven winners in our harsh climate and short growing season," Meg said.

Bob worked at Fitger's Brewhouse, Minnesota's oldest brewpub, so it was only natural to experiment with cider making.

"We had lots of space and equipment we had accumulated," Meg said. "In 2016 we had an amazing batch of cider and thought it would be fun to try making cider every year."

Some years yield more cider than others, depending on the harvest. All the milling and pressing is done on site using a Ger-



Canosia Grove

5508 Martin Road, Duluth
Phone: 218-341-0988

Email: CanosiaGrove@gmail.com

Learn more about hosting a private event at Canosia Grove and shop for products online at CanosiaGrove.com.

The Blairs offer property tours on Wednesdays and Sundays from 4-5 p.m., June through October.

man-made electric motorized mill and a vertical hydraulic press. The Blairs also offer processing to other apple growers during harvest season.

Their workhorse is the chestnut crab, a common variety used for cider which, surprisingly, is not an actual crab apple. The chestnut crab is a smaller, russet apple known for its high acidity, making it well suited for cider production. Wealthy, Beacon and Minjon (Jonathan and Minnesota Gold hybrid) are other apple varieties that can be found in the field. The Blairs also planted 10 trees a couple years ago from the University of Minnesota, serving as the Northern research outpost for a new cider apple.

"We live in a place where it is not unusual to see 40 degree below zero temperatures,

which minimizes a lot of pest pressure," Meg said. "With climate change, we will begin to see more types of pest pressure that is seen more in southern Minnesota."

The Blairs have utilized the Organic Fruit Growers Association (formed out of the MOSES – now Marbleseed – conference) which has been a significant resource for learning about orchard management and best practices. They are also involved in the Minnesota Cider Guild and the Sustainable Farming Association, where Meg is a board member of the Lake Superior chapter.

Private events at Canosia Grove are scheduled to coincide with the growing season, and they typically host half a dozen per year. Meg clarifies their approach to agritourism, "We provide a gorgeous backdrop for the events we host but rely on the creativity of our clients to put on their own show."

Their family has enjoyed hosting people on the farm through Harvest Hosts. Through this platform, RV campers pay an annual membership fee and can access overnight camping at agritourism sites across the country.

"It has been really great, especially during COVID," Meg said. "We made connections with people who have come back to stay on our farm year after year."

The couple joined the Minnesota Farmers Union for several reasons.

"Beyond farmer education and connection, I've really appreciated the Farmers Union's political advocacy work," Meg said. "If we don't tackle the challenges with our healthcare, childcare and [other issues in agriculture], we aren't going to be able to succeed in sustaining our small farming communities."

Canosia Grove cider can be found at a handful of places in Duluth, including Lake Avenue Restaurant and Bar and Carmody Irish Pub. Their farm shop is open, and they sell cider and farm products through the Twin Ports REKO Ring, an online farmer's market showcasing local foods.



Bob and Meg Blair with children Ellie and Robin are pictured on opposite page. They collaborated with the Canosia Township Historical Society to host an open barn event on the former 40-acre dairy farm that is now an orchard. They host private events in the barn. Their workhorse apple is a chestnut crab, a smaller, russet apple known for its high acidity.



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Water quality concerns top list at Zumbrota listening session

By Janet Kubat Willette

More than a hundred people attended a Listening Session with Sen. Aric Putnam in Zumbrota on Jan. 24.

Minnesota Farmers Union organized the Listening Session in southeast Minnesota for the senator to hear input from farmers and community members in advance of the 2024 Minnesota legislative session, which began Feb. 12.

Many of the comments made during the 90-minute session focused on water quality and nitrate use. Deer damage, rural emergency medical services, access to veterinary care and competitive markets were other top concerns.



Water quality and nitrates

In April 2023, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency received a Safe Drinking Water Act emergency petition regarding the southeast Minnesota karst region, which encompasses Dodge, Fillmore, Goodhue, Houston, Mower, Olmsted, Wabasha and Winona counties.

In November 2023, EPA determined that further action is needed to protect public health and requested that Minnesota develop a plan and provide education and outreach as well as alternative drinking water to residents with water above the maximum contaminant level for nitrate.

Jeff Broberg, a geologist with the Minnesota Well Owners Organization, said that the petition is not an attack on farmers or well owners, rather it's asking the state to develop a plan to determine what's in



State Sen. Aric Putnam, DFL-St. Cloud, visits with people before a Jan. 24 Listening Session at the Zumbrota VFW. Below, Putnam, Assistant Minnesota Agriculture Commissioner Peder Kjeseth and MFU President Gary Wertish.

the water in southeast Minnesota. Water may infiltrate quickly in the karst region, bringing surface contaminants to underground aquifers. Shallow wells that draw water from these aquifers are at risk. Wells are unseen and water testing is not widespread enough, Broberg said. He encouraged people at the meeting to test their water and know what is in it.

Olmsted County dairy farmer Ron Pagel said that farmers have made improvements in how they manage and apply manure over the past 10 to 20 years. The area's water quality problem didn't develop overnight and won't be solved overnight, he said. Farmers are doing a better job managing their nitrogen and

fertilizer applications, but those changes won't be reflected immediately in tests that are ever-more sensitive.

Ted Keller, who farms in Goodhue County, said the petition is part of a war on agriculture. Lake Pepin used to be green, but when he was there last summer the water was clean. He could see to the bottom of streams too. In Rice County, there was a push 15 years ago for farmers to reduce their nitrate use and there was still algae in the water. Turns out it was from lake-front homeowners pushing fertilized grass clippings into the water, he said. Cities also pump nitrates from their wastewater treatment plants into bodies of water.

Winona County farmer Glen Groth said it will take cooperation from farmers, environmentalists and all involved to improve water quality and fix the nitrate issue in southeastern Minnesota.

Assistant Commissioner Peder Kjeseth said a work plan was submitted to EPA on Jan. 12 that calls for a phased approach to addressing nitrates in southeast Minnesota. The first phase is addressing the public health threat, which will involve a lot of outreach and education.

Too many deer

Amanda Armstrong, who farms in Steele County, said an overpopulation of deer is raising havoc for cattle producers. Not only are the farmers losing feed, but there's also a disease transmission concern. The Minnesota State Cattlemen's Association is urging the state to set up a reimbursement program like the program for losses due to elk and wolves, she said.

Eddie Jostock, who farms in Wabasha County, said last winter he saw 60 to 70 deer eating round bales in his yard and another 40 to 50 at a neighbor's farm 1.5 miles away at the same time, meaning the herd in the area numbered more than a 100.

