

Minnesota Agriculture

Voice of Rural Minnesota



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June 2024

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The Perfect Storm

It's time to take another look at annuities

By Sandy Shapiro

Economic news can be confusing. Often, our Farmers Union Agency clients ask us questions about their situation based on what they're hearing about the economy. A common question we get these days is if they should consider purchasing an annuity.



Sandy
Shapiro

An annuity is a financial product designed to provide a regular, guaranteed income stream over a specified period or for the rest of a person's life.

When I reflect, 2023-2024 reminds me of 2006-2007 right before our economy struggled and our country went through a difficult period. In 2006-07, we had uncertainty in our country and the world. Today we face some eerie similarities. There are issues nationally and globally that are compelling people to look at measures of safety. They are not only looking at the safety of humanity, but also the safety of wealth and assets. In addition, the cost of living is skyrocketing, and inflation is still high with goods and services costing significantly more than they did just a year ago. These factors and many more are causing strain on people's nest eggs and put tremendous pressure on them just to keep up with the cost of living. With volatility on the horizon due to political and global issues, that creates an even bigger burden on those portfolios as now they need to not only provide supplemental income but also not suffer any losses.

From 2007-2008, the stock market dropped by about 43 percent. Many people who had dreams of retirement in those years had to work longer because the stock market drop eroded their retirement funds.

We are in a similar situation in 2024. The market is at an all-time high, but we have some challenging things happening around us. Seniors and pre-retirees are trying to make sure that they do not outlive their money. They are also trying to guard against a potential long-term care health event that could be catastrophic to

their portfolios, especially if they are not protected through insurance. We are told to buy low and sell high, but the problem is most people do the exact opposite.

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Is this the perfect storm? It is not possible to time the market but what if there was a way that you could have your cake and eat it too? In other words, what if there was a vehicle that existed that enabled you to grow your money when the market is going up and provided you with absolute safety when it is going down? This vehicle exists and billions of dollars are deposited in them annually. It's time you take another look at annuities. They are not what they used to be and some of the wealthiest people in the world are using them to protect their profits.

Turn to our agents at Farmers Union Agency to see if an annuity is right for you.

Shapiro is Director of Sales, Health and Life for Farmers Union Agency

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President's message

GARY WERTISH, PRESIDENT

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There has been movement on the farm bill as this issue of Minnesota Agriculture heads to press in early May.

House and Senate Agriculture Committee leaders released summaries of their proposed farm bills on May 1.

Sen. Debbie Stabenow, chair of the Senate Agriculture Committee, said her version contains more than 100 bipartisan bills.

"I've decided that the best way to jump-start the next steps on negotiation is to actually put out a farm bill. So this is not a framework — this is a farm bill," Stabenow said in an article in Roll Call. "I feel if this was on the floor right now in the Senate, we could get the bipartisan votes for it."

House Agriculture Committee Chairman Glenn "GT" Thompson, R-Pa., released his summary too, and said his committee will mark up the legislation on May 23.

"I hope for unanimous support in this endeavor to bring stability to producers, protect our nation's food security, and revitalize rural America," Thompson said in a statement.

It's encouraging that both leaders put forward their proposals, but there's still a long way to go before a new farm bill is enacted. As we all know, it's more important to have a good farm bill than to rush to get one done. NFU President Rob Larew has said it often, so I'll quote his remarks: "We don't just need a farm bill – we need the right farm bill."

The 2018 Farm Bill was extended to Sept. 30, 2024. It's unknown if another extension will be needed.

Zambia-Minnesota Agribusiness Forum

On April 30, I participated in the Zambia-Minnesota Agribusiness Forum in Minneapolis. The event theme was "Building Strategic Partnerships for Economic Growth and Opportunities in

Agriculture." It was organized in partnership with the Minnesota Department of Agriculture (MDA).

The Zambian Ambassador to the U.S. Chibamba Kanyama and the Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of Agriculture in Zambia Yvonne Mpundu made a case for foreign investment in the country's agricultural sector in advance of an agricultural trade mission planned for Zambia in June.



MFU President Gary Wertish accepted an award from the Minnesota FFA Foundation for MFU being a 60-year donor.

The forum spotlighted investment opportunities in the Zambian agricultural sector in hopes of fostering collaborations with Minnesota farmers and investors. In Zambia, 60 percent of the population derives their income from agriculture and agriculture is second to mining in terms of economic output.

Located in the center of southern Africa, Zambia is a resource-rich country bordered by eight countries. It has one of the world's youngest populations. It is also a poor country, with some of the highest levels of poverty and inequality in the world. Rural poverty is widespread and there are disparities between urban and rural areas regarding access to essential services.

Zambia is considered a stable country with a strong government and little corruption. The country gained its independence in 1964 and democratic elections are held every five years.

The country is in the grips of a severe drought that is impacting agriculture; it is the worst drought in the country's history. An influx of foreign investment in mining may offset some of the losses incurred in the agricultural sector.

There are 10 provinces in Zambia and the government has set aside 100,000 hectares in each province designated for farming, a lot of which isn't being farmed. The 100,000 hectares are divided into various parcels from small to large and are available for people to start farming. In one province, all the parcels are spoken for. Ambassador Kanyama said smallholder farmers are encouraged to be involved in production agriculture in Zambia. Farms in the country range from small farms, run by natives, to large commercial farms, which are mostly owned by European settlers. The main crops grown in the country are corn, sorghum, millet, manioc and peanuts.

During my discussion with the ambassador, I told him it was good to hear him speak of the importance of agriculture and farmers in Zambia and it was great to hear him say they are setting aside land for small farmers to get started.

The Farmers Union is held in high esteem in Zambia, with the Zambia National Farmers Union president seated next to

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**ANNE SCHWAGERL,
VICE PRESIDENT**

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In the land of 10,000 lakes, where the soil is rich and the winters are (typically) long, Minnesota's farmers eagerly anticipate the arrival of spring every year. However, this season brings with it a unique set of challenges and opportunities, shaping the way farmers approach their planting strategies and embrace climate-smart agriculture practices.

Every year is different, and this spring has presented its own set of challenges. Perhaps it was hubris, but many of us saw the early end of a mild winter and thought we would have the crop in the ground by the beginning of May. As I sit in my office on another dreary, 45-degree day, Mother Nature is paying me back for such hubris. Machinery sits idle in the yard, my garden hasn't been touched in two weeks, and many fields around me look as bare as they were two months ago.

Rather than wallowing in the 3-plus inches of rain that we've received in the last two weeks, I am practicing gratitude about the crops that are in the ground already and loving this cool, wet, classically spring weather. Prior to the rain, I was able to plant some spring wheat as well as field

Each spring brings a unique set of challenges and opportunities



Destined for a crush plant later this summer, this winter camelina has overwintered on both fields successfully, despite the lack of snow cover.

peas on about a third of our acres. Those crops are thriving in the cooler temperatures and moisture. Unlike last year, when our small grain crops didn't see much more than a tenth of an inch of rain from their plant date to boot stage and the temperatures soared in May, this cool wet spring is setting the small grains up for success, hopefully.

Helping alleviate the challenge of another wet, late spring is the presence of winter annuals already in the ground. These hardy plants, such as winter camelina, winter

wheat and rye, take advantage of the fall planting window and establish themselves before the onset of winter. Winter annuals can help prevent soil erosion and improve soil health over the winter months, they can also spread out our labor during a crunched planting window where we can get our row crops planted. Last fall, I planted 75 acres of winter camelina on ground that had oats and a test field of soybean stubble.

I spent a good chunk of the winter worried that the camelina would winter kill. Thankfully, it's about as hardy as the winter rye that my father-in-law planted and has already started to bolt. This ecosystem service-friendly crop also provides great early forage and habitat for pollinators.

Climate-smart agriculture looks different on different farms and there is no one-size-fits all solution to how farms navigate into the future. I've just described one of the management tools that we're deploying. I am excited, however, about the expanding "toolbox" of options available to farmers. From innovations in cover cropping and precision agriculture to new marketing opportunities, farmers have a growing number of options to help them in the future.

I hope your spring has been successful, and more importantly, safe. See you in the summer, Farmers Union comrades.

April new members

Welcome to the new members who joined MFU in April. We look forward to getting to know you and thank you for your membership. We encourage experienced members to invite new members to events in your area. Working together we make a stronger Farmers Union.

Rachel and Kyle Bohman, Olmsted County
Cynthia Christensen, Houston County

Kristina and Thomas Davis, Aunt Kris's Cupcakes & More, Dakota County

Timothy and Debra Dolan, Sibley County

Lee and Michele Eustis, Hey Dry Farm, Sibley County

Carly Gatzlaff, Churchill Street, Ramsey County

Sara Gjerdrum, Gjerdrum Farms LLC, Fillmore County

Nick Heiling, Redwood County

Susan and Craig Holm, Hennepin County

Jeremy Kalin, Avisen Legal PA, Hennepin County

Jen Nieters, Ramsey County

Mariah Peterson, Red Lake County

Gretchen Sabel, League of Women Voters Upper Mississippi River Region, Anoka County

Paul and Karen Schmidt, Schmidt Farm, Fillmore County

Dean Schuette, Schuette Family Farm LLC, Carver County



STU LOUREY
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DIRECTOR

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As of writing this on May 8, lawmakers are working long hours at the State Capitol and that pace isn't expected to break until the legislature's constitutional adjournment on May 20. This month, we've seen renewed action on the Minnesota-Care Public Option, passage of the Senate agriculture omnibus package, approval by both bodies of a new veterinary technician licensure, and other developments responding MFU's grassroots priorities.

