

Minnesota Agriculture

Voice of Rural Minnesota



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April 2025

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



Cooperative celebration set for July 29-30 in Morris

The United Nations (UN), has declared 2025 the International Year of Cooperatives with the theme "Cooperatives Build a Better World."

The intention of the declaration is:

- To raise awareness of the contributions of cooperatives to poverty reduction, employment and social integration
- To highlight the cooperative business model as a solution to global challenges
- To promote cooperatives as a way to achieve the UN's Sustainable Development Goals by 2030
- To highlight the values of equality, equity, and solidarity inherent in the cooperative model

How can you participate?

- Tell your co-op story.
- Spread the word about cooperatives on social media. Hashtags are **#iyc2025 #coopsyear #cooperativesbuildabetterworld**
- Donate to cooperatives who are forming, co-ops in potential need and cooperative development entities

Save the date for a Minnesota celebration for the International Year of Cooperatives. The event is set for July 29-30 at the University of Minnesota, Morris.

Source: Community Development Services



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MFU Phone: (651) 639-1223

MFU Toll-Free: (800) 969-3380

MFU Website: www.mfu.org

Minnesota Agriculture

Volume 169 No. 4 April 2025

Janet Kubat Willette, Editor
Gary Wertish, Publisher

Publication Number
351340 ISSN 0274-9718

Published monthly by the Minnesota Farmers Union;
305 Roselawn Ave. E, Suite 200 St. Paul, MN 55117.
Periodical rate postage is paid at St. Paul, MN.

Postmaster: Send address changes to Minnesota Agriculture; 305 Roselawn Ave E, Suite 200 St. Paul, MN 55117. Phone (651) 639-1223.

Minnesota Agriculture is published exclusively for the use of Minnesota Farmers Union members. The newspaper is a benefit of membership in the statewide organization that represents family farmers and works to preserve and improve the quality of life for all who live in rural Minnesota. A portion of each member's dues, about \$5, funds a subscription.

The Seven Cooperative Principles

Cooperatives trace their roots to the Rochdale pioneers, who established the first modern cooperative in Rochdale, England, in 1844. The seven principles used by the International Cooperative Alliance are generally accepted by cooperatives worldwide.

Cooperatives are also based on the values of self-help, self-responsibility, democracy, equality, equity and solidarity. Cooperative members believe in the ethical values of honesty, openness, social responsibility and caring for others.

- 1. Voluntary and Open Membership -** Cooperatives are voluntary organizations, open to all people able to use their services and willing to accept the responsibilities of membership.
- 2. Democratic Member Control -** Cooperatives are democratic organizations controlled by their members – those who buy the goods or use the services of the cooperative – who actively participate in setting policies and making decisions.
- 3. Member Economic Participation -** Members contribute equally to, and democratically control, the capital of the cooperative. This benefits members in proportion to the business

they conduct with the cooperative rather than on the capital invested.

- 4. Autonomy and Independence -** Cooperatives are autonomous organizations controlled by their members. If the co-op enters into agreement with other organizations or raises capital from external sources, it is done so based on terms that ensure democratic control by the members and maintains the cooperative's autonomy.
- 5. Education, Training and Information -** Cooperatives provide education and training for members, elected representatives, managers and employees so they can contribute effectively to the development of their cooperative. Members also inform the public about the nature and benefits of cooperatives.
- 6. Cooperation among Cooperatives -** Cooperatives serve their members most effectively and strengthen the cooperative movement by working together through local, national, regional and international structures.
- 7. Concern for Community -** Cooperatives work for the sustainable development of communities through policies and programs accepted by the members.

Source: UW Center for Cooperatives



President's message

GARY WERTISH, PRESIDENT

gary@mfu.org

I pick up this month's column where I started my March column, with an update on the tariff situation.

As of Feb. 28, President Trump said he plans to impose tariffs on Canada and Mexico starting March 4, in addition to doubling the 10 percent tariff charged on goods imported from China. Trump intends to put 25 percent tariffs on imports from Mexico and Canada, with a 10 percent tax on Canadian energy products.

These tariffs will raise prices for consumers. Jacob Jensen, a trade policy analyst at the America Action Forum, is quoted in an Associated Press article saying the 25 percent tariffs on Mexico and Canada would amount to a total tax increase on the U.S. public of somewhere between \$120 billion to \$225 billion annually. The additional China tariffs could cost consumers up to \$25 billion.