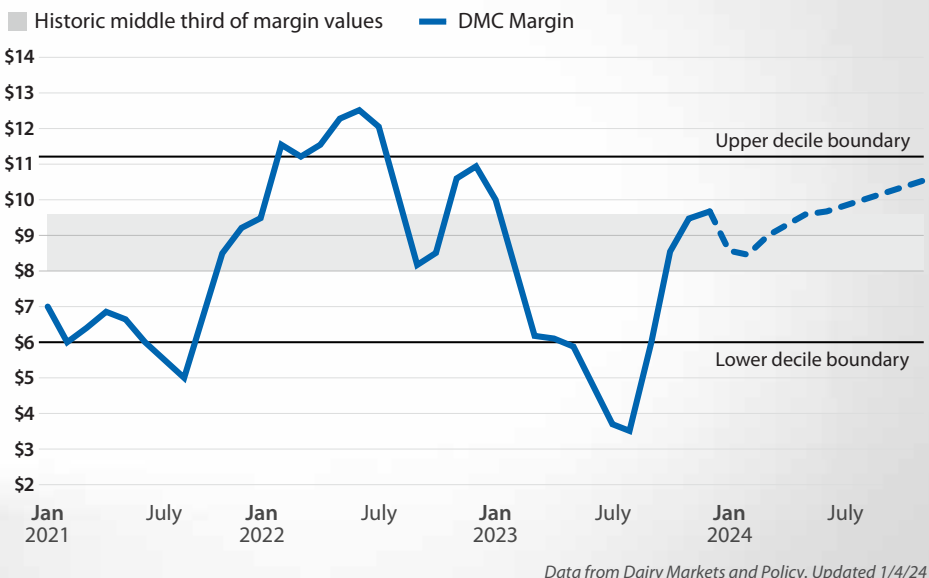
Putnam's comments

Putnam said there is no deliberate war on agriculture, rather people don't understand farmers because they don't spend enough time with them. Listening is part of the process of governance and by working together problems can be solved.

"The stories you tell me are things I can use to educate my colleagues who are not as well versed in agriculture," Putnam said, pledging to amplify the concerns of the agricultural community in the state Senate.



Actual and forecast dairy margin



By Janet Kubat Willette

Leonard Polzin, a dairy markets and policy outreach specialist with the University of Wisconsin-Madison, doesn't expect a huge uptick in milk prices in 2024.

Polzin, who spoke during a Hoard's Dairyman online presentation on Jan. 8, predicts on-farm milk prices will be in the \$16 to \$20 per hundredweight range for the year.

If cow numbers don't increase too much and if supply pressure doesn't hold prices down too much, there could be upward price mobility, but domestic and international demand are wild cards.

Cow numbers trended down in 2023, but not outside the historical range until November, when there was a significant trend in lower cow numbers. However, "our dairy herd is milking quite well," Polzin said, and the market is signaling it is long on milk and it needs to clear product.

The gap between Class 3 and Class 4 prices is widening more than historically. Class

3 milk is used for cheese, ice cream and other frozen products, while Class 4 milk is used in butter and dry milk products. That shows where price pressures come from, he said.

In 2022 and 2023, cheese factories were running at capacity and there is more domestic cheese processing coming online

showed up. Hopefully, buyers will show up again and create a price floor for some of these products, Polzin said.

Butter production was solid all year and looks to be carrying Class 4 prices. Butter exports were down, but domestic disappearance offset that decline.

Dairy product selection in 2023 showed that consumers were going nonfat or higher fat. Lowfat ice cream sales were down 10.5 percent, but nonfat ice cream sales were up almost 26 percent.

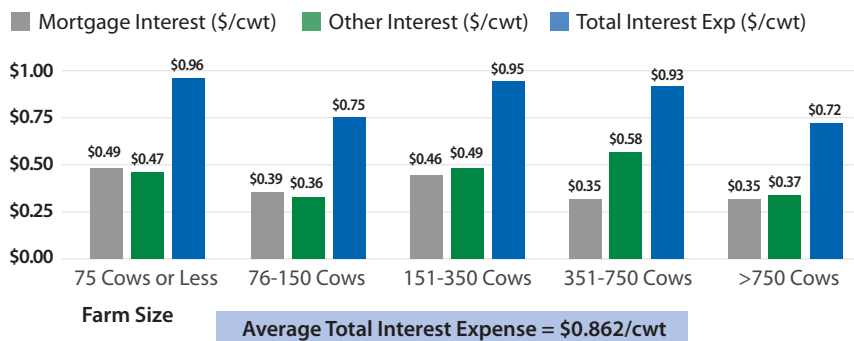
The Asian market and Mexico are leading export markets for U.S. dairy products, coming in at 32.5 percent and 24.8 percent, respectively. There's increasing uncertainty that China will continue

buying dairy products from the U.S.

The global milk supply from key exporting countries including New Zealand is putting price pressure on the United States.

Polzin encouraged dairy producers to take risk management measures in 2024.

2022 Wisconsin Dairy Farm Interest Cost/CWT



through 2024, 2025 and 2026. However, cheese exports are a bit weaker. The good news is that even with inflationary pressures, U.S. consumers keep eating cheese.

Whey production did well in 2023 and as prices came down, international buyers



Mural from Lake Street now graces wall of member's shed

By Janet Kubat Willette

The mural in David and Betty Lou Adelman's shed tells a story from Lake Street's past.

Painted in 2014 by artist Jason Najak, the mural, *Horses on Lake Street*, is allegorical art. Allegorical art is when the subject of the artwork is used to symbolize a deeper meaning, according to Encyclopedia Britannica.

The mural showcases Lake Street, an east-west thoroughfare on Minneapolis' south side, in the early 1900s. It captures an era when horses, buggies, bicycles and streetcars were the dominant form of transportation and new immigrants from Germany and the Scandinavian countries started small businesses along the dirt and cobblestone street linking Minneapolis and St. Paul.

One of those entrepreneurs was Emil Schatzlein, a German immigrant from Kulsheim, Germany, who departed from Germany in 1897. Schatzlein apprenticed with a saddle and harness maker in California and moved to Minneapolis in 1907 to open the Schatzlein Saddle Shop on Lake Street.

Schatzlein started repairing bridles, halters and harnesses. In 1958, Emil died and his son, Jerry, became the second-generation owner. Jerry Schatzlein and his wife, Millie, expanded the store's western wear selection. The third generation of Schatzlein's assumed ownership in 1974.

The shop became a landmark over its 115-year run, sought out by people looking for riding clothes, cowboy boots or a new

Stetson. They were known for their saddle and tack repair. The family served both the famous and not famous, counting country star Kenny Chesney and Gene Simmons of KISS among their customers.

In 2022, after weathering COVID-19 and supply chain disruptions, the family decided it was time to close the store.

But what about the mural that graced the exterior at 413 W. Lake St.?

"We always saw it when we went by there," said David Adelman, a horse owner and Dakota County Farmers Union member. "My dad and the guy standing there holding hands were second cousins."