First, and in a broad context for these final weeks, first-term Sen. Nicole Mitchell, DFL-Woodbury, was arrested and charged with burglary. The timing of her arrest, the narrow Senate majority and the nature of the charges could make this more disruptive to legislative work than the arrests of five other sitting lawmakers who were charged with crimes while in office. Some predicted gridlock. That said, omnibus budget bills continue to move forward as the time before adjournment narrows.

Time is particularly tight because in many cases (probably most), bills need to be debated and voted on at least four times—by the House and Senate, and then by both bodies again after conference committees reach agreement. One strategy the DFL majority has employed to expedite work is to bundle omnibus bills together.

This is true for Chair Aric Putnam's, DFL-St. Cloud, and Chair Samantha Vang's, DFL-Brooklyn Center, supplemental agriculture omnibus bills, which were combined with budgets for commerce and energy late last month. On May 6, the Senate approved this package on a near party line vote (36-30), sending the Senate file (SF4942) to the House.

Vet tech licensure bill advances; Public Option still alive as session nears end



Chair Samantha Vang's ag bill passed the House on May 9 as part of the joint ag, energy, commerce omnibus bill.

In debating the agricultural portions of the bill, Republicans were in broad agreement that Putnam's proposal was a good one that would have enjoyed broad bipartisan support. In fact, agriculture minority lead Sen. Torrey Westrom, R-Elbow Lake, brought forward no amendments on behalf of his caucus. You can find full details on the ag provisions—which include investment in AGRI, Soil Health Equipment Grants, Farm to School, and a host of other provisions MFU supports—on our website.

The Senate's agriculture policy bill (SF4225) is also expected to be considered as part of this full package. It was passed by the full Senate on with a broad bipartisan vote (58-9) on April 4. The bill includes provisions MFU worked on this session including requiring MDA to establish a portal to report suspected violations of the corporate farm law, clarifying language barring confidentiality clauses in ag marketing contracts, updating grain licensing and improving rules around food sampling.

Another proposal that will now be part of the debate over the agriculture, commerce and energy joint omnibus is the MinnesotaCare Public Option. This is the healthcare proposal MFU has worked on for many years that would allow farmers

and others to 'buy-in' to the affordable, comprehensive coverage provided to lower income Minnesotans through MinnesotaCare.

In short, the next steps in establishing this program were being advanced as part of Chair Melissa Wikkund's, DFL-Bloomington, Health and Human Services omnibus before the Public Option was stripped out when Sen. John Marty, DFL-Roseville, voted with Republicans on his Finance Committee to remove the proposal from the bill. Following that, House Majority Leader and Public Option author, Jamie Long, DFL-Minneapolis, led in adding the proposal onto the commerce portions of the joint ag, commerce and energy omnibus. This is because the next step in the process for the Public Option is to secure the necessary federal waiver and the Minnesota Department of Commerce is the agency that would lead on that waiver.

The entire package in the House is expected to come up for a vote on May 9.

On other priorities relevant to special orders, an omnibus bill carrying a new Veterinary Technician licensure passed both the House and Senate (HF4570),

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The fight against monopoly power is moving to center stage

JUSTIN STOFFERAHN,
ANTIMONOPOLY DIRECTOR
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Antitrust is going mainstream. While MFU members have long advocated for and understood the importance of an economy free from the tyranny of monopoly power, the public has recently been getting a closer look.

Chairing the Federal Trade Commission (FTC), while important, has not typically been a path to fame of any sort. Truth be told, I could not tell you who the previous chair of the FTC was, but if you've read any of my past columns you probably already know current FTC Chair Lina Khan. While Khan frequently gives interviews in the business press such as appearing on CNBC, in the span of a week she was interviewed on both The Daily Show by comedian Jon Stewart and CBS News Sunday Morning, putting the fight against monopoly power the closest it has been to center stage for decades.

Khan is also working to get out of the beltway. In December, Koch Industries announced it would be acquiring Iowa Fertilizer Company (IFCO) which operates a fertilizer plant in Wever, Iowa. IFCO received millions in tax breaks and subsidies to build the plant in 2017, with the goal being to create more competition in the highly consolidated fertilizer industry. Koch is one of the four dominant players that controls 75 percent of the fertilizer industry.

In April, Khan visited Iowa to hear directly from farmers about consolidation in agriculture. I attended and spoke to Chair Khan about the incredible work MFU members are doing. Around 80 people came to The Gatherings Event Space in Nevada, Iowa, to share their experiences with Khan, NFU President Rob Larew and several Iowa state legislators. The commu-



Federal Trade Commission Chair Lina Khan with MFU Antimonopoly Director Justin Stofferahn at an Iowa event.

nity meeting was organized by the Iowa Farmers Union and the State Innovation Exchange, a national advocacy organization that works with state legislators across the country. Farmers shared a variety of stories with Khan. This included not only experiences with the rising cost of fertilizer, but heartfelt stories about how monopoly power is making farming more difficult and blocking future generations from the farm life experiences others grew up with.

While not the reach of the Daily Show, CBS or a public gathering with an antitrust enforcer, MFU had its own opportunity to connect with members of the public on the issue of monopoly power in our food system. In early April, MFU organized an event with author Austin Frerick at Moon Palace Books in Minneapolis. Frerick, an antitrust expert and fellow at the Thurman

Arnold Project at Yale University, is the author of *Barons: Money, Power and the Corruption of America's Food Industry*. Frerick's book explores the consolidation of our food system through stories of "barons" that control industries from grain to grocery.

Between 70 to 80 people came to the discussion with Frerick and myself, where we discussed how this consolidation happened and what state and federal policymakers can do to address the harms of monopolization. While I believe most people understand the negative impacts of monopoly power, this was an opportunity to help educate people on the pervasiveness of the challenge while also shining a light on the solutions to our monopoly crisis. If you have ideas for events MFU could be organizing on the issue of monopoly power, please let me know.

Another way MFU is helping to educate the public is through our website. We recently launched a new antimonopoly webpage that you can find at mfu.org/antimonopoly. The page features a variety of resources and content from MFU as well as our stakeholders. Please check the page out and let us know if you have suggestions for additional content.

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

Minnesota Cooks: Local foods make a positive impact on local economies

By Claudine Arndt

This month I'm using my Minnesota Agriculture real estate to talk about something (besides membership) near and dear to my heart: Minnesota Cooks, MFU's local foods program. We've welcomed so many new MFU members recently, I want to make sure everyone knows about Minnesota Cooks.

Started in 2003, Minnesota Cooks celebrates local foods and the dynamic people behind Minnesota's robust local food scene, specifically farmers and the chefs, restaurateurs, makers, bakers and others who work directly with farmers and the local foods they grow and raise. Every year we select and highlight farm-to-table partnerships from around the state in the widely distributed Minnesota Cooks Calendar. Our work emphasizes the value of buying locally grown and produced foods and encourages eaters to spend their dollars with the folks we highlight.

Minnesota Cooks was my gateway into Minnesota Farmers Union, as it has been for many others. I was hired in 2010 to interview farmers and chefs and write about their partnerships for the Minnesota Cooks Calendar, which, I'll be honest, is a dream gig.

For many years we also hosted Minnesota Cooks Day at the Minnesota State Fair, a big local foods celebration, but we sunsetted that event in 2020. We now sometimes collaborate with participants to create smaller local food celebrations, but mostly we focus our energy on the calendar and on farm-to-table matchmaking, especially through Minnesota Foodshed, a platform we created to help farmers and wholesale buyers connect (more on Minnesota Foodshed next month).

Local food systems are important because they diversify and strengthen local economies. According to an article published by North Carolina State Extension, Local Food Systems: Clarifying Current Research, industry estimates indicate that sales of



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Our work is simply this: local supports local

Laune Bread is part of a community of farmers, millers, advocates and friends working to create a thriving local food movement with good food and healthy soil.

Local nutrition

Ingredient		Farm	County
Water	45.69%	Minneapolis	Hennepin County
Whole Wheat Linkert	26.62%	Askegaard Organic	Clay County
Sifted Forefront	16.77%	A-Frame Farm	Lac qui Parle County
Rye	4.15%	Whole Grain Milling	Martin County
Barley	2.77%	Whole Grain Milling	Martin County
Emmer	2.77%	A-Frame Farm	Lac qui Parle County
Salt	1.08%	USA, undefined	USA, undefined
Malted Barley Flour	0.15%	Maltwerks	South Dakota

98.77% sourced within 200 miles of Laune Bread

98.77% Minnesota Grown & Processed by small farmers and businesses

69.1% Whole Grain Flour

All flour except Malted Barley Flour certified organic by Real Organic Project

Purchasing directly from producers & farmers

We buy from the source whenever possible, rather than from a distributor.

In 2023,
\$42,936.²⁸ (or 46.95%)
went directly
to farmers and
producers.