In addition, Trump has imposed a 25 percent tariff on all steel imports and has raised his 2018 aluminum tariffs from 10 percent to 25 percent, according to NBC News.

Trump also plans to impose additional tariffs on April 2. This will include a 25 percent tariff on products from European countries. He is reportedly planning tariffs on copper imports and wants to place tariffs on autos, computer chips and pharmaceutical drugs.

Tariffs are a tax levied on imports. The company that imports the product pays the tariff to the federal government. The U.S. Customs and Border Protection Agency collects the tariff. The tariffs are often passed on to consumers in the form of higher prices. An analysis by the Tax Foundation found that the tariffs will increase costs for U.S. households by more than \$800 in 2025. An analysis by The Peterson Institute for International Economics found that the tariffs would cost the typical U.S. household more than \$1,200 per year.



MFU President Gary Wertish looks on as Sen. Amy Klobuchar, D-Minn., speaks during the MFU Full Board on Feb. 22.

Integrated market

Canada is Minnesota's leading trading partner. In 2023, Minnesota's exports to Canada totaled \$7.1 billion, according to the Minnesota Chamber of Commerce. Exports to Mexico totaled \$3.3 billion and exports to China totaled \$2.4 billion. Mineral fuel, oil and vehicles were Minnesota's top exports to Canada in 2023.

After participating in a press conference with Sen. Amy Klobuchar, D-Minn., on Feb. 7, I was invited to the Canadian Consulate in Minneapolis to talk with Saskatchewan Minister of Trade Warren Kaeding along with a few other agricultural leaders. We had an open discussion about the importance of trade and how tariffs hurt farmers on both sides of the border.

Canada and the U.S. are an integrated market after 35 years of free trade agreements between the two nations. Both countries depend on one another.

At the Canadian Consulate, I learned that Canadians eat six times more U.S. products than Americans eat Canadian products. I don't know how much longer that will be the case. Once Trump threatened tariffs, the relationship was damaged. The

damage has only worsened with new threats. Canada has retaliatory tariffs set to take effect if Trump moves forward.

We need to trade. U.S. farmers grow more than we can use. Everyone likes to buy American-made products, but there are so many products that aren't produced in America. For example, we don't have any potash in Minnesota; Canada, on the other hand, has an abundant supply and we have relied on them for decades to supply this important crop nutrient.

Farmers Union supports fair trade that respects the rights of everyone involved in the supply chain.

Supporting Ukraine

Later that week, I met with Estonia Ambassador Kristjan Prikk at Farmers Kitchen + Bar. Estonia is in northeastern Europe, bordered on the north and west by the Baltic Sea and on the east by Russia. It is a small country where farmers and agriculture are important. The principal crops include potatoes, barley and hay. Raising cattle and hogs is also important. Ambassador Prikk said Estonians are worried about what is happening in Ukraine and feel strongly

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Farmers persist in face of uncertain climate, markets and tariffs

ANNE SCHWAGERL, VICE PRESIDENT

anne@mfu.org

Happy Spring – as I write this in early March our fields are bare following a very dry, mild winter. I wonder how many more weeks I will be indoors working in my office before it'll be time to start checking fields and thinking about planting season again. I might be in the minority among Minnesotans, but I could use just one more snowstorm before we kick off the growing season. It's futile, of course, to hope for a different weather system, or to hold off the progression of time. We need to move ahead with the cards that we are dealing with today.

Speaking of working with the cards we are dealing with today, let's talk about the mass firings of federal employees and the federal funding freeze. At a time of uncertain markets in farm country, uncertain tariff situations of agricultural products, growing concern about animal and crop disease pressures, and wildly

uncertain climate conditions, the Trump administration has opted to start gutting the federal workforce.

I think we can all agree that where there is government bloat, we should advocate for streamlining the way it does business. However, to borrow a phrase from my cousin, a career public servant that I had lunch with last week, this is like "ripping parts off the airplane and hoping it still flies." It feels like whiplash after the previous administration worked hard to attract and retain USDA staff in rural communities. Losing the staff, who were already overstretched in many cases, feels like a double whammy. These folks work to help farmers navigate federal programs, implement conservation programs and protect the safety of our nation's food supply.