After conversations and measuring, he and fellow Dakota County Farmers Union member Brian Rohrenbach removed the piece of history from the building. The mural is made of 10 sheets of 5-foot by 8-foot panels that when assembled form a 10-foot by 40-foot visual history lesson. They took the mural down on Sept. 22, 2022, and placed the individual panels carefully in an enclosed trailer for the trip to Adelman's farm.

He moved a few things around in his shed and by Nov. 30, 2022, the mural was up in its new home. A few other mementos from the store, including Sam the mannequin, a saddle made by Emil and a horse that riders sat upon to be sure their clothes fit when riding also made the move.

The mural features Schatzlein family members, friends of the family and

This piece of allegorical art is now at home in David and Betty Lou Adelman's shed. David is related to the Schatzlein family who operated Schatzlein Saddle Shop on Lake Street from 1907 to 2022. David and Betty Lou are standing in the shed and reflected in the picture through a mirror. Below, store founder Emil Schatzlein is in the doorway of the store. His son Jerry is standing aside the buggy and holding the hand of his wife, Millie. Their daughter Diane is in the buggy next to Millie. Their daughter Peggy is holding the team of horses. Their son Gary is wearing his apron and standing on the sidewalk. Daniel Ojeda, a good customer, is on the sidewalk in cowboy apparel.



historical figures. The panels were interrupted by a pole and downspout on the building.

On the right side of the mural, store founder Emil Schatzlein is in the doorway of the store. One of his sons, Jerry, the second-generation owner of the store, is standing aside a buggy and holding the hand of his wife, Millie. Their daughter Diane is in the buggy next to Millie. Their daughter Peggy is dressed in blue and holding the team of horses on the buggy. Their son Gary is wearing his apron and standing on the sidewalk by the store. Gary is a third-generation leather craftsman.

Daniel Ojeda, a retired Vietnam War Sky Soldier and good customer of the saddle shop, is on the sidewalk in cowboy apparel.

Jerry and Millie's daughter Janet is riding the Palomino horse in the street and Bella the dog is waiting by the parking post. Their daughter Linda is wearing the red dress on the left sidewalk, walking by Jerry and Millie's granddaughter, Jenny, who is carrying flowers.

The ice wagon in the mural was an important fixture of the time. The man carrying a block of ice is Jerry and Millie's son Paul. The iceman delivered blocks of ice in the days before refrigeration and the faded sign in the upper window showed how much ice to deliver to the apartment.

Jerry and Millie's daughters Joan and Judy are holding umbrellas and walking in the street with Jerry and Millie's granddaughter Sarah.

All the family members in the mural worked at the store at one time.

The artist also included himself in the mural. He's by the bicycle and in the store window.

The rearing horse is Shado, owned by Jim McGillivray, a Staples resident who loved horses. Shado was a purebred Arabian horse and McGillivray's pride and joy.

A horse from Watertown named Goliath is pulling a streetcar. Lake Street received a streetcar line in 1905.

The mural includes historical figures James J. Hill, T.B. Walker and Healy C. Akeley walking together on the left side of the street. Hill, known as "The Empire Builder," was a railroad executive. Walker was a business magnate who was among the 10 wealthiest men in the world in 1923. He helped found the Walker Art Center. Akeley was a lawyer and lumberman. The town of Akeley, Minn., is named for him.

The Layman's white house on the left horizon became the Pioneers and Soldiers Memorial Cemetery, or Layman Cemetery, which is located at Cedar Avenue and Lake Street. It was established in 1853 on Martin and Elizabeth Layman's farm and is the oldest known cemetery in Minnesota.

MFU sends 10 delegates to NFU Convention

Ten delegates were elected at the Minnesota Farmers Union State Convention to represent Minnesota Farmers Union (MFU) at the National Farmers Union Convention, March 10-12 in Scottsdale, Ariz.

The delegates participate in national policy discussion during the convention.

Any paid MFU member serving as a delegate may be nominated. Per national policy, each delegate and alternate selected shall have been or be now actively engaged in farming or ranching, as defined

by USDA. Further, adult children of an eligible Farmers Union family who receive value in exchange for their engagement in the farm operation but lack a capital position in the assets of the farm are eligible to be NFU delegates.

Learn more about NFU's 122nd Anniversary Convention online at nfu.org/convention. Contact Membership and Minnesota Cooks Director Claudine Arndt at claudine@mfu.org if you are interested in learning more about being a delegate in 2025.

Here are MFU's 2024 NFU Convention delegates:



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Mahnomen
County



Pam Pederson,
Norman County



Cynthia
VanDerPol,
Chippewa County



Jim Falk,
Swift County



Lisa Phillips,
Blue Earth
County



Tim Velde,
Yellow Medicine
County



Kelsey Love
Zaavedra,
Chisago County



Mark Thell,
Carlton County



Molly Byron,
Waseca County



Lindsey Zemanek,
Rice County

Updated Minnesota Groundwater Protection Rule map available

The Minnesota Department of Agriculture (MDA) has issued an updated map to help farmers comply with the Groundwater Protection Rule. The rule restricts fall application of nitrogen fertilizer in areas vulnerable to groundwater contamination, and it outlines steps to reduce the severity of contamination in areas where nitrate is already elevated in public water supply wells.

The MDA has made changes to the Fall Nitrogen Fertilizer Application Restrictions Map which is accessible on the MDA website at <https://bit.ly/3U4VVxa>. Three Drinking Water Supply Management Areas (DWSMAs) were removed from the map, and none were added. Two of the DWSMAs

were found to have non-agricultural sources of nitrate, while the third was removed after further sampling data indicated the nitrate levels were below the threshold for inclusion.

The restriction of fall application of nitrogen fertilizer on these acres will begin Sept. 1, 2024. Farmers are encouraged to check the new map at <https://bit.ly/3U4VVxa> prior to fall 2024 to determine if their fields are subject to these restrictions.

For more information on the Groundwater Protection Rule visit www.mda.state.mn.us/nfr.



CLIMATE RESILIENCE ON THE FARM

Multi-generation farm diversifies to adapt to changing agricultural environments

By Lisa Holm

Melany Thomas grew up on a farmstead near Georgetown, Minn., and studied animal science.

Noreen Thomas grew up on an orchard and has a background in nutrition and chemistry. Noreen married into the farm 30-plus years ago, and with her husband, Lee, has grown grains, feed and beans. Noreen is an advocate for agricultural education and environmentally conscious farming.

Melany started working on her in-law's, Noreen and Lee, land in 2019 and had her own fields in 2020.

Melany and husband Evan's daughter, Cora, is the 6th generation to grow up on the farm.

Q. What is the background/history of your farm? What do you produce?

A. Melany: In 2020 I had my first fields of about 230 acres of barley and wheat, and put in a cover crop of triticale, winter rye and wheat. In 2021, it was so wet and impossible to get into the field that we had to seed the cover crops by plane.

Now, I manage 800 acres that includes winter wheat, spring wheat, buckwheat, rye, oats, barley, soybeans and alfalfa this year.