This supports them wholly, builds relationships, helps us understand their realities, farming practices, and work.

local food in the United States have almost doubled in recent years, from \$5 billion in 2008 to \$9 billion in 2020. And while even \$9 billion is a small part of the total agriculture market, \$9 billion is certainly impactful to rural economies nationwide that aim to keep dollars local and circulating among residents. The "multiplier effect" of keeping dollars local can play a big role in keeping a vibrant main street from turning into a ghost town. Additionally, since local foods come from farmers and producers who are rooted in their communities, studies repeatedly show how local food initiatives foster stronger social networks and an overall sense of community togetherness. Studies have even shown that when communities organize around local food issues, civic engagement and network building often leads to communities addressing other community-wide problems, such as food insecurity.

Katie Cannon of Katie Cannon Photography has been our talented photographer for Minnesota Cooks since I started, and last year we added Lisa Holm to our team. We all find immense joy and meaning in our work. We believe in the importance of

local foods, we believe in promoting the good work of Minnesota's farm-to-table players, and we feel fortunate that we get to meet and showcase amazing people making a positive impact in our state.

Speaking of impact, we're excited to share some data from Laune Bread in Minneapolis, which is featured in April of the 2024 Minnesota Cooks Calendar. Laune has a small storefront in Minneapolis where they are open Wednesday – Saturday, and their pastries are all 50 percent or more whole grain flour. The team at Laune takes their local sourcing seriously and strives to measure their considerable impact. We're grateful for their commitment and for sharing this information with us, which can't help but inspire you to run over to their adorable store and buy some croissants... and bread...and danishes, and....

As we like to emphasize, every dollar we spend counts.

If you're new to MFU and didn't receive a 2024 Minnesota Cooks Calendar, please contact me at claudine@mfu.org and I'll mail you a copy.

There's a lot of similarities between running a small farm and running a small newspaper

By Janet Kubat Willette

Randy Olson steps out from behind a fortress of papers to greet a visitor to the Bonanza Valley Voice office, hand out-stretched in welcome.

Olson is the Bonanza Valley Voice, a weekly newspaper that covers Belgrade, Brooten, Elrosa, Grove Lake, Padua, Sedan, Sunburg, Regal, Terrace, Georgeville and the Norway Lake area.

A 1996 graduate of Belgrade-Brooten-Elrosa High School, Olson earned a degree in political science from the University of Minnesota-Morris. He bounced around from job-to-job, writing his first freelance sports article for a newspaper in 2003.

"I never ever dreamed of owning a newspaper," Olson said, but Mike Hurst, his high school band teacher, planted the idea.

In 2008, he joined the staff of the Hoffman Tribune, and he stayed through a merger with the Herman Review in 2010. He learned a lot from newspaper owner Nick Ripperger, who displayed a great demeanor and temperament for a small-town newspaper owner, Olson said. Ripperger taught him how to interact in a small town as a newspaper person. Olson learned that "when push comes to shove, you have to do newspaper things."

In 2011, with a newborn at home, he was lured to the Sauk Centre Herald with the promise of a larger paycheck. There, he learned from the legendary small-town newspaperman Dave Simpkins, who died in 2018.

"He taught me everything," Olson said. "He gave magnificent advice. He taught me so much."

In November 2014, Olson bought the Bonanza Valley Voice from Kayla and Howard Johnson, who operated the newspaper from 1970 through 2014. He and Kayla put the final issue of 2014 together; he published the first issue of 2015 solo.

In the nine years since, Olson has grown into the newspaper version of his dad's

Jessica and Randy Olson outside the Bonanza Valley Voice office in downtown Brooten.



46-cow dairy farm where he grew up in the 1970s and 1980s.

"Basically, I do it all by myself . . . with great help from my wife (Jessica Olson), of course," Olson said. "The overriding goal is to stay independent."

Jennifer Murphey, his former assistant editor and graphic designer, died in June and since then, he's been a one-man show, with help from friends, neighbors and other newspapers to put out a 12- to 14-page newspaper that reaches more than 1,660 homes each week.

"Corporate interests have no place in agriculture or in newspapers."

It's not easy. He works 60 to 80 hours a week and every day is a workday. "It's like farming," Olson said.

Similarly, what's happening with consolidation in agriculture is also happening to newspapers.

"Corporate interests have no place in agriculture or in newspapers," Olson says, handing over the April 25 issue of the Voice with this headline sprawling across four columns of the front page: "Stunned and distraught: Hutchinson and Litchfield set to lose their newspapers this week."

"Our newspaper family is sickened by the news of the pending closure of newspapers in Hutchinson and Litchfield," Olson writes in his column.

The two newspapers, along with the Shakopee Valley News, Prior Lake American, Savage Pacer, Jordan Independent, Chaska Herald and the Chanhassen Villager, all ceased publication by April 30. In addition, the Crow River Press printing business ceased operation. All were owned by MediaNews Group, owned by Alden Global Capital, a hedge fund described by Bloomberg's Joe Nocera as the "destroyer of newspapers."

According to an article in the Hutchinson Leader, "The Leader and Independent Review, like many newspaper businesses around the country, have been challenged during the past decade or longer by changing lifestyle habits, especially by the dramatic shift in advertising revenue from local print publications to digital options such as Google, Facebook and Amazon."

Those digital platforms don't pay for the content created at newspapers like the Voice, but they do benefit from using it. U.S. Sens. Amy Klobuchar, D-Minn., and John Kennedy, R-La., have introduced the Journalism Competition and Preservation Act (JCPA) to create new mechanisms for publishers to get payment from Google and Facebook for news content used on their platforms. The idea behind the JCPA is to deal with what many antimonopoly advocates see as a key reason for the

decline of print news, which is Big Tech's monopoly over online advertising, particularly Google and Facebook.

A recent report from the Interactive Advertising Bureau says that \$225 billion was spent on digital advertising in 2023. Google received more than half at \$113.2 billion. Facebook received another quarter of the pot at \$59.6 billion and every other firm in the U.S. that received digital advertising revenue shared the remaining \$52.1 billion.

The argument is that while the internet caused a disruption for newspapers, it is who receives the revenue for digital advertising that is the larger problem.

The JCPA would:

- Empower news publishers with fewer than 1,500 full-time employees and news broadcasters that engage in standard news-gathering practices to form joint negotiation entities to collectively negotiate with a covered platform over the pricing, terms and conditions under which the covered platform is allowed access to digital news content.
- Require covered platforms to negotiate in good faith with the eligible news organizations.
- Create a limited safe harbor from federal and state antitrust laws for eligible digital journalism providers that allows them to participate in joint negotiations and arbitration and, as part of those negotiations, to jointly withhold their content from a covered platform.
- Prohibit retaliation by a covered platform against eligible digital journalism providers for participating in joint negotiations or arbitration and provide a private right of action for violations of this prohibition.

While the JCPA passed out of the Senate Judiciary Committee on a bipartisan vote in 2023, it has not received action from the full body. California legislators have introduced a state-level version of the act this year.

In Minnesota, the School Boards Association proposed legislation to allow school

districts to publish their public notices on school websites rather than in their local newspapers.

Olson said legal notices are a cheap cover your butt policy for local units of government at a time when trust in government is at an all-time low. Newspapers create a printed record of what was acted upon and can be referenced later.

"If the public trusts you, you can be successful," Olson said, which is especially important for school boards when they seek the public's support to pass school



Randy Olson holds his 'bibles' at his desk. Broom My Hometown and Belgrade Tracks Through Time are centennial books from each community and handy reference books for Olson as he writes tomorrow's history.

bonds or levies. Secrecy gives fodder to those who argue against school bonds or levy referendums, he said, while transparency creates trust.

Trust is essential for a small-town newspaperman who chronicles everything from business milestones to crime trends, crashes, weather and deaths.

"Every moment of every day, you have to love your community and its people," Olson said, saying he can tell the time of day by looking out his window and seeing what vehicles are on Main Street. He grieved with the community when a young person died in a car accident – "I was numb on a daily basis. The paper had to get out." – and he celebrated with the

community when the B-B-E football team made it to U.S. Bank Stadium.

He draws inspiration from the people of Bonanza Valley, like the 87-year-old gentleman who came in to renew his subscription for three years. Everyone is a celebrity in his stories.

"The oldest man in town just died," Olson said. "His mom wrote for the papers from the 1940s to the 1980s."

Charles Sagedahl died April 13. He was 93. A video of him speaking in 2022 went viral on the Voice website (<https://www.bonanzavalleynvoice.com/>). His mother, Opal Sagedahl, was the local columnist, writing about who went where for what.

"No one existed as good as her," Olson said. "She was just so good at what she did."

Olson is a fourth generation Farmers Union member. As a young man, his grandfather, Obert, organized for National Farmers Organization. His father continued the membership, he was all about staying independent, Olson said.

"My dad always said, 'if you're not part of this type of organization, you're competing against your neighbor. You want to work together.' He didn't believe in competing against neighbors," Olson said. "Dad taught me to respect other people. At the end of the day, dad was always looking to work with them."

There's a lot of similarities between independent small-town newspaper owners and farmers, he said. Both have to be optimistic, and both need access to a processor – or in the case of a newspaper, a printer – to be successful.

"We're competing against the big companies," he said.

But citizens aren't without the power to make a difference. Subscribe to your local newspaper, volunteer as a photographer for your local paper or contact your local newspaper editor to sign up for the Citizen Journalism University, a reporting basics course for active citizens who wish to contribute news to their local newspapers.

West central Minnesota farmers were leaders during farm crisis

By Tom Cherveney

One of the great untold stories of Minnesota history is recent enough that some people still refuse to talk about it.