Not only are staff being unceremoniously fired for no reason other than they haven't been on the job for very long or are not responding to email requests of an unelected billionaire, but the administration is choosing to withhold critical funding in ag country. The programs where funding is being withheld support a transition to a

climate resilient food and fuel supply, support small and local food producers, and support low-interest loans to help farmers use clean energy on their farms. Even as I type this article, I'm receiving emails from farmers who signed contracts with USDA (rural development, in this case) and were told to submit reimbursement requests for funds spent only to have this administration capriciously ignore their contractual obligations. This doesn't even touch the ripple effect that pausing federal payments will have on state and local budgets.

We may not all care about politics or be politicians, but politics certainly cares about us. This is a time when the political reality of Washington, D.C., and its trickle-down effects is especially noticeable.

And yet, as the saying goes, we persist. Livestock chores still need to be finished, and field work is waiting for us around the corner. Mother Nature waits for no one.

I hope your spring planting season gets started in a safe and productive manner, with adequate moisture and little-to-no breakdowns. Fingers crossed.



A blizzard hit southern Minnesota on March 5, closing Interstate 90 in the southwestern part of the state. Snow totals ranged from 13 inches in Dennison to 5.5 inches in Garden City. This photo was taken in rural Dodge County, where an estimated 9 inches of heavy, wet snow fell.



**CLAUDINE ARNDT,
MEMBERSHIP AND
MINNESOTA COOKS
DIRECTOR**

claudine@mfu.org

"A culture is strong when people work with each other, for each other. A culture is weak when people work against each other, for themselves." – Simon Sinek

In mid-February, we offered an optional County Leader Training for county presidents and other leaders traveling in for the full board reception and meeting. The overarching themes of the training were leadership and how to build a healthy and productive community that fulfills Minnesota Farmers Union's mission to protect and enhance the economic interests and quality of life of family farmers, ranchers and rural communities.

Our time together was divided into two sections, first, a training covering the general roles and responsibilities of county officers, county conventions, effective advocacy and tips for engaging members; and second, a workshop section during which participants answered questions and worked in groups to do some county goal setting and planning for the year ahead.

I am deeply grateful to all who attended and genuinely participated. I learned a lot during our time together, as I knew I would, and I'm eager to share a recap. Below are high-level summaries from the training and workshop.

Training

To set the stage, I asked participants to share a leadership quality they admire or value. Popular responses included:

- Clear communication skills, including speaking skills

County Leader Training provides food for thought



The MFU Executive Committee. All the district representatives were re-elected at the February Full Board meeting. Pictured, from left, Missy Bakker Roach, state secretary; Josh VanDerPol, District 2; Anne Schwagerl, vice president; Steve Linder, District 1; Gary Wertish, state president, Carol Anderson, District 4 and committee chair; Ted Winter, District 3 and committee vice chair, and Linda Larson, District 5.

- Deep listening skills
- The ability to harness the talents and skills of others around them
- The ability to run a clean meeting that stays on track
- The ability to delegate and get others involved
- The ability to carry out a plan and accomplish goals
- Integrity
- Honesty

We then covered the following topics:

Roles and Responsibilities of County Officers - County officers are invaluable in bringing visibility to MFU and the voice of MFU to all corners of the state. Being a county officer means being willing to be out front, organizing members for county conventions and other MFU events and generating county-level energy. We also deeply appreciate the support county leaders can provide with communicating

information from the state office to their members and bringing questions and concerns from members back to us. We highly encourage county leaders to bring their own personalities and creativity to the table and to weave the role into their existing lives; we don't want county officers to feel burdened. Additionally, we emphasized the importance of getting other members involved, rather than trying to do everything oneself. To read more about the roles of county officers, please request a copy of the 2025 Leadership Guide.

County Conventions – Southeast Minnesota Membership Organizer Gail Donkers talked about the importance of a well-planned county convention, aka "county business meeting." County conventions are our grassroots democratic process in action, and they are one of the best and most important ways to get new members involved and for members to feel value from their MFU membership. To have a

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State legislators busy crafting state budget as Trump administration moves forward with tariffs

STU LOUREY
GOVERNMENT RELATIONS
DIRECTOR
 stu@mfu.org

The legislature's first month was unique from past years and the next was no exception. MFU's legislative team, leadership and members have testified in support of a strong agriculture budget, healthcare affordability, support for beginning farmers, tax fairness and more at the state Capitol.