I am trying to diversify and experiment but am also hesitant. There are a lot of costs to consider between land and machinery rent and upkeep.

Noreen: Melany has evolved our production of diversified wheat, and she now has about seven to nine rotations.

We became certified organic in 1997. The way Lee and I saw it was that we could either get big, get out or find a niche. We saw becoming certified organic as an opportunity to get into



Photo by Alice McCabe, Aubergine Design

Top photo, Melany, Cora and Evan Thomas enjoy an evening ride around their property. Bottom photo, Noreen and Lee Thomas. Melany is working on the Thomas farm operation with her in-laws, Noreen and Lee. Her husband, Evan, works off-the-farm.

niche markets domestically and abroad. We sold lots of soy and barley to Japan and Korea. Melany was operating under our organic certification but now has her own.

Q. How has your farm structure changed in recent years and how are you planning for the future?

A. Melany: I am continuing to look at adding in more diversification and figuring out what kinds of methods are out there that can improve crop quality, cover crops and ways to spread the workload.

Noreen: We have planted cover crops like rye, but Melany has really stepped it up. By using multi-species cover crops she has got better tilth, and reduced fertilizer inputs. Melany also got the farm Minnesota Agricultural Water Quality Program certified (MAWQCP). It's all exciting to see and we are learning from her. Some of these practices are new to us and are not really seen in the [Red River] Valley.

Together we are exploring the value-added food market and looking at the hard frost seeding of red clover into wheat, which is exciting.

Q. How has your farm operation remained resilient?

A. Noreen: We are lucky to be along the Buffalo River. Longer rotations and being mindful of what we're applying have been beneficial.

Melany is always taking soil samples. From the time we started planting more cover crops, we have seen the organic and carbon matter in the soil increase from around 3 percent to 4 percent soil organic matter (SOM), to a 7 percent to 8 percent SOM. Cover crops have also helped reduce weed pressure in crops.

During COVID, conventional fertilizer prices from top producing countries like Morocco and Russia skyrocketed - even fish fertilizer, which is organic compliant, can be very unstable. Recognizing the

value of producing more inputs directly on the farm, we started composting, which Lee manages. It's been a success - we have composted over 350,000 tons of material.

We work with Clay County to collect pumpkins for compost every season through a program called 'Take Jack Back'. So far, we have composted a total of 540 tons of pumpkins, which are a great source of minerals like nitrogen for soil. We are really proud that our county started this initiative and hope that other counties continue to replicate it.

We also have over seven acres of fruit trees for chokecherries and junberries which provide habitat for beneficial insects. Melany will be creating more pollinator habitat.

Q. What do you think people are missing in the conversation around climate?

A. Melany: Climate change seems to be a topic at conferences and such, but I don't know any farmers that sit around and talk about it. I think we talk about it

in terms of the more extreme weather events we experience.

Noreen: People need to be aware of how non-stop busy farmers are and realize they have a bank to answer to at the end of the day. Farmers need to know how implementing more climate-smart agricultural practices will work for them and have access to relevant information to help them make decisions. Incentives for conservation practices enable farmers to experiment.

Q. If you could tell Congress to do one (or two) things that would help your family continue to farm in the next generation, what would it be?

A. Melany: There needs to be more competition - a competition title in the Farm Bill would be great. Regarding markets, we need Right to Repair.

You hear stories of mom-and-pop shops, but I don't have that experience. In my area, I deal with monopolies and it is often very difficult. Congress needs to step back and invest in each state's

agricultural communities. Issues like local meat processing and supporting small farms have received a lot of attention due to COVID, but there are other important aspects of infrastructure that are needed - like grain cleaning, processing and packaging - to help build resilient communities. I notice a lot of family farmers that are less concerned with feeding the world and more concerned about feeding the people around them.

Noreen: Universities and institutions have extraordinary purchasing power which should go to local farmers. This will be our first year selling to five schools made possible by Minnesota Department of Agriculture (MDA) Farm to School grants.

The importation of cheap and fraudulent organic labeled grains is a threat to the integrity of the organic label and hurts grain farmers like us.

MFU is very good at offering local food for conferences. At every farmer meeting, I always ask "where is the local food?" Even a \$300-\$400 order is huge for many farmers.

Two couples represent MFU in FUEL

The Farmers Union Enterprise Leadership (FUEL) program is intended to empower future leaders in the Farmers Union Enterprise states of Minnesota, Montana, North Dakota, South Dakota and Wisconsin. Participating in FUEL is an opportunity to grow personally, professionally and in your community. This program offers a unique experience to gain skills and form relationships to last a lifetime.

This year, Marty and Lisa Phillips of Blue Earth County and Nathan and Brenda Rudolph of Morrison County are representing Minnesota Farmers Union in the FUEL cohort.

The Phillips' raise garden vegetables and grains and operate a you-pick pumpkin patch in the fall called Pumpkin Junction. Their farm, Blue Skye Farms Organics, is certified organic in more than 58 crops. They have six goats, five cows and two sheep.

The Rudolph farm has been in Nathan's family for more than 130 years. Brenda



Lisa and Marty Phillips, Brenda and Nathan Rudolph

and Nathan farm with their two children, Everett, 14, and Vivian, 9. They have transitioned their farm from a dairy farm to a direct market farm. They direct market pork, lamb, beef and poultry at farmers markets, schools, food hubs and to individual families. They grow corn, alfalfa, rye and oats. They also custom raise dairy steers. In addition, they offer farm tours and community outreach in urban areas to bridge the gap between rural and urban communities.

We asked the couples why they elected to participate and here's what they have to say. "Marty and I talked about it after we

heard the speaker (at state convention) talk about what a great thing it was for him," Lisa Phillips said. "But then, we just put it on the back burner because we had so much going on. And then Claudine reached out about it, and we talked about it and decided to do it."

"We applied for FUEL to continue our education for our farm," Brenda Rudolph said. "It is important to us to continually learn and grow with our farm. Even if that is a new direction. Farmers Union offers a diverse range of farmer members to be able to learn and to grow from, in an ever-changing market landscape. We look forward to meeting members across the U.S."

The FUEL cohort meets for the first time at the National Farmers Union Convention, held March 10-12 in Scottsdale, Ariz.

For more information about participating in FUEL, contact Membership and Minnesota Cooks Director Claudine Arndt at claudine@mfu.org.

President's Message

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Meat processing

Minnesota Farmers Union Foundation is now accepting loan applications from meat processors. The Foundation has a total of \$900,000 in revolving loan funds to distribute to support small and medium-sized meat and poultry processors through the Meat and Poultry Intermediary Lending Program (MPILP).

The MPILP offers low-interest loans for the start-up, expansion and operation of slaughter and further processing of meat and poultry. Loans of up to \$100,000 are available at a 4 percent fixed interest rate with a term of up to 10 years. Funds can be used to purchase land or equipment, cover start-up costs and make other business investments. Returned funds will be made available to new borrowers.