Others are willing, but it's not always easy.

"I can't tell you how many people simply broke down crying," said Jim Roe. He spent many hours during the past two years interviewing people who experienced the farm crisis so that this story could be recorded and told by the 10 historical societies comprising the West Central Minnesota Historical Association.

Kandiyohi and the nine adjoining counties that also comprise the historical association — Big Stone, Chippewa, Lac qui Parle, Lincoln, Lyon, Redwood, Renville, Swift and Yellow Medicine — were a central stage for much of the crisis, according to Roe, a St. Paul historian who spoke at the Kandiyohi County Historical Society annual meeting on April 18. It's only fitting, he said, as these 10 counties were also ground zero for the Farm Holiday Movement and protests that occurred in Minnesota during the farm crisis of the 1930s.

Roe said he was not surprised that these rural western Minnesota counties would play the role they did. These counties

have a rural culture of speaking up, he explained.

Farmers spoke up as their economic plights worsened. One of the opening acts in the crisis occurred on Feb. 5, 1979, and was national in scope. Farmers drove their tractors all the way to the nation's capital to protest low commodity prices. Kent Kanten, of Milan, was among them: He still keeps the open-seat tractor he drove.

On the weekend of July 4, 1980, national media found their way to farm fields near Granite Falls and Milan as farmers Lou Anne and Wayne Kling and Anne and Chuck Kanten plowed down an acre of wheat on each of their farms to call attention to the plight of farmers.

On Sept. 13, 1984, 50 tractors rolled through the streets of Willmar and a crowd estimated at 1,000 gathered at the Kandiyohi County Fairgrounds to hear speakers from the American Agriculture Movement and Farmers Union.

Gerald and Alicia Kohnen, of Roscoe, spoke about how weeks earlier they and 35 others — including Paul Wellstone, then an assistant to Gov. Rudy Perpich — were arrested when they refused to leave the



A July 4, 1980, "plow down" on Lou Anne and Wayne Kling's farm outside of Granite Falls drew national attention to the farm crisis. West Central Tribune file photo

lobby of the First Bank of Paynesville at closing time to protest the bank's decision to call their farm loan.

Just a few months later, in January of 1985, and with only a few days' notice, some 10,000 farmers converged on the State Capitol in St. Paul.

What Roe called the "turning point" in this crisis occurred in July 1985 when protesters converged on the steps of the Lac qui Parle County Courthouse in Madison.



Willmar was among many locations where tractorcades were held to draw attention to the economic distress of farmers in the 1980s. This photo is from the Sept. 13, 1984, tractorcade in Willmar that saw 50 tractors and an estimated 1,000 farmers converge on the Kandiyohi County Fairgrounds. West Central Tribune file photos

They shouted “no sale” as an auction for a farm foreclosure took place. Law enforcement officers forcibly tossed some of those attempting to disrupt the auction from the steps.

“This event really shocked people,” said Roe.

Many of the protests were modeled after the tactics of the 1930s, he said. Clint Haroldson, of Atwater, who had participated in the farmer rallies of the 1930s, was the main character in a movie filmed in the Milan area in 1982. It likened the crisis of the 1980s to that of the 1930s. Director Jim Gambone filmed “Foreclosure” using local people, Roe said.

The economic challenges of the 1980s were formidable. After years of being encouraged to take on debt to expand and modernize, farmers suddenly found themselves in a predicament beyond their control.

Farm commodity prices plummeted as prices for other goods and services rose and land values tanked.

It was a time of inflation, peaking at 14 percent. Yet land values dropped by 50 percent.

There were farmers taking out loans to pay the interest on loans, said Roe. “The perfect storm,” he called it.

By 1982, nearly one-half of the loans with the Farmers Home Administration — known as the lender of last resort — were delinquent. The previous year the FmHA sent out a directive to shed 20 percent of the delinquent loans.

The FmHA sent representatives from outside of the local communities to do so. “It changed the dynamics so dramatically,” said Roe of the new, confrontational relationship between farmers and lenders.

“Save the family farm” was the rallying call throughout. The theme of protecting the family farm resonates today, said Roe. “It’s very meaningful in American culture,” he said.

The farm crisis led to many changes. Lou Anne Kling and Anne Kanten both realized after holding their “plow downs” that there was no way they could recruit enough farmers to withhold product to affect prices, said Roe. They focused instead on working with the state and federal governments.

With help from the state, the two women and others trained “farm advocates” to represent farmers with delinquent loans in their dealings with lenders. The Farmers Legal Action Group was launched to work for farmers’ legal rights.

Change came on the farm too, according to Roe. Those he interviewed told him that many farm women took jobs in town to supplement farm income, while also continuing to shoulder the burden of being working partners on the farm.

The farm landscape has changed. Farms are larger but smaller in number, and fewer people work on the land today.

Roe played an audio interview he made with Ruth Ann Karty of Clarkfield, a farmer’s advocate through the crisis, who spoke about these many changes.

Farming has changed in a very fundamental way, she pointed out. “Farmers have learned to be better at business,” said Karty.

Editor’s note: This story originally appeared in the West Central Tribune. Reprinted with permission.

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40 Acre Co-op aims to build opportunities for marginalized farmers

By Lisa Holm

Editor's note: This is the second article in a series highlighting the projects of Minnesota Farmers Union Foundation "Co-ops for Climate" grant recipients. Co-ops for Climate is a Minnesota Farmers Union Foundation grant program that funds farmer cooperatives in developing solutions for climate resilience. Learn more at mfu.org/mfu-foundation-com-climate-working-lands/.

40 Acre Cooperative, based in Sandstone, is a part of the first cohort of "Co-ops for Climate" grant recipients awarded in the summer of 2023.

40 Acre Cooperative aims to create access and opportunities for historically marginalized farmers in Minnesota and the surrounding region and build climate resilience through operational support for specialty crops, specifically hemp. 40 Acre is proud to be the first national Black farmer cooperative since the Reconstruction Era. Projects funded through the grant include a market assessment and specialty crop business planning guide.

This is the third year that 40 Acre has held grower-member meetings. Angela Dawson, founder and CEO of 40 Acre, said

it is important for hemp growers to be adaptable due to frequent changes in the governing laws. Dawson often provides one-on-one assistance to help ensure growers have the correct compliance and license materials. Dawson also highlighted the need farmers have expressed in meetings for assistance in accessing grants and developing business plans. 40 Acre is developing an Introduction to Business

Visit fortyacre.coop to learn more about the history and mission of 40 Acre Cooperative.

Planning guide for specialty crop growers.

The cooperative has held trainings where Dawson, alongside other growers and technical experts, teaches the basics of how to grow hemp using 40 Acre's hoop house model. Training goes through steps including site preparation, necessary supplies and proper hemp genetics. Through

this work, Dawson has seen the need for more foundational knowledge on cooperatives, which she incorporates into lessons.

There has been a significant increase of people interested in growing hemp, especially from Indigenous producers. In the spring, 40 Acre worked with Loretta Hansen, Education Developer for Mille Lacs Band of Ojibwe, to hold a training for Tribal members at the Hinckley Community Center and another online. Dawson said there is a need for emerging farmer resources that use more Indigenous language and methods, which she is working with Hansen to develop.

One resource that has been important to the cooperative is the Agricultural Utilization Research Institute's (AURI) research on value added products, including the Minnesota Hemp Value Chain Analysis, which informed 40 Acre's educational strategy. Dawson appreciates the work AURI has done to support the growing hemp industry in the upper Midwest and beyond. 40 Acre is dedicated to expanding its network of hemp growers across Minnesota through providing education, training and increased market power to growers.



Harold Robinson, center, talks with people at the Hinckley Community Center. At right, a hoop house at 40 Acre Co-op.

Q. Why a cooperative model?

Dawson: Cooperatives are important for smaller and regenerative farmers because there are so many issues we face that there really aren't many resources for yet. The co-op model is a great way to respond to those needs more efficiently. I'm excited about the new opportunities emerging to support this model, like MDA's cooperative development grants.

Q. What have been some challenges thus far?

Dawson: A lot of the challenges we've faced have been external things we can't control. Weather and regulations have made things more unpredictable, and we've had to pivot to adapt. In the

last two years, members have had issues with storms that cause delays in planting and all kinds of things like damage to infrastructure which is super expensive to repair. The tornados that came through last year were devastating and tore down all but one of our hoop houses - that took a lot of reworking. We fixed a lot of it now, but it was basically destroyed. The neighbors came together to help fix it.

There's also been a lot of fluctuation in pricing. Two years ago, the price was high but then for six months there was a rule that made hemp oil illegal so there were no sales. It's leveling out now, after this new cannabis law is enacted next year things will be steadier.

Q. What have been some successes thus far?

Dawson: I am super excited about how open and receptive ag leaders have been to small farmers and really taking hemp seriously as a commodity crop for Minnesota. I appreciate the receptiveness from policy makers and appreciate that it has been easy to work with the MDA and MFU.

Over the last couple of months there has been steady product demand, which has been encouraging. Education and marketing are important, but I want there to be strong financial incentives for people to participate [in growing hemp]. That happens when you have consistent demand.

Three earn Farmers Union scholarships

Minnesota Farmers Union Foundation awarded three \$1,000 scholarships to graduating seniors this year. The scholarships went to Waylon Petersen, Pine City High School; Jack Wertish, Renville County West High School, and Jessica Willette, Triton High School.