The legislature is set to adjourn on May 19 and the final deadline for approving a new package for state government and averting a government shutdown is the end of the fiscal year on June 30.

While the state legislature is hard at work crafting their budget with a newly restored tie in the Minnesota House, eyes are pointed toward consequential action in Washington, D.C. At the time of writing this on March 12, Congress is working to avert a looming government shutdown.

Starting in late February, the U.S. House narrowly approved a budget framework, the first step in advancing President Trump's agenda through Congress. While many details are yet to be defined by committees, the budget resolution—the first step in passing a new budget via 'reconciliation'—directs committees to cut \$4.5 trillion in taxes and cut \$1.5 trillion to \$2 trillion in spending across various jurisdictions.

The package was approved with only GOP votes and all Republican members of Minnesota's delegation voted to approve the plan.

The budget frameworks' cuts to the nation's health safety-net have been widely reported and decried by Democrats. While the president has insisted that Medicare will not be cut by the plan, the plan requires \$880 billion in cuts to the Commerce budget, the vast majority of which goes toward spending on Medicare and Medicaid.

Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP). House Ranking Member Angie Craig, D-2nd District, was quick to respond in strong opposition and to signal this move would endanger progress on a Farm Bill, which needs bipartisan votes.

"A bipartisan farm bill has always been a coalition between the farmers who produce the food and Americans who need a helping hand," Craig said in a statement.

USDA staff fired

The congressional effort to reshape the federal government is separate from efforts to shrink the federal workforce through offers of buyouts, mass firings, and other administrative moves led by the Department of Government Efficiency (DOGE). This hit home when MFU county leaders shared reports of local USDA staff being fired—without notice and despite excellent performance reviews.

Responding to a resolution passed by the MFU Full Board on Feb. 22, MFU President Gary Wertish wrote to all 10 members of Minnesota's congressional

delegation urging them to oppose these cuts and asking for information on affected services.

"MFU has long championed better staffing at the county-level to ensure that farmers have access to critical farm safety-net, disaster aid, farm loan, and conservation programs," Wertish wrote. "As many farmers face tough balance sheets and an uncertain agricultural economy, we are



Several MFU members have testified on legislation in recent weeks. Pictured, clockwise from upper left, Hannah Bernhardt, Pine County; Paul Sobocinski, Redwood County, Brad Kluver, Dakota County, and Peter Schwagerl, Big Stone County.

From Minnesota, lawmakers showed bipartisan concern about these cuts with a dozen Republican lawmakers writing GOP members of Congress in opposition to Medicaid cuts, pointing out that Medicaid plays a critical role in providing care to seniors, those with disabilities, and children.

The budget plan also requires the Agriculture Committee to cut \$230 billion over the next decade, which is expected to come at the expense of the Supplemental

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Walz, Petersen visit Lundell farm to talk about impact of tariffs

By Janet Kubat Willette

CANNON FALLS, Minn. – Gov. Tim Walz and Agriculture Commissioner Thom Petersen held a press conference on March 4 to talk about tariffs at the farm of MFU members Danny and Mary Lundell.

The Lundells raise corn and soybeans on 140 acres in Goodhue County. The farm has been in Mary's family since just after the Civil War when her great-grandfather Alex McKinley returned from the war and purchased the farm. He lied about his age to enlist, she confided.

Alex had a diversified farm with a variety of animals, pasture and crops. His great-granddaughter Mary and her husband, Danny, milked cows before specializing in corn and soybeans.

The Lundells are bracing for the impact of the 25 percent tariffs that President Trump imposed on Canada and Mexico on March 4. Trump also doubled the tariff he imposed on China in February, raising it to 20 percent. Canada was quick to retaliate, with Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau saying he would impose tariffs on more than \$100 billion of American goods over 21 days, according to the Associated Press. China retaliated by placing tariffs of up to 15 percent on an array of U.S. farm exports and expanding the number of U.S. companies subject to export controls and other restrictions, the AP reported. Mexican President Claudia Sheinbaum pledged to announce retaliatory tariffs on March 9.

Tariffs are taxes charged on goods imported from another country. The companies that bring imported goods into the country pay the tax to the government and pass some or all of the cost to customers. Tariffs are typically a percentage of a product's value. For example, a 20 percent tariff on a \$10 product imported from China would add an additional \$2 to the product's cost.