Minnesota Farmers Union has worked to enhance meat and poultry processing options for family farmers for more than five years, since members first raised the issue of a lack of access to small meat lockers and having to wait more than a year to have their livestock processed. Covid-19 illustrated the problems of a consolidated food system. Since then, the state legislature has invested in rebuilding the state's meat and poultry processing infrastructure and this federal loan program will help meat processors make additional investments. An independent, diverse meat processing industry is essential to a diverse, independent livestock production industry and a cornerstone of rural economic development.

MPILP is funded by a grant from United States Department of Agriculture Rural Development.

Find more information online at <https://bit.ly/MFUFmeatprocessing>.

Co-ops for Climate

The MFU Foundation is also accepting applications for the Cooperatives for Climate grant program, which aims to support cooperatives that are organizing in response to climate-related challenges and opportunities.

Cooperative development is a foundational principle of the Farmers Union, and we



are proud to be assisting a new generation of cooperative leaders. Early Farmers Union members organized themselves into cooperatives to give themselves more opportunities in the marketplace. Today's cooperative founders are following in their footsteps by organizing cooperatives to meet the need for sustainability solutions.

The grant application period runs through March 15. Applications will be reviewed by a panel of MFU members and grants will be awarded by the end of April. A total of \$90,000 is available.

Grants can be used for technical assistance and business development for established or newly formed farmer cooperatives. Projects should have a clear connection to climate adaptation and resilience.

Find the grant application and additional details online at mfu.org/mfu-foundation-com-climate-working-lands/.

Support for the Cooperatives for Climate grant program comes from the Morgan Family Foundation and the McKnight Foundation.

Congratulations

This year, National Farmers Union is recognizing 10 Minnesota counties for their achievements at the national convention this month in Arizona. The counties are earning national leadership awards. We'll have more about them in future issues, but I want to offer my congratulations to the leaders and members of Chisago, Dakota, Dodge, Fillmore, Hennepin/Ramsey, Kandiyohi, Pine, Redwood, Saint Louis and Scott counties. In addition, Linda Larson and

Kelsey Love Zaavedra each earned national membership awards. Read more about them in Claudine's column elsewhere in this issue.

We've got great members in Minnesota and I thank all of you for your work to make Minnesota Farmers Union the best organization in the state.

YOU MATTER. TALK TO US.



No concern is too small

Farmers and farm family members call to talk about: financial worries, substance use, relationships, anxiety, depressions, and more.

Call or text for free and confidential help if you or someone you know is struggling.

Minnesota Farm & Rural Helpline



833-600-2670



Text **farmstress** to 898211

Why is Right to Repair needed?

By Tim Velde

Having Right to Repair guaranteed in law is long past due. As farm equipment becomes more dependent on electronic components to control their operating systems, it is imperative that independent repair shops and farmers are allowed access to the technology needed to do repairs.

Currently, dealers do the best they can when asked to repair equipment that needs repair, but distance and time are a real concern.

Due to the fact that the dealer network has been consolidated and continues to consolidate further, the distance a farmer and

their equipment needing repair are from a dealer continues to grow larger.

Right to Repair will promote competition and allow independent repair shops to be started that can be located closer to where repairs are needed.

Velde is the Yellow Medicine County Farmers Union President.

Editor's note: Passing Right to Repair for farm equipment is a MFU legislative priority this year. Do you have a Right to Repair story to share? Email stu@mfu.org to share your comments on Right to Repair.



Government relations

continued from page 4

Public Option last session and directed Commerce to conduct the actuarial analysis needed for submitting the necessary federal waiver.

The Commerce report outlines two plans, one of which expands the existing MinnesotaCare program by allowing farmers, small business owners and others to 'buy-in' to the comprehensive coverage provided to lower income Minnesotans. Building off MinnesotaCare, this plan would cover trips to the emergency room, doctor and clinic visits, hearing aids, dental, eyeglasses, and a long list of other services all with limited cost sharing. Mental health or substance abuse visits, for example, don't come with any copay, emergency room visits carry a \$100 copay, and prescription drug costs to the patient are capped at \$70 per month.

Together with a coalition representing workers, healthcare employees, national experts and others, MFU President Gary Wertish issued a joint statement:

"For years, Minnesotans have spoken out about high healthcare costs . . . we can and must do more to ensure Minnesotans have access to strong healthcare coverage, building on a successful public health insurance program. This report provides the tools lawmakers need to move forward this legislative session. It is now incumbent

upon the Minnesota Legislature to act to advance MinnesotaCare as a Public Option."

A main challenge beyond the remaining complexity with crafting this first-in-the nation program, is that the plan carries a significant price tag—anywhere from \$113 to upwards of \$350 million annually. For a jurisdiction like agriculture, that is a big number. But healthcare is expensive. This year, current programs at the Department of Human Services will cost nearly \$58 billion (including federal passthrough).

Federal policy issues

On the federal level, debate over the now long-awaited farm bill continues to take shape. In January, Senate Chair Debbie Stabenow, D-Mich., shared a letter with colleagues outlining five key principles she hopes will guide Congress as it works to strengthen the farm safety net:

- Programs must be targeted to active farmers.
- Provide farmers choices and flexibility.
- Assistance should be timely.
- Expand the reach of programs to help more farmers.
- Address the emerging risks farmers face.

Wertish spoke at a joint USDA and Department of Energy listening session on solar siting on agricultural land. He shared the

importance of tackling climate change and that many members are excited about farm-scale projects that can make their operations more resilient. He also shared some concerns related to utility-scale development that he hoped the agencies would consider as they help make sure we get development right.

"We believe a more distributed approach, targeting marginal land and edge of field, will allow more farmers to participate, diversify farm income and reserve highly productive land for growing crops," he shared with agency leaders.

As always, if you have questions, thoughts or concerns about MFU's legislative work, reach out to me at stu@mfu.org or (320) 232-3047.

Get social with Minnesota Farmers Union!

Follow Minnesota Farmers Union on social media to find out about events, policy happenings, photos and more.

Facebook: Minnesota Farmers Union
X (Twitter): @mnfarmerunion
Instagram: mnfarmersunion
YouTube: MN Farmers Union

Registration opened March 1 for Farmers Union Leadership Camps

Northern Camp (combined elementary and junior) – ages 9-13 - Monday, June 17 to Friday, June 21

Southern Elementary – ages 8-11 - Sunday, July 14 to Wednesday, July 17

Southern Junior – ages 11-14 - Sunday, July 21 to Thursday, July 25

Senior – ages 14-18 - Sunday, July 28 to Friday, Aug. 2

Learn more at
mfu.org/camp



2024 Women's Retreat set for March 23-24 in Waterville



The MFU 2024 Women's Retreat is 1 p.m. March 23 to 1 p.m. March 24 at Omega Lodge Retreat and Conference Center, 22750 Lind Ave., Waterville. The retreat blends education, fun and social time. The theme for this year is building strong communities and fostering well-being. Speakers include Meg Moynihan Stuedemann, Cynthia Christensen, Theresa McCormick and Nikki Warner.