Waylon Petersen



Jack Wertish



Jessica Willette

The scholarship is awarded to members or their children pursuing post-secondary studies. Winning this scholarship shows not only academic strength but also a dedication to being a leader who will innovate and shape the future.

Petersen plans to attend the University of Minnesota, Temple University or the University of Wisconsin-Madison. His major is undecided, but he is interested in political science, biology and conservation. He has been active in baseball, football, basketball, concert choir and National Honor Society.

"My experiences growing up on a farm have shaped me into the person I am today, and it has set me up for my life ahead," Petersen wrote in his application essay. "One major lesson I have learned from my upbringing on a farm is one of perseverance. Often, you are subjecting yourself to nonstop hard work on a farm. Even when the work is vigorous, and the hours are long, you never stop until the job is done.

Farming requires qualities of hard work, dedication and perseverance that are rare to find in today's fast-paced culture."

Wertish plans to study agricultural science at South Dakota State University. He's been active in National Honor Society, Student Council, FFA, 4-H, football, basketball and baseball.

"While attending Minnesota Farmers Union Camps in the summers with my friends, I learned how important community is to farming," Wertish wrote in his application essay. "Our community is one that forms many cooperatives and connections that keep farmers and rural businesses thriving. Listening to debate over issues that affect my family's farm in Renville County at the Minnesota State Convention, I learned there are many sides to an issue and many working parts in every regulation/law that is brought forward in Congress. Organizations like Farmers Union play a very important role in agriculture.

"Family farms are the heart of agriculture in Renville County; and I hope to join other classmates to continue the role farmers play in providing for our communities," Wertish wrote.

Willette plans to study crop and soil science sustainable agriculture at the University of Wisconsin-River Falls.

She has been active in National Honor Society, Students Against Destructive Decisions, choir, theater, Business Professionals of America, Link Crew, student council, volleyball, soccer and Family, Career and Community Leaders of America.

"My first official job around the farm was picking rock, which I think is a rite of passage; once you're trustworthy enough to handle a rock, they can trust you with a live animal or an old tractor," Willette wrote in her application essay. "Being entrusted with these jobs at a young age has allowed me to develop a strong work ethic, and good teamwork and problem-solving skills.

"Growing up around agriculture has shaped me, and even though I didn't always enjoy it, it has taught me many valuable lessons and allowed my interests to prosper," she wrote. "I can't imagine my life any other way."

Dining on the Farm

Alpha & Omega Farm



Brad and Kim Hayes own and operate Alpha and Omega Farm on 38 acres in Princeton. They and their team work together to create a destination that brings community together. Alpha and Omega Farm features an outdoor dining experience which includes Neapolitan-style wood-fired pizzas made with many locally sourced ingredients. The farm hosts special events including weddings, reunions, birthday parties, groom's dinners, showers and anniversary celebrations. They also offer a variety of events.

Learn more at alphaomegafarm.co or email khayes@mlcv.com or call (763)234-1350.



The Crowded Table



Matthew and Amber Jensen are the owners of an award-winning restaurant in Alexandria that features farm-to-plate dining. They are now on a mission to revolutionize rural dining experiences. The Crowded Table features table-to-farm multi-course dinners where they highlight Minnesota grown food and feature products grown on site. Their mission is to shine more light on small family farms and producers by providing guests with meaningful and memorable local food experiences. Alongside their dinners, they offer cooking classes and other educational events. Join them for events at Brickhouse Farms on June 14-15th, Haffner Family Farm on July 26 and Full Circle Farm on Aug. 24.

Learn more at thecrowdedtablemn.com or email thecrowdedtablemn@gmail.com. Call Matthew at (320)424-1467.



Fairhaven Farm



John and Emily Beaton's mission when they started Fairhaven Farm was to gather, nourish and inspire their community by producing tasty food grown right. Sharing food with the community has always been the heart of their farm, which is why they started Pizza Nights. Gather with your family and friends on Pizza Nights for an outdoor dining experience. Take in the scenery, stroll through the vegetable fields and enjoy freshly prepared pizzas from their wood-fired oven. They also offer events including gardening workshops, a plant sale with more than 150 varieties of greenhouse-grown starter vegetable, herb and flower plants and sell farm products on-site during events. In addition, they offer a farm stay.

Learn more at fairhaven.farm via email at hello@fairhaven.farm or call (218) 576-4700.



From camper to counselor: Matt Shaver's camp experience

By Natalie Beckendorf

Matt Shaver's camp journey is filled with memories, friendships and life lessons. From a reluctant camper to a seasoned counselor, his story is one of unexpected twists and heartfelt connections.

"Camp wasn't on my radar at all," Shaver admits, recalling his initial skepticism. It took a nudge from a friend to convince him to give it a shot. "Chris, my buddy from school, convinced me to tag along. He promised it'd be fun and that I'd meet cool people."

His first day at camp was a whirlwind of nerves and excitement. "I was a day late to my first camp because I had a baseball game. I felt all eyes on me as I pulled up," Shaver said with a chuckle. But having Chris by his side eased the tension. "Having a friend there made all the difference. Chris introduced me to everyone, and soon enough, I felt right at home."

What began as a summer adventure soon turned into an annual tradition. Shaver found himself drawn back to camp year after year, soaking in the camaraderie and friendships. "I made lifelong friends at camp," he said, reminiscing about the bonds formed over friendship bracelets, hikes up Mount Tom and late-night chats.

But it wasn't just about the friendships, camp also shaped Shaver's outlook on life. "Camp taught me about leadership and cooperation," he reflects. His time on the Youth Advisory Council (YAC) honed his leadership skills. "Jim (Tunheim), our camp director at the time, opened my eyes to the power of advocacy," Shaver recalls.

The transition from camper to counselor was a natural progression for Shaver.

"I wanted to pay it forward," he says. Becoming a mentor to younger campers was a rewarding experience, and it was during this time that he met Kristin, his future wife. "Camp brought us together," he said. Matt and Kristin were camp counselors for five summers together and enjoyed every second of it.

As Shaver looks back on his camp days, he's grateful for its impact on his life. "Camp taught me to embrace new experiences and cherish the moments spent with friends," he says. "It's a place where memories are made, and friendships last a lifetime."

The values of leadership and cooperation he absorbed during his summers at camp became the guiding principles of his professional life. Tunheim played a significant role in shaping Shaver's career trajectory, inspiring him to pursue a path of advocacy and education. Today, Shaver serves as the Policy Director at EdAllies, where he advocates for education reform in the state legislature. His camp experience continues to be a source of inspiration and motivation, reminding him of the importance of making a difference in the lives of others.

For Shaver, camp isn't just a summer getaway; it's a part of who he is. "I can't wait to send my kids to camp one day," he says. "It's where I learned some of life's most valuable lessons, and I want my kids to experience that same magic."

Shaver wanted to end with a simple message to anyone considering attending summer camp, "Give camp a shot. You never know what adventures await."



MFU camp staff in 2010 included, back row, from left, Education Director Jim Tunheim, Matt Shaver, Logan Faggerberg, Ryan Kliber and front row, Nallely Urbano, Shelly Jansen, Kate Hanson and Kristin (Potts) Shaver.



Matt Shaver and his wife, Kristin, met at Farmers Union Camp. They have two children, Wesley and Kellan, who Matt is excited to send to camp in a few years. "It's where I learned some of life's most valuable lessons, and I want my kids to experience that same magic," he said.



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FOR MORE INFORMATION VISIT [MFU.ORG/CAMP](https://mfu.org/camp)

President's Message

continued from page 3

the country's president at official functions. It was a bit unnerving as Zambians jockeyed to get their picture taken with me as the president of Minnesota Farmers Union.

Legislative update

It's disappointing that Right to Repair didn't advance this legislative session, but I anticipate the members of Farmers Union will want us to advocate for this important issue again next session.

To me, Right to Repair gives power back to the people. It allows people to repair their own equipment or choose their technician. It's just like taking your car or truck to a dealership for repairs or taking it to a local mechanic; it's your choice. With fewer new vehicle dealerships, it's sure nice to

visit the mechanic in my community for vehicle repairs. The same is true of farm equipment. With fewer dealerships, it sure would be nicer to take my tractor to the local equipment repair technician than to have to get on the dealership calendar. Not to mention, having a local equipment repair technician creates an opportunity for someone to be a business owner.

Ag education

I enjoyed attending the 95th annual Minnesota FFA State Convention in April. It's always inspiring to see the next generation at work. Congratulations to the 2024-25 state officer team of Emma Braford, vice president, Kaiya Grossman, secretary, and Torri Gunderson, sentinel, all of Grand Rapids; Lauren Stoel, president, Murray County Central; Cole Sundeen, treasurer, Rockford, and Natalie Clemenson, reporter, Zumbrota-Mazeppa.

Another highlight was receiving an award for Minnesota Farmers Union being a 60-year donor to the Minnesota FFA Foundation. As you can tell, MFU has long placed a priority on agricultural education. We are proud to support the next generation of rural leaders through this premier leadership program.

In addition, MFU Foundation awarded three scholarships to graduating seniors who are pursuing post-secondary education.

Speaking of agricultural education, there's still time to register for MFU's Summer Youth Leadership Camps. You can learn more about the camps at mfu.org/camp.