Friends, neighbors and community leaders joined Danny and Mary Lundell on March 4 when they hosted Gov. Tim Walz and Agriculture Commissioner Thom Petersen on their farm.

The tariff news has the Lundells preparing for the worst. With stubbornly high input costs, fears of a looming drought because of the dry winter and red ink in the commodity markets, they see tough times ahead.

"It's going to hit everyone," Danny said. "There's going to be auctions."

In a sign that times are already tough in farm country, Agriculture Commissioner Petersen said the number of farmer-lender mediation notices sent in January 2025 was seven times higher than the number sent in January 2024.

Petersen expressed frustration with the Trump administration's actions. Trump re-negotiated the North American Free Trade Agreement during his first term and renamed the trade agreement the USMCA. The USMCA is working, Petersen said, and rather than impose tariffs, the administration should be working on the review coming in 2026, "not putting a tariff on our neighbors and our biggest customers."

"I always think about what business you're in, how you treat your customers," Petersen said. "Our administration, we've worked on . . . building relationships. I've been in the room with the governor, both here and in Canada when we're visiting with those whether it's premiers or ministers and opening those relationships and that has benefitted our state with the two-way trade."

In fact, almost \$1 billion a year in agricultural products goes both ways across the border between the U.S. and Canada. Minnesota's pork producers, for example, import almost 750,000 piglets or iso-weans from Canada each year. There's also potash, an important fertilizer, that is imported from Canada and 90 percent of Minnesota's fuel comes from Canada. Petersen said the impact of the higher potash and fuel costs is expected to be \$4 to \$8 per acre.

Tariffs don't work, Walz said, and the agricultural community is always hit the worst in a trade war.

Farmers and commodity groups work hard to get more markets and then a tariff is placed, and all that effort is for naught. During the first Trump administration tariffs were placed on China. China turned to other countries to fill its bins, and exports from the U.S. to China hadn't returned to levels that existed prior to the first Trump administration before this latest round of tariffs was launched in February.

Petersen worked with Minnesota farmers to find new markets to fill the void left by China, traveling to several smaller countries to build relationships, but they hadn't replaced the loss. Canada and Mexico are even larger markets.

These latest tariffs create more uncertainty for the state's farmers, Walz said.

"The uncertainties that are out of their control, producers have always dealt with that. It's the manmade disasters that are avoidable and the ones we really need to keep a look on," Walz said. "Building markets and having a place for our commodities, Minnesotans are innovative as heck. We have been at the forefront of the Green Revolution, we fed the world the folks that are on pieces of land just like this and now for whatever reason we decided to pick a fight with our biggest trading partners. . . . These are our friends."

There are no winners in a trade war, said Stan Lundell, Danny's cousin. It will hurt every sector of the economy.

"The simple solution is to be a good neighbor," Danny Lundell said.

Watch the press conference at <https://bit.ly/4i3z12u>.

Bentz focused on creating a market for wool, an often-underappreciated natural fiber



Theresa Bentz in her sheep pasture.

NORTHFIELD, Minn. - A desire to be more connected with her food led Theresa Bentz to pursue a place in the country. She grew up on St. Paul's East Side and her first experience with fresh food was when the Hmong farmers moved into the area and started turning vacant lots into community garden spaces.

She and her husband, Jake, found a place in Dakota County in 2014. It was a stroke of good luck to find 40 acres outside of Northfield which was in their price range. The 11 acres of tillable land was rented out and the lower acres were no longer grazed by animals, so invasive plants were able to take over the prairie and wetland. Their house and barn sit upon a dolomite rock foundation, with the property sloping down a steep south-facing hillside into the Cannon River Valley. There's a wetland in the bottomland, along with a rectangle-shaped pond Bentz suspects was dug to water the livestock that grazed there decades ago. They've done lots of cleaning, restoring and renovating of the house and land, including the siding on the 1880s house, straightening the 1840s barn, and updating the electrical service in the house and the barn over the last decade.

The farm is a full-time gig for Bentz. Husband Jake works off-the-farm. His primary on-farm tasks are tractor work, tree work and barn cleanup. They have two children, Padruig, 18, and Opal, 8.