The cost for Farmers Union members is \$95; a \$50 deposit will hold your reservation and \$45 is due at the door. The cost

for non-members is \$125, with a \$50 deposit to hold your reservation and the remaining \$75 due at check-in. Cash, check or credit card will be accepted at the door. The fee covers room, meals, activities and programming.

Register at bit.ly/mfuwomensretreat24. Event registration will close on March 12. Deposits are refundable until registration closes.

Contact MFU program coordinator Lisa Holm for questions at lisa@mfu.org, 763-607-4570.

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Choose from a wide variety of MFU branded apparel including shirts, jackets, hats, and more.



Order directly from our partner, Fully Promoted, and products will be shipped to you in four to six weeks.

www.mfu.org/store

Keith Place to be inducted into FFA Hall of Fame

Minnesota Farmers Union member Keith Place of Okabena is among the Minnesota FFA Hall of Fame Class of 2024.



Keith Place

A selection committee consisting of FFA members, alumni, agricultural educators and foundation representatives selected the final inductees. "We were looking for individuals who have been in-

fluent and supportive of Minnesota FFA and who have demonstrated a high level of service and longstanding commitment to agriculture, agribusiness, and/or education in agriculture," said Steve Olson, co-chair of Minnesota FFA Hall of Fame Committee.

This year, six inductees will join the 240 members previously inducted into the Minnesota FFA Hall of Fame. The FFA Hall of Fame is a collaborative effort between the Minnesota FFA Association, Alumni and Foundation.

Inductees will be introduced on March 2 at the Minnesota FFA Alumni and Supporters Annual Conference being held at South Central College in North Mankato. An induction ceremony will be held on April 21 at the First General Session during the State FFA Convention.

Other 2024 inductees include: Corynn Flood, Cokato; Sally Noll, St. Paul; Nathan Purrington, Ada; Russ Runck, Watertown, and Jean Johnson, Grand Forks, N.D.

Member photo

The Le Sueur County SWCD Board chose the Karl and Nancy Heldberg family as their 2023 Outstanding Conservationists. The Heldbergs are third generation farmers who milk 75 cows and have young stock and dry cows on pasture. Their cattle are grazed on cover crops and corn stalks in the fall. They rotate corn, alfalfa, small grains and cover crops. Karl, Nancy and their family are witnessing the benefits of incorporating soil health practices as their

fields have shown increased water holding capacity and infiltration rates, allowing for healthy crops during the last few dry years. Karl has been a great mentor for surrounding farmers who have questions about soil health.



From left, Gretchen, Garrett, Luke and Karl Heldberg at the Minnesota Association of Soil and Water Conservation Districts annual meeting. Karl's wife, Nancy, isn't pictured as she wasn't able to attend the convention.

Apply for Stanley Moore, Dave Morman scholarships

Applications are open through April 26 for the Stanley Moore Scholarship offered by the Farmers Union Industries Foundation.

The scholarship is open to Farmers Union members and their children in Minnesota, Montana, North Dakota, South Dakota and Wisconsin. High school seniors, college students or non-traditional students seeking funding to attend a two- or four-year accredited college, university or technical school are eligible to apply.

Several \$1,500 scholarships will be awarded with money to be used for tuition and books. The recipient will be notified by July 31.

A completed application form must be submitted. Find more information at <https://fuillc.com/about-us>.

Materials should be returned to FUI Foundation, Attn: Bonnie Ahlbrecht, 220 Ponderosa Road, P.O. Box 319, Redwood Falls, MN 56283.

The applicant's academic record and social and community activities will be reviewed. A written essay or oral presentation outlining personal and professional goals and involvement with Farmers Union is required. Please submit a 10-minute videotape or CD/ DVD for oral presentation. Priority is given to students pursuing an ag-related course of study. Finalists may be required to participate in a phone interview.

The scholarship is given in memory of Stanley Moore, who was born into two prominent Farmers Union families, the Moores and the Talbotts. As a young boy, he traveled with his grandfather, C.C. Talbott, a principal organizer and the first president of the North Dakota Farmers Union. He was the president of North Dakota Farmers Union from 1975 to 1987.

In addition, Moore served as vice president of National Farmers Union, chairman of the National Farmers Union Insurance Companies (NFUIC) board and NFUIC's chief executive officer.

Moore was a strong advocate of education, and this scholarship provides a lasting memorial in honor of his achievements and dedication to the Farmers Union.

Dave Morman Scholarship

Applications are open through April 26 for the Dave Morman Scholarship given to children of regular full-time, hourly employees who have worked at least one full year for Farmers Union Industries.

Applicants must complete an application form and an essay. Two letters of recommendation are also required as part of the application.

Application materials must be submitted to FUI Foundation, Attn: Bonnie Ahlbrecht, 220 Ponderosa Road, P.O. Box 319, Redwood Falls, MN 56283 or email bahlbrecht@fuillc.com.



MARCH 1934

Colonel Geo. C Lambert, legal counsel in this area for the Farmers National Grain Corporation and formerly secretary-treasurer of the Farmer Union Terminal Association, died at this home in St. Paul on Feb. 15 after an illness of two months. Colonel Lambert was best known to the public for his leadership in the long fight for congressional authorization of the nine-foot channel in the Upper Mississippi River, now approved and under construction.

The Minnesota Farmers Union met at the D.R. Drude home Friday evening, Feb. 16, in Waverly Township. Albert Van Buren of St. Paul gave an instructive lesson on farmers' organization, cooperative business, collective buying and selling and defined what is wrong with farming and why. Submitted by Mrs. John Breen, Fairmont.

MARCH 2004

Minnesota Farmers Union had the largest delegation at the NFU Convention in Billings, Mont., with more than 50 members registered. MFU had five Silver Star winners. In addition, Minnesota had five counties

and several locals recognized for leadership activities. Counties recognized: Aitkin, Chisago, Dakota, Isanti, Nobles, Todd. Locals recognized: Palisade of Aitkin County, East Central of Kandiyohi County, Brewster of Nobles County, Browerville, Clarissa of Todd County, Tabor-Lakeside of Polk County and Paynesville of Stearns County.



Minnesota's five Silver Star winners were honored at the NFU Convention Award Luncheon on March 8. Pictured, from left, Bessie Klose, Kandiyohi County, Ernest Anderson, Swift County; Tim Henning, Nobles County; Alan Perish, Todd County; Andy Derner, Dakota County, and MFU President Doug Peterson.

MARCH 1984

Delegates to the National Farmers Union convention held in New Orleans March 11 through 14 elected Minnesotan Cy Carpenter to its highest office, president, and re-elected North Dakota Farmers Union President Stanley Moore as vice president.