And finally, remember to get your county convention on the calendar. The membership team is updating materials in preparation for a July start to county convention season. I think I'm already scheduled to speak at the Kanabec County Convention.

Government relations

continued from page 5

both with strong bipartisan votes (92-37; 66-0). This was led by Rep. John Huot, DFL-Rosemount, and Sen. Rob Kupec, DFL-Moorhead.

The Senate tax bill (SF5247) includes a provision allowing small farms to benefit from the Ag Homestead Credit and an increase in funding for Soil and Water Conservation Districts (SWCDs). This proposal passed the Senate with broad bipartisan support (55-10). In conference, it will meet the House's proposal, which doesn't include these provisions.

Also in the Senate, Chair Fong Hawj, DFL-St. Paul, led an amendment to restore funding to ag programs as part of his Clean Water Fund proposal, a move which earned votes from most Republicans (55-9). Both the House and Senate Legacy proposals now fund work around nitrates and soil health at the Department of Agriculture (MDA), help the Department of Health (MDH) respond to the EPA petition in southeast Minnesota, and pay for additional nitrate monitoring at the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency (MPCA).

These largely align with the recommendations put forward by the Clean Water

Council (CWC), which includes MFU Big Stone County President Peter Schwagerl.

This week, we received member questions about a provision that would remove the requirement that school boards post their meeting minutes in a local newspaper, allowing them to instead post online. Member concerns include that not everyone—particularly in greater Minnesota—has access to internet, that schools wouldn't need to maintain that archive and that transparency is good for everyone. This proposal is part of the education policy omnibus (SF3567), which is Chaired by lawmakers Rep. Laurie Pryor, DFL-Minnetonka, and Sen. Steve Cwodzinski, DFL-Eden Prairie.

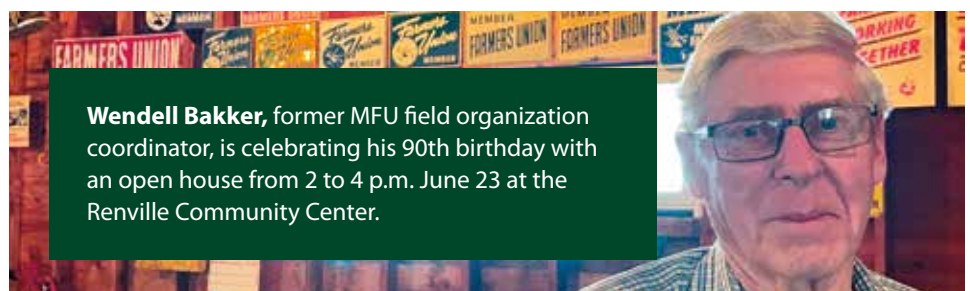
Finally for the state level, work on a borrowing package for publicly owned infrastructure—or a bonding bill—still remains. Last week, the House Chair Rep. Fue Lee, DFL-Minneapolis, advanced his

nearly \$1 billion proposal through a final committee stop.

On the federal level, there's new news on a potential Farm Bill with both chairs releasing new details on their proposals. National Farmers Union (NFU) responded, highlighting the need for continued bipartisan work.

"Family farmers need a farm bill that establishes a stronger farm safety net, builds fairer and more competitive markets and creates better opportunities for the next generation of farmers," said NFU President Rob Larew. "We are encouraged to see yesterday's progress and look forward to working with the committees as they forge ahead in the process."

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



Wendell Bakker, former MFU field organization coordinator, is celebrating his 90th birthday with an open house from 2 to 4 p.m. June 23 at the Renville Community Center.

Three Minnesota members attend NFU Advocacy Training Workshop

By Lisa Holm

In April, the National Farmers Union (NFU) hosted 15 members from around the country in Washington D.C. for the 2024 Advocacy Training Workshop. The goal of this annual workshop is to help members build a solid foundation in communication and advocacy. Attendees from Minnesota included Kelsey Love Zaavedra of Chisago County, Laura Gosewisch Frederickson of Ramsey County and me, a proud Hennepin County member. I applied for this training because it looked like a great opportunity to develop my leadership, civic engagement and public speaking skills.

The training took place over two days at NFU's office and the Capitol. On the first day we were warmly welcomed by NFU President Rob Larew, who spoke about the role leadership and advocacy have played in Farmers Union history and recent events.

Participants then had an engaging session with Communications Coach and Consultant, Emily Oehler, on effective communication and how to memorably explain key farming issues to elected officials, media and potential new members. Through exercises like writing your "Spokesperson Intention," Oehler helped us understand the role of being a spokesperson to help build the brand of our business, industry and NFU through timely, accurate, retainable and actionable information that is appropriate for the audience.

A few takeaways that stood out from the training about how to engage with media:

- Always pause before responding to a media call, email or request;
- Always research the media outlet, reporter, audience and topic before you agree to talk;
- Always practice and then practice 5 more times before you share information with the media or a group;
- Deliver quotable responses: Repeat the question in your answer, repeat your main message as often as you can, have a closing response to "Is there

anything else you would like to add?" and be comfortable with silence.

Next, we received board training from Columinate, a national consulting cooperative serving mission-driven organizations. During this session, participants learned about some of the responsibilities that come with being a board member and how to be a strong leader. This training culminated in a lively mock board meeting. One of the main takeaways I learned from this session is how board members must bring a duty of loyalty to act in the co-op's best interest, care to show up and be prepared and, finally, obey the law.

The following day, NFU Government Relations staff prepared us with tips for talking to politicians about important issues. Participants met in groups with other attendees from their state and a Government Relations staff member to review talking points and plan for the day on Capitol Hill.

We had an action-packed afternoon visiting the offices of members of Congress and talking about issues that are affecting family farmers, ranchers and communities. Issues the Minnesota group focused on included:

- Protecting new funding for voluntary, incentive-based conservation and renewable energy programs in the Farm Bill;
- Supporting the Fairness for Small-Scale Farmers and Ranchers Act to strengthen antitrust laws across the agriculture sector;
- Passing the Farmers First Act to re-authorize the Farm and Ranch Stress Assistance Network, a program that connects farmers, ranchers and other agriculture workers to stress assistance programs and resources.

The NFU Advocacy Training Workshop is one of the many educational opportunities available for Farmers Union members. Visit <https://nfu.org/education/> to learn about other national education programs.



Three NFU members attended NFU's Advocacy Training Workshop. Pictured from left, Laura Gosewisch Frederickson of Ramsey County, Lisa Holm of Hennepin County and Kelsey Love Zaavedra of Chisago County.

My cohorts had this to say about the program.

"I learned so much more than I expected - being part of this training was challenging and invigorating," Frederickson said.

"Making sense of the importance of the Farm Bill and feeling empowered to speak about my experiences and needs as a farmer were incredibly valuable. I was surprised to find that I want to do more advocacy work after this experience!"

"I honestly longed to be back in the field as my nerves went full tilt walking the Capitol grounds," she said. "Leaving the farm during a crucial time in spring was a tough decision, and not everyone has the ability to do so. I imagined the tasks I would have been doing back at home and thought of all the other farmers out there doing their chores while I had the opportunity to share our stories, worries and needs. The people that make decisions that affect us need to know us; this program has inspired me to continue to advocate for my fellow farmers and the future of farming."

"Participating in advocacy training was an empowering experience," Zaavedra said. "The training equipped me with practical skills and strategies to advocate for change in my community and beyond. It also gave insight into the issues our membership faces nationwide and offered discussion surrounding clear ways to effectively communicate our needs. The training connected me with a supportive network of like-minded individuals who share my experience farming. Together, we continue to advocate for meaningful policy and amplify the voices of underserved farmers. I really enjoyed our time on The Hill speaking with members of Congress and always appreciate Farmers Union's strength of relationship building in these spaces."

EPA approves year-round sale of E15 in eight states



The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) announced an emergency waiver permitting the sale of E15 (gasoline containing 15% ethanol) during the summer months. This marks the third consecutive year EPA has issued the waiver, following major spikes in energy costs and market volatility because of various conflicts across the globe. NFU joined a group letter to EPA Administrator Michael Regan urging the agency to implement emergency fuel waivers and authorize the sale of E15 for the summer 2024 driving season.

Back in February, EPA issued a final rule approving the permanent year-round sale of E15 in eight states, effective April 28, 2025. While this was a good step forward toward permanent year-round E15, the 2025 effective date has created a “coverage gap,” which would have prevented the sale of E15 this summer, had EPA not issued the waiver.



Though EPA’s decision to issue the waiver represents an important win for family farmers, much more remains to be done to promote the development and use of renewable, low-carbon fuels. NFU supports the Consumer Fuel and Retailer Choice Act, which will enable the year-round, nationwide sale of E15 and permanently extend the Reid vapor pressure (RVP) volatility waiver to ethanol blends above 10 percent, providing nationwide uniformity across U.S. fuel markets.

Farm bill update

It appears farm bill language may be on the horizon, as recent signals from key lawmakers suggest there will be legislative action in May.

In early April, House Agriculture Committee Chairman Glenn “GT” Thompson, R-Penn., stated “without a doubt, we will mark up a farm bill before Memorial Day.”

In a series of remarks from the floor, members of the majority called on Congress to pass a farm bill that better supports farmers, citing high inflation, increased input costs and decreasing farm income as major challenges, while stressing the importance of a farm bill that protects food and national security. Speeches also highlighted the need for strong farm safety net programs, increased reference prices and robust crop insurance, along with expanded agricultural market access.