They bought five sheep over their first two years, four ewes and a ram. One of

the ewes, Jill, remains in the flock, and the blood lines from the other three ewes are seen in their current flock. Bentz is a self-taught shepherd who is fascinated by all things sheep and sheep-related. After buying sheep, she discovered she had an abundance of wool, and has made wool her focus, creating a market for the often-underappreciated natural fiber.

Her sheep

Bentz started her flock with Icelandic sheep, a Northern European shorttail breed and one of the oldest sheep breeds. They are a triple purpose sheep, known for their meat, wool and milk. Icelandic



At left, Jill, the grandmother of the Bentz sheep flock. At right, sheep enjoy a warm spring day on the farm.



sheep are not friendly, but they are good mothers. Bentz added Soay sheep after she and Kathy Zeman of Simple Harvest Farm Organics in Nerstrand went on a wild sheep rescue adventure. Soay sheep are a small-framed animal which was likely domesticated in the Bronze age and used for meat and textiles. They are good mothers who produce hearty, strong lambs, but their size does not make them desirable for meat or wool production.

This year Bentz brought in a Bluefaced Leicester ram to cross with the Icelandic

ewes. She chose this breed specifically because she enjoys working with the wool of BFL/Shetland cross sheep. The BFL breed was developed in the 1900s in England to use in the production of high-quality crossbred ewes, their wool is long and fine, with luster and crimp. Bentz likes to crossbreed to bring in new genetics and to breed for specific body conditioning and wool in the lambs.

"The Icelandic sheep are good browsers of poor pasture, gaining weight on brush and wild grass, which makes them ideal for restorative grazing on the hillside and bottomlands of Get Bentz Farm," Bentz said.

Wool? Now what?

With sheep comes wool, and Bentz soon realized there weren't a lot of places to process her wool into a product like yarn or roving, and that she needed to build a market for the yarn/roving once processed. Rather than be deterred, she started learning

how to process the wool into items that could be sold at farmers' markets.

"I had to learn this all by myself, I had to learn how to process wool and market homespun yarn," Bentz said.

She learned all she could about wool, created groups of spinners and knitters and started building her own on-farm mill.

"All because I like sheep," Bentz said. "Then I needed to do something with the wool."

In 2019, she turned a pole building into a shop, adding concrete floors, insulating

the space and adding heat, to house her future wool mill. The mill is solar powered and the building's rooftop solar was financed through the Rural Energy for America Program. She tries to add a new piece of equipment to her mill each year. Bentz sells her wool at farmers' markets and ships it across the country from her website.

She goes to farmers' markets in a mid-1960s vintage camper that she's dubbed 'the Yamper.' A friend purchased the camper with the intention of converting it to a silk-screening shop on wheels. After starting the demolition, the friend's plan changed. Bentz purchased the gutted trailer and rebuilt it as a yarn shop on wheels. The shop also serves as her retail store at the farm.

Preparing wool for market is labor intensive. Bentz washes it in the house, then carries it to the mill where it is run through the picker, which opens the fibers and prepares it for carding. The wool is carded with a series of combs that align the fiber into one direction and produce roving, which Bentz sells to spinners through her wool business, Badgerface Fiber. She also processes roving on her own spinner to produce yarn to sell.

Each wool is unique, Bentz explains, and suited for different purposes. In addition

to processing her own wool into yarn and other products, she purchases limited quantities of wool from other shepherds. She prefers the fine wools from Rambouillet, Polypay, Targhee, Bluefaced Leicester and Clun Forest sheep. Her storage trailer has white, brown and black wool waiting to be turned into gloves, hats, sweaters, bedding or other products.

Knitted garments tell stories, she said, though knitting is often derided as "women's work." During world wars one and two, spies sent messages through knitted garments using intricate codes.

"Knitting is peaceful and a way to reduce tension and stress," Bentz said. Wool used to be the leading fabric in the textile industry, but it was replaced by synthetic fibers. Wool is harvested annually from sheep who feed on pastures, spun into yarn and then fashioned into clothing. It's the ultimate sustainable fabric, she said. Why would anyone want to cover their skin, the biggest organ in their body, in anything but a natural fabric?

Symbiotic relationship

Bentz is working with an emerging farmer, Maddie Bartsch, on her farm. Bartsch didn't have access to land to grow their plants; and Bentz had a piece of ground not suitable for grazing. Now, Bartsch is growing

plants there that are specifically used to dye textiles, building their business as a dye stuff grower.