West Ottertail County Farmers Union will hold its annual springtime dance from 8 to 12 p.m. March 31 at the Silver Dollar, Elizabeth. Music by Rep. Collin Peterson and his band, the Establishment. Tickets can be purchased in advance from the Harvest States Co-op in Fergus Falls or any Farmers Union officer. Ticket donation is \$1 per person.



New NFU President Cy Carpenter is pictured with retiring NFU President George Stone.

Mahnomen County Farmers Union President Paul Bisek Jr. and Nicollet County Farmers Union President Doug Fitzke announce that their organizations have met their membership goals for 1984.

Sausage, Potato, and Cabbage Soup

Prep time: 15 mins/Total time: 35 mins (4-6 servings)

Ingredients

- 2 tablespoons canola oil
- 1 (14-ounce) package kielbasa or other cooked sausage, sliced
- ½ yellow onion, chopped
- 1 large carrot, chopped
- ½ medium green or savoy cabbage, chopped
- Kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper
- 2 cloves garlic, chopped
- 6 cups chicken broth
- 2 large russet potatoes, peeled and chopped
- 2 tablespoons red wine vinegar
- 2 tablespoons chopped fresh dill
- Crusty bread, for serving

Directions

Heat oil in a large pot or Dutch oven over medium heat. Add

kielbasa and cook, stirring occasionally, until browned, 8 to 10 minutes. Use a slotted spoon to transfer to a plate. Add onion, carrot and cabbage to pot. Season with salt and pepper. Cook, stirring occasionally, until vegetables are softened, 5 to 6 minutes. Add garlic and cook until fragrant, 1 to 2 minutes. Add broth, potatoes and sausage. Bring to a boil, then reduce heat



and simmer until potatoes are cooked through, 17 to 20 minutes. Remove from heat. Stir in vinegar and dill. Serve with crusty bread.

Congress signs third stopgap measure since October, extending funding to March



In January, Congress approved another continuing resolution (CR) to extend fiscal year 2024 (FY24) government funding into March, marking the third stopgap passed by Congress since October.

The stopgap maintains the ladder approach from the previous CR, extending funding for some agencies until March 1 (including the agriculture-FDA appropriations bill) and others until March 8. The CR is mostly “clean” and does not interfere with USDA’s ongoing Packers and Stockyards Act rulemakings.

The CR follows news of an agreement struck between Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer, D-N.Y., and House Speaker Mike Johnson, R-La., on topline spending levels for the rest of FY24 and largely mirror those agreed to in the Fiscal Responsibility Act of 2023 (FRA), which resolved last year’s debt ceiling standoff. The stopgap provides appropriators more time to develop annual appropriations bills for the rest of FY24, before potential spending cuts required by the FRA are triggered on April 30.

Farm bill update

Senate Agriculture Committee Chair Debbie Stabenow, D-Mich., outlined a variety of potential changes to commodity programs and crop insurance in a January letter to Senate colleagues.

The concept of doubling down on crop insurance is featured prominently in the letter. Stabenow showed support for offering farmers the option of forgoing Title I programs (such as Agriculture Risk Coverage or Price Loss Coverage) in exchange for purchasing risk management products with higher subsidy levels. The letter notes previous farm bills offered cotton growers such a choice which ought to be extended to all commodities.

Stabenow’s letter also echoed some NFU policy priorities, such as broadening the reach and availability of Whole Farm Revenue Protection (WFRP) and increasing marketing loan rates. These messages were consistent with indications from the Senate Agriculture Committee staff over the last few weeks.

NFU looks forward to learning more about the specifics in the letter, especially regarding the possibility of increasing farm bill spending levels using outside funds.

Merger guidelines released

On Dec. 18, the U.S. Department of Justice (DOJ) and Federal Trade Commission (FTC) jointly released the final version of their 2023 Merger Guidelines after more than two years of consultation.

The guidelines aim to address concerns of excessive corporate consolidation by enhancing merger enforcement. Key changes include including horizontal and vertical mergers in a single guidelines’ document (and integrating thinking around these types of mergers more than in the past), a lower concentration level recommendation to presume mergers are unlawful, and a generally more aggressive stance on merger enforcement.

The precise impact of the merger guidelines cannot yet be determined. Ultimately, the courts play a major role in ruling on merger challenges, and much depends on how the courts understand, interpret and rely on the guidelines. But the guidelines certainly carry significant weight.

HBIIP investments announced

On Jan. 11, USDA announced the next round of awards under the Higher Blends Infrastructure Incentive Program (HBIIP). The announcement includes \$19 million in grants across 22 states to increase the availability of ethanol-based fuels and further reduce prices at the gas pump. This round of investments follows the first round of awards last June, after USDA made \$450 million available in funding

for the program through the Inflation Reduction Act.

The Higher Blends Infrastructure Incentive Program (HBIIP) provides grants to fueling station and distribution facility owners to help expand access to domestic biofuels. These investments help business owners install and upgrade infrastructure such as fuel pumps, dispensers, and storage tanks, expanding the availability of homegrown biofuels across the country.

USDA continues to accept applications for funding to expand access to domestic biofuels. These grants will support the infrastructure needed to reduce out-of-pocket costs for transportation fueling and distribution facilities to install and upgrade biofuel-related infrastructure. There are three quarterly application windows left, and the program ends Sept. 30. The next application deadline is March 31, 2024.



DAN MAHONEY
EXECUTIVE OFFICER, MN FSA
 daniel.mahoney@mn.usda.gov

The USDA Farm Service Agency (FSA) is now accepting applications for the Continuous Conservation Reserve Program (Continuous CRP) signup. USDA's Farm Service Agency (FSA) encourages agricultural producers and landowners in Minnesota who are interested in conservation opportunities for their land in exchange for yearly rental payments to consider the enrollment options available through Continuous CRP, which also includes the Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP) offered by FSA partners. Additionally, producers participating in CRP can now apply to re-enroll if their contracts will expire this year.

On Nov. 16, 2023, President Biden signed into law H.R. 6363, the Further Continuing Appropriations and Other Extensions Act, 2024 (Pub. L. 118-22), which extended the Agriculture Improvement Act of 2018 (Pub. L. 115-334), more commonly known as the 2018 Farm Bill, through Sept. 30, 2024. This extension allows authorized programs, including CRP, to continue operating.

Producers with acres enrolled in Continuous CRP set to expire Sept. 30, 2024, can also now offer acres for re-enrollment. A producer can both enroll new acres into Continuous CRP and re-enroll any acres expiring Sept. 30, 2024.

FSA water quality practices, such as riparian buffers, prairie strips, grassed waterways and wetlands, will receive an additional 20 percent incentive. Buffer practices have a positive impact on water quality. Additionally, the Climate-Smart Practice Incentive launched in 2021 is also available in the continuous signup.