On April 19, Ranking Member David Scott, D-Ga., released an op-ed criticizing Republicans for abandoning bipartisanship and proceeding with proposals he claims will jeopardize

House Democratic support for the farm bill, such as cuts to nutrition programs.

The Ranking Member also cast doubt on GOP’s ability to pass a farm bill on party lines and reiterated support for investing in farm safety net programs without cutting SNAP benefits or restricting the Secretary of Agriculture’s use of Commodity Credit Corporation (CCC) funds, both of which Thompson seems poised to pursue.

In the Senate, Sen. John Hoeven, R-N.D., and Senate Agriculture Committee Ranking Member John Boozman, R-Ark., have introduced the FARMER Act, which increases premium support for the highest levels of crop insurance coverage and reduces producer deductibles. This bill follows a January letter from Chairwoman Debbie Stabenow, D-Mich., that outlined her priorities for improving crop insurance and other farm bill programs.

NFU will continue to monitor developments and urge Congress to pass a bipartisan farm bill. But not just any farm bill – Farmers Union members know we need the right farm bill.

NFU has also endorsed the Next Generation Fuels Act, which establishes a minimum research octane number (RON) standard of 98 for gasoline, requires the added octane value to reduce carbon emissions by at least 40 percent compared to regular gasoline, and incentivizes vehicle technologies that reduce greenhouse gas emissions and increase fuel economy. By requiring high-octane fuel to use low-carbon sources, the Next Generation Fuels Act will decarbonize liquid fuels as vehicle technologies advance. This requirement, coupled with a new limit on harmful

aromatics content, ensures the progress already made to expand the use of ethanol while lowering emissions will continue, and will lead to the usage of higher-level blends.

Additionally, the Year-Round E15 Act will allow year-round E15 sales to begin this year, addressing the coverage gap from EPA’s February rulemaking. NFU will continue advocating for usage of higher-level blends of ethanol, which will add further benefits to the economy, air quality, the environment and America’s farmers.

MFU's meat processing work continues to progress

By Dave Endicott

Minnesota Farmers Union (MFU) has been a leader in helping resolve the bottleneck in meat processing for small and medium-sized producers. We continue to pursue avenues to provide and support increased availability of meat processing throughout the state.

MFU helped support the creation of meat cutting and butchery programs at Ridgewater College (RC) and Central Lakes College (CLC). Both programs are finishing their second year. The impact on the workforce is already evident and both programs continue to grow. There are also several high schools in Minnesota that are starting meat cutting classes that will hopefully become feeder programs for the colleges.

It was exciting to see the training modules built by Friesla arrive on the CLC campus. These modules were purchased by a grant from the Economic Development Administration (EDA) that Minnesota Farmers Union Foundation (MFUF) received. Beginning this fall, students



at CLC will learn their craft in these state-of-the-art modules.

Money available

The Foundation has more than \$900,000 in Meat and Poultry Intermediary Lending Program (MPILP) funds available for meat processors. The Farmers Union Foundation's MPILP fund is put to work to strengthen, diversify and expand the meat processing sector in the state. Farmers Union MPILP lending prioritizes small and mid-sized meat processing facilities and

conducts outreach to new and underserved communities throughout Minnesota. There have been 10 MPILP inquiry forms filled out and two loans are close to closing as of May 1.

New facility

Plans continue to move forward on building a new meat processing facility in the industrial park in Staples. Land has been purchased and the project is in the final design phase. This plant will utilize the funds from the EDA grant to purchase a USDA-compliant modular meat processing system and a mobile harvest unit that will be shared with Ridgewater and CLC for training purposes.

At this time, it is expected that the mobile slaughter unit will be completed by the end of 2024, with the other modules to be completed in spring 2025. We plan to break ground for the facility infrastructure this summer. If all goes as planned, a spring 2025 opening may be possible.

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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
	<input type="checkbox"/> Student - \$20

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JUNE 1934

Records of the weather bureau show that may of this year was the second driest on record for Minnesota. The spring of 1934 was the driest on record for Minnesota. The year which ended on May 31, 1934, was the driest year on record for Minnesota.

Co-operative purchasing of farm supplies has grown more rapidly during the last five years than any other form of cooperative activity, according to recent studies conducted by the co-operative division of the Farm Credit Association. The number of buying co-operatives in the United States is well above 1,600.

Plans for the establishment of a co-operative by the Indians of Minnesota for the marketing of their products and purchasing of their supplies have been completed. Under the new system, the Indians will sell their wild rice, hides, blueberries and fur through a co-operative store.

JUNE 2004

Minnesota Farmers Union members are invited to the State Picnic and Summer Auction in Nicollet County on July 31. The event will be held at the Nicollet Conservation Center on the south side of Swan Lake.



Harmon Wilts

Swift County Farmers Union President Harmon Wilts is one of 32 Minnesotans selected for the Minnesota Agriculture and Rural Leadership (MARL) program.



Minnesota's two participants in the NFU National Collegiate Conference in Washington, D.C., met with Rep. Collin Peterson. Pictured, from left, Candace Oerter, Tyler, a student at St. Cloud State University and a Torchbearer Award recipient; Peterson; MFU Education Director Jim Tunheim, and Jacob Yost of St. Peter, a student at South Dakota State University and also a Torchbearer Award recipient.

JUNE 1984

The nation's chief farmer, Agriculture Secretary John Block, has admitted that he owes \$8 million in farm debt, according to a report by the Wall Street Journal. Block's financial woes come to light at a time when the agriculture secretary and President Ronald Reagan downplay farm troubles and have repeatedly insisted that farmers in financial difficulty are poor managers.

At least six Minnesota Farmers Union families had a first-hand experience with the devastation and life-threatening action of a tornado when severe weather hit an area of Grant County April 29. MFU members most directly affected by the storm include the families of Leland and Polly Hedstrom, Martin and Fern Pasche, Hjalmer and LaJune Tommerdahl, and Dennis and

Carol Winter, all of Hoffman, and Gary and Connie Olson and Roger and Karen Quick, all of Barrett.

Between 750 and 1,000 cooperative patron-owners and friends participated in a tribute to Mahnomens cooperative spirit on June 16. A special afternoon and evening filled with activities was hosted by the Mahnomens Farmers Co-op Grain Association, Mahnomens Farmers Union Oil Company and Production Credit Association of Mahnomens.



Gary, Chad, Luke and Connie Olson were home when the storm damaged their house, blew down a pole building and tore a hole in the roof of a mobile home on their property.

Homemade Italian Sausage

Recipe from Nancy & Keith Babin, Babins Back Acres, Pine County



Ingredients

- 3 pounds local farm-raised pork shoulder, ground (80-85 percent lean)
- 2 ½ teaspoons kosher salt
- 1 teaspoon sugar
- 1 tablespoon whole fennel seeds
- ½ teaspoon ground fennel seed
- 1 ½ teaspoons coarsely ground pepper
- 1 tablespoon paprika
- 1 ½ teaspoons red pepper flakes
- ½ teaspoon garlic powder
- ½ cup ice water

Instructions

Mix ingredients well, making sure all spices are evenly distributed. For spicier sausage increase red pepper flakes by ½ teaspoon until it's to your preference.

We like this recipe in all of our Italian dishes. It is also a favorite of ours to make patties from the mix and grill. Then top with mozzarella cheese and marinara on a toasted bun.

Submit your recipe for a future issue of *Minnesota Agriculture*. Email it to janet@mfu.org.

Willmar events focuses on meat locker ownership, resources available for entrepreneurs

Can ambitious rural Minnesotans bring in new people to revitalize the tradition of local butcher shops and meat processing lockers in Minnesota?

Judging from the experience new local meat processors shared at a Minnesota Farmers Union Bottleneck Project workshop, the answer is a qualified yes.

A 2022 report, Meat Processing Bottlenecks, found that 33 percent of existing meat processors and meat lockers are without a fully developed succession plan. For the small to mid-sized livestock farmers who rely on these businesses, losing one-third of the state's butcher shops and meat lockers threatens their livelihood and by extension, the prosperity of rural communities.

"We're working on promoting resiliency in greater Minnesota's small local meat lockers," said Bottleneck Project organizer Paul Sobocinski of Wabasso. "It's important to local communities and it allows farmers the option through direct marketing to increase their bottom line while providing meat to their local communities."

The Bottleneck Project was developed with the support of the Minnesota Farmers Union, University of Minnesota Rural Sustainable Development Program and the Minnesota Department of Agriculture to support family farmers and the local food economy in rural Minnesota.

Tough, but rewarding

"Don't get into this industry unless God tells you to get into it," K & S Poultry & Meats owner and operator Klinton VanHeuveln told the 30 potential meatpreneurs at the event.

He detailed the long hours and learning curve his family mastered as they expanded their poultry operation to a full-service local custom meat operation in rural Kerkhoven. Now the shop does custom processing for area livestock producers, as well as vacuum-packed meat for customers.

Kerkhoven area meatpreneur Giorgia Gallardo followed a different route into the business.

"I was a paralegal," she said. "My husband knew butchering. I didn't even kill flies."

Now, Gallardo butchers and processes sheep, goats, cattle and deer at the Kerkhoven Country Butcher business she owns with her husband.