"It's a beautiful symbiotic business relationship," Bentz said. Pollinators love it too.

It's also an asset as Bentz grows agritourism on Get Bentz Farm. There's a hay wagon stage parked between the house and the mill. In the summer, musicians come out to entertain guests who picnic in the yard, gazing out at the musicians and the Cannon River Valley stretching below them.

In the future, Bentz would like to build a parking lot on a piece of ground adjacent to the mill and garden. It dries out quickly and is not suitable for pasture, she said.

Wool landscape fabric

Bentz is also working to find uses for other wool. She and Bartsch secured a Cooperatives for Climate grant from Minnesota Farmers Union Foundation to continue their work to use wool to make woolen landscape fabric a competitive alternative to plastic landscape fabric. Wool shorn from Dorset and Hampshire sheep is ideal for this use, Bentz said.

They are working with a strawberry grower to field test the fabric. They are also working with the Agricultural Utilization

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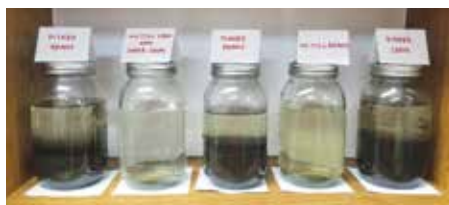
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Cover crops, bale grazing help protect soil in winter

By Jada Csikos-Monroe

Our farms rely on healthy soils, and with our changing climate it's increasingly important to have healthy soils to ensure the resiliency of our farms. Climate change has introduced a new challenge for soil health with unreliable snow coverage. In fact, the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources reported that the winter of 2023-24 had 50 percent less snow coverage on average across the state. Without winter snow coverage soils are vulnerable to erosion, flooding and drought, and an increase in freeze-thaw cycles. Luckily, soil health practices that keep soil covered in the winter can mitigate the effects of unreliable snow coverage. Row crop farmers can turn to reduced tillage and cover crops, while livestock farmers can implement bale grazing.



Samples taken by the staff at Rice County Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD) of snowmelt showing soil loss from wind erosion from fields managed with varying tillage practices and cover crops.

Steve Pahs and his team at the Rice County Soil and Water Conservation District recognize the ability of reduced tillage and cover crops to reduce winter erosion. They carried out an experiment where they took samples of snow at the edges of fields with varying tillage and cover crop implementation. As the snow melted, the amount of soil eroded from each field was revealed. There was virtually no soil in the no-till and cover crop field snow samples, while there was noticeably more soil in the fields that implemented disking, plowing and ripping. This visual demonstration showed that reduced tillage and cover crops protected the fields against wind erosion,



Left: Residue left on Hannah Bernhardt's pasture in the early summer after implementing bale grazing during the winter. Right: Sheep on Hannah Bernhardt's pasture flock to the areas that have been bale grazed to eat the most palatable forage.



which is more likely to happen with below average snow coverage. And in the case of less snow, residue would also protect against water erosion by covering the soil from being hit directly by raindrops and snow, and instead slowly releases water into the soil, increasing water storage.

That brings me to my next point: reduced tillage and cover crops help retain water during the winter. When there is no snow, residue on fields can help limit water evaporation while helping to capture any precipitation. A study done by the USDA Agricultural Research Service in 2012 confirmed this when they found that a no-till field with standing wheat had more uniform snow coverage than a conventional tillage barren field, leading to a better water recharge rate. This water storage in the soil becomes useful during drought events in the growing season, especially with decreased snowmelt. More residue and roots in fields also improves soil aggregation and creates pores, resulting in a sponge-like soil texture for better water infiltration during flooding events.

And finally, residue from reduced tillage and cover crops can shield against increased freeze-thaw cycles during the winter. Without snow cover, our soil loses an insulator. Residue cover on fields can replace snow as an insulator and prevent soil from freezing. Some freezing during the winter is expected, and freeze-thaw cycles can aid in reducing soil compaction. However, too many freeze-thaw cycles can worsen soil texture and release nitrous oxide. By adding residue cover from reduced tillage and cover crops, we will protect our soils in the winter from too many freeze-thaw cycles when snow is not there to do it.