There are several enrollment options within Continuous CRP. This includes:

Conservation Reserve Program signup now open at FSA



- **The Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP)**, which leverages federal and non-federal funds to target specific state, regional, tribal or nationally significant conservation concerns.
- **State Acres For Wildlife Enhancement (SAFE)**, which restores habitat to meet state wildlife conservation goals.
- **Highly Erodible Lands Initiative (HELI)** practices, through which producers and landowners can enroll in CRP to establish long-term cover on highly erodible cropland that has a weighted erodibility index (EI) greater than or equal to 20.
- **Farmable Wetlands Program CRP**, through which producers and landowners can enroll land in CRP to restore previously farmed wetlands and wetland buffers, improving both vegetation and water flow.
- **The Clean Lake Estuaries and Rivers (CLEAR) Initiative and CLEAR30**, which prioritizes and offers additional incentives for water quality practices on the land that, if enrolled, will help reduce sediment loadings, nutrient loadings and harmful algal blooms. Through CLEAR30, additional incentives for adoption of water quality practices can be accessed in 30-year contracts.

Signed into law in 1985, CRP is one of the largest voluntary private-lands conservation programs in the United States. It was originally intended to primarily control soil

erosion and potentially stabilize commodity prices by taking marginal lands out of production. The program has evolved over the years, providing many conservation and economic benefits.

To submit an offer, producers should contact the FSA at their local USDA Service Center by July 31, 2024, to have an offer effective by Oct. 1, 2024. To ensure enrollment acreages do not exceed the statutory cap, FSA will accept offers from producers on a first-come, first-served basis and will return offers for approval in batches throughout the year.

For Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) participants that previously enrolled land in a CRP contract it is important to remember that it may require new conservation cover depending on the CRP practice or for general CRP signup the practice point value selected by the landowner. Establishment of CRP cover must be completed within 12 months of the start date of the contract. FSA requires contract holders to certify the new conservation cover has been established per the Conservation Plan of Operation (CPO) developed with Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) or a Technical Service Provider (TSP) as soon as the cover has been established.

For more information on the Conservation Reserve Program, producers can visit fsa.usda.gov or contact their local USDA Service Center.

Working for Green View is fulfilling and rewarding experience

By Natalie Beckendorf

Pam Orrock, the Green View crew leader at the Enfield Rest Area on I-94 East by Monticello, radiates enthusiasm for her work and the sense of community that surrounds it. Orrock retired from a career with Cargill in finance and manufacturing and found a new calling with Green View.



Pam Orrock

Orrock discovered Green View in a newspaper and the prospect of a flexible work schedule immediately caught her attention. Four years later, she describes her time with Green View as fulfilling, emphasizing the company's culture of kindness, respect and appreciation.

"I love it here. I'm so blessed to have this position with Green View," Orrock said, highlighting the positive atmosphere that extends from top leadership to every team member.

Orrock and her dedicated team at Green View undertake a range of tasks, contributing significantly to the seamless operation and positive reputation of the Enfield Rest Area. Their day-to-day responsibilities

include meticulous safety checks during adverse weather conditions, salting icy sidewalks and demonstrating a commitment to the well-being of both employees and travelers. The team ensures the cleanliness of restrooms, undertaking deep sanitization twice daily, creating a spotless and sanitary environment for visitors. Regular spot checks and garbage inspections help maintain the overall tidiness of the facility.

Green View employs people throughout the state of Minnesota. If you, or anybody you know, is interested in working for Green View, call Mike McShane at (651) 639-1913.

In addition to indoor tasks, the team also takes pride in keeping the outdoor spaces, such as walking paths and picnic areas, pristine and inviting for travelers. Their commitment to quality work is validated by unannounced inspections, which Orrock appreciates as they keep everyone accountable.

"We have all stated how our work is very rewarding. Each compliment from travelers is very appreciative, and there are many compliments a day here," Orrock said.

She sheds light on a unique aspect of the Green View team dynamics, the recognition and appreciation of each member's strengths, or as she calls them, "assets." These assets are distinctive qualities and skills that each team member brings to the table. Orrock mentions the pride they take in their work, and this is intricately tied to the recognition of these assets. Some may excel at maintaining sparkling windows and mirrors, while others may take pride in meticulous cleanliness in other areas. This acknowledgment of individual strengths creates a dynamic where each team member becomes an asset, contributing to the overall success of Green View's mission.

Interacting with travelers is a significant aspect of Orrock's role, and the positive feedback she receives fuels her dedication.

"A semi-truck driver once told me he drives from coast to coast, and the Minnesota facilities are the cleanest rest areas he encounters. Isn't it neat?" she said.

Orrock encourages others to consider joining Green View, citing the perfect working hours, beautiful facilities and the sense of pride that comes with contributing to a clean and welcoming environment. She assures potential applicants that Green View is not just a job but a fulfilling and rewarding experience.

March events

March 5

Centra Sota Cooperative's Third Annual Winter Soil Health Education Event, 9 a.m. -1:30 p.m., Coyote Moon Grille, St. Cloud

March 10-12

National Farmers Union Convention, Scottsdale, Ariz.

March 23-24

Women's Retreat, Waterville. Register at <https://bit.ly/mfuwomensretreat24>

March 26

Meeting and tour at CannonBelles Coffee and Ice Cream, 402 Mill St, Cannon Falls. Hosted by Dakota and Goodhue County Farmers Unions. Email gail@mfu.org for more information.

For an up-to-date listing of events, visit our website: mfu.org/events

Beckendorf is new Communications Intern

Hello everyone! I'm Natalie Beckendorf, the new Communications Intern. I hail from a small hobby farm outside Renville, where we raise market goats, beef cattle and chickens. My journey into agriculture began on the farm but FFA and 4-H fueled my passion for agriculture. Proudly, I served as the 2022-2023 Minnesota FFA Vice President.



Natalie Beckendorf

I am a 2022 graduate from Renville County West. Currently, I'm a second-year student at the University of Minnesota-Twin Cities, majoring in agriculture communication and marketing with a minor in international agriculture. On campus, I'm engaged

in various activities, including the Beta of Clovia Sorority, Gopher Dairy Club, Agricultural Education and Communication Club, Block and Bridle and the National Agri-Marketing Association.

My connection with the Minnesota Farmers Union organization dates to middle school, attending the impactful summer camps. Recognizing the value MFU instilled in young agriculturalists, I eagerly seized the opportunity to give back and grow within the organization, expanding my professional skill set through this internship. I'm thrilled to join the communication team and excited to narrate compelling stories and showcase the remarkable initiatives of Minnesota Farmers Union.



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Ivanhoe	Mike Panka	(507) 694-1750
Lake Crystal	Matt Peterson	(507) 726-2961
Lakeville	Sam Zappa	(952) 456-0029
Luverne	Barb Anderson	(507) 283-8383

Luverne	Steve Cattnach	(507) 283-8383
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