Resources available

Sophia Thommes, Ridgewater College meat cutting instructor, said students from across the country earn beginning and advanced meat cutting certificates through the college. The course work is online, but students learn the art of meat cutting at certified meat shops located near them.

Christine Fischer, Regional Director for the Southwest Minnesota Small Business Development Center based in Marshall, advised aspiring meatpreneurs to write business plans. She said budding entrepreneurs can acquire these skills at no cost working with the center. It also offers help for those seeking Small Business Administration (SBA) loans.

"We need to be smart about our finances before we take our next step," said Jennifer Mendoza, Greater Minnesota Career Development and Community Liaison for Comunidades Latinas Unidas en Servicio (CLUES), based in St. Paul.

"Sixty percent of new businesses are founded by immigrants," said Rico Duran of Latino Economic Development Center Minnesota based in St. Paul. Coaching entrepreneurs is the core of the organization's work. "Our organization is open to working with everyone, not just Latinos."

Minnesota Department of Agriculture State Program Administrator Maya Benedict shared the basics of state Agricultural Growth, Research and Innovation (AGRI) Meat, Poultry, Egg, and Milk Processing (MPEM) grants. The grant's priorities include creating additional meat or poultry slaughter and processing capacity.

Article courtesy Minnesota Farmers Union Bottleneck Project. Learn more about the project at bottleneckproject.weebly.com.

Member photos

Send your images to janet@mfu.org for publication in a future issue of *Minnesota Agriculture*.



University of Minnesota Extension Educator Katie Black spoke at a Brown County Farmers Union climate event in April.



Goodhue County Farmers Union members Mary and Danny Lundell met with DOJ Assistant Attorney General for Antitrust Jonathan Kanter during a visit to Washington, D.C., this spring.



Several MFU staff attended the Women's Ag Leadership Conference in April. Pictured, from left, Lisa Holm, Anne Schwagerl, Claudine Arndt and Gail Donkers.



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

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) Farm Service Agency (FSA) begins accepting nominations for county committee members on June 17, 2024. All nomination forms for the 2024 election must be post-marked or received in the local FSA office by Aug. 1, 2024.

Elections will occur in certain Local Administrative Areas (LAA) for these members who make decisions about how federal farm programs are administered locally. LAAs are elective areas for FSA committees in a single county or multi-county jurisdiction. This may include LAAs that are focused on an urban or suburban area.

Agricultural producers who participate or cooperate in a USDA program and reside in the LAA that is up for election this year may be nominated for candidacy for the county committee. A cooperating producer is someone who has provided information about their farming or ranching operation to FSA, even if they have not applied or received program benefits. Individuals may nominate themselves or others and qualifying organizations may also

Farm Service Agency accepting nominations for County Committee members

nominate candidates. USDA encourages minority producers, women and beginning farmers or ranchers to nominate, vote and hold office.

Members of American Indian tribes holding agricultural land are eligible to vote in an FSA county committee election if the tribal member meets the voting requirements. For purposes of FSA county committee elections, every member of an American Indian tribe is considered an agricultural landowner if the land on which the tribal member's voting eligibility is based is tribally owned or held in trust by the United States for the tribe, even if the individual does not personally produce a crop on that land. Members should contact their local FSA county office to update their voter eligibility.

Nationwide, more than 7,700 members of the agricultural community serve on FSA county committees. The committees are made up of three to 11 members who serve three-year terms. Producers serving on FSA county committees play a critical role in the day-to-day operations of the agency. Committee members are vital to how FSA carries out disaster programs, as well as conservation, commodity and price support programs, county office employment and other agricultural issues.

Commonly, County Committee meetings are held monthly and last two to three hours, depending on the number of materials needing review. Meetings will not be held if there is not sufficient business to address in a given month. If impromptu work or pressing issues arise between meetings, a conference call can be held instead of a physical meeting. Committee members get reimbursed for travel to and from committee meetings. Committee members are also compensated for their time.

Producers should contact their local FSA office to register and find out how to get involved in their county's election. They should check with their local USDA Service Center to see if their LAA is up for election this year. To be considered, a producer must be registered and sign an FSA-669A nomination form or an FSA-669-A-3 for urban county committees. The form and other information about FSA county committee elections are available at fsa.usda.gov/elections. Election ballots will be mailed to eligible voters beginning in November. To find your local USDA Service Center, visit farmers.gov/service-locator.

For more information on programs or committee elections, visit farmers.gov, fsa.usda.gov or contact your local USDA Service Center.

North Central USDA Regional Food Business Center connects resources and rural producers

By Candice Zimmermann

The North Central USDA Regional Food Business Center is a hub of resources for small and mid-sized agricultural businesses to transform the food value chain in Minnesota, North Dakota and South Dakota.

Region Five Development Commission was awarded the cooperative agreement by the U.S. Department of Agriculture to coordinate the Center in 2023 and was established in July 2023. At its core, the Center coordinates 32 experienced and dedicated partners throughout the tri-state region that provide technical assistance and grant writing capacity. It is through these activities that small and mid-sized producers can overcome barriers to market access, build resilient businesses and strengthen the economies of the rural communities that they serve.

Although Region Five Development Commission coordinates the North Central USDA Regional Food Business Center, they understand that it will take intentional collaboration with rural partners who truly understand the needs of the middle-of-the-food supply chain and possess the grit and determination to address them. As a result, each of the partners formed a regional action plan focused on their area and objectives that will assist in building wealth with small and mid-sized producers. Those regional objectives are being rolled into Statewide Action Plans which

Members appointed to state boards

The following MFU members have been appointed to serve on boards and commissions for the state of Minnesota.

- **Anne Schwagerl, Browns Valley,** Governor's Advisory Council on Climate Change, reappointment. Term expires April 4, 2027. The Governor's Advisory Council on Climate Change identifies opportunities for, and barriers to, the development and effective implementation of policies and strategies to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and promote climate change resiliency.
- **Angela Dawson, Sandstone,** Cannabis Advisory Council, new seat for a farmer or a person representing the interests of farmers. Term expires Jan. 4, 2027. The Cannabis Advisory Council reviews national cannabis policy, examines the effectiveness of state cannabis policy, reviews developments in the cannabis industry and hemp consumer industry, reviews developments in the study of cannabis flower and other items, takes public testimony and makes recommendations to the Office of Cannabis Management.
- **Peter Schwagerl, Browns Valley,** Clean Water Council farm organization representative, reappointment. Term expires Jan. 3, 2028. The Clean Water Council advises on the administration and implementation of the Clean Water Legacy Act.

will provide consistency and be a guidepost for all partners of the Center over the next five years.

Recently, the Center released its first Business Builder Subawards focused on funding projects that will build a more diverse and competitive food system. With average funding awards of \$50,000 per year over the next 5 years, the Center will impact small food businesses by supporting staff time, business planning, equipment and innovative projects that address bottlenecks in the region's food supply chain.

Calendar of events

June 6-7	Dairy Cow Quadricentennial , Dodge County Fairgrounds, Kasson
June 11	Noon, New member welcome Zoom . Email claudine@mfu.org for more information.
June 12	MFU VP Anne Schwagerl and Climate and Working Lands Director Ariel Kagan hosting a room at 17 Rooms event at U of M, Morris. Email ariel@mfu.org for more information.
June 15	5-8 p.m., Pizza night at the Stone Creek Farm , Shafer. Contact Kelsey Love Zaavedra at kelsey@heirloomista.com for more info.
June 17	2 p.m., Informal Zoom Gathering for the Women of MFU . Email lisa@mfu.org for more information.
June 19	Office closed
June 20	Noon to 1 p.m., Human Resources Lunch and Learn with Nancy Miller via Zoom . Email gail@mfu.org for more information.
June 23	2-4 p.m., Wendell Bakker 90th birthday open house , Renville Community Center
June 23	2-4 p.m., Goodhue County Ice Cream Strawberry Social , Ferndale, Cannon Falls
June 26	1-7 p.m., Lakes Area Sustainability Fest , Northland Arboretum, Baxter. Contact Maren Butenhoff at buten037@umn.edu for more information.
June 29	9 a.m. to noon, Breakfast on the Farm at Duane and Doreen Laveau dairy , Wrenshall
June 30	1 p.m., Kanabec County Farmers Union gathering at Sapsucker Farms , Mora. Contact Stacy Ripka at 320-412-6362 for more information.
July 9	7 p.m., Membership Engagement Committee meets on Zoom.

Find the latest news online at mfu.org/events

A list of boards and commissions, including open positions, can be found on the Secretary of State's website at commissionsandappointments.sos.state.mn.us/Position.



ATTENTION MEMBERS!

Is your contact info up to date with MFU?

Email changes to claudine@mfu.org.

The Center is working with USDA Agricultural Marketing Services (AMS) to reduce barriers to small and mid-sized producers with limited experience applying for federal grants.

"Funding opportunities often seem inaccessible to small producers," says Cheryal Hills, the Executive Director of Region Five Development Commission. "We are breaking down barriers such as match requirements and confusing language, so farmers and producers don't feel intimidated by the grant process."

In addition, the North Central RFBC technical assistance providers are working alongside applicants throughout the application process. The application process for the first round of funding closed at the end of April and awardees will be announced by June 30.

The Center is a hub of resources for those who are looking to contribute to local food efforts but are lost in a sea of information. Visit northcentralrfbc.org to learn more.

Zimmermann is Regional Development Planner for Region V.



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