How can livestock farmers protect their soil during winter? Hannah Bernhardt of Pine County shared her enthusiasm for bale

grazing. Implementing bale grazing during the winter has decreased her workload and improved her soil health. She spends two days setting bales on pasture in the fall. In the winter, all that's left to do is cut the bale wrap off before sending cattle out to feed. This practice helps protect soil from erosion during winters with less snow coverage. Leftover residue also helps shield the soil from erosion into the spring. Residue and manure are incorporated into the soil improving soil texture, which increases water infiltration and retention. Bernhardt saw this first-hand when her bale grazed pasture continued producing forage during a drought while the rest of her pasture went dormant. Bernhardt also noted that her sheep flock to the bale grazed areas to eat the most palatable forage of her pasture. This is a testament of the power of keeping soil covered during the winter whether you raise livestock or crops, especially as reduced snow coverage leaves it more vulnerable.

Researchers with the University of Minnesota Climate Adaptation Partnership expect central Minnesota to see 11 to 13 fewer days with at least one inch of snow coverage by midcentury. This creates an urgent need for farmers to keep their soil covered through other means, as the lack of snow during winter means the loss of an insulator and cover for soil, making them more vulnerable to erosion, water availability issues and increased freeze-thaw cycles. Livestock and row crop farmers can reduce their vulnerability by implementing practices like reduced tillage, cover crops and bale grazing to keep their soil covered year-round. Some programs are available to provide incentives and technical assistance for farmers to implement these practices. Find available programs by using the **connector.ag** tool online and inputting your county.

Behind the Dollar with Gail Donkers



A checkoff-centric Q&A with Minnesota Soybean Research & Promotion Council (MSR&PC) Vice Chair Gail Donkers. A director since 2019, Donkers is the first woman to serve as Council vice chair in the organization's more than 40-year history.

This interview has been edited for length and clarity.

Soybean Business: Give us a quick background on your farm.

Gail Donkers: We have a multi-generational farm. We farm with my husband's father, Paul, my brother-in-law Matt and our two sons, Mitch and Riley, help on the farm as well. We run land in a big vicinity, but it also spreads out our risk. We also raise bottle calves to finish dairy steers, finish hogs and we also raise and sell purebred breeding stock for Babydoll and Dorset sheep.

Q: Why did you decide to run for the Minnesota Soybean Research & Promotion Council?

GD: (Past Director) Keith Schrader talked to me several years before I actually ran for the Council, and he kind of told me about it. It's something I was always curious about. You get your checks in from your payments, and a portion of money is taken out for the checkoff. I always wondered what happened to those dollars and where they went. So, this was a perfect way to find out more about it.

Q: Why do you feel the checkoff is critical to Minnesota's soybean farmers?

GD: The checkoff is so critical, and I have to say, since I've gotten involved with MSR&PC I see that it's so much more important than what I ever even thought it was. It's such a great way for soybean producers to find new places to sell their soybeans, like the Uzbekistan project that we've been working on, and Morocco. It's a great way to do research to do a better job of raising our soybeans. We have a whole team that works on research and working on new seed varieties and best practices. We also have the education side where we educate people about soybeans.

Q: How does the board ensure checkoff dollars are invested responsibly?

GD: There is a chart that shows for every dollar soybean farmers invest into the checkoff, soybean farmers earn \$12.34 in return value. Checkoff dollars really do make a difference, and we are trying to make the best choices for making soybeans in Minnesota more profitable. We have a superior product compared to other soybeans across the United States. We need to showcase our soybeans, and we need to tell people about how wonderful they are. Without that, we wouldn't have nearly as many sales of soybeans and soybean meal and it's just a very important thing that we need to embrace and to work harder on. We're never resting at Minnesota Soybean. It's always, "What's the next project?"

Q: How has directing checkoff funds raised your awareness of the soy checkoff?

GD: Directing checkoff funds has raised my awareness tenfold. I'm just so much more aware of what's going on with the checkoff dollars and how hard MSR&PC tries to utilize the dollars wisely. When we go to our Requests for Proposals (RFPs), and we interview the people that are submitting the proposals, we find out what they're doing and why they're doing it and go very in depth into it. It's very hard to decide which projects should get the checkoff dollars. As a team it's very interesting to see the different ideas the farmers have in the room. What we're trying to do is to maximize the profits for every soybean farmer in Minnesota, utilizing the checkoff dollars wisely and to put it toward new projects, new research and new education possibilities.

Q: What project(s) are you most proud of that you have seen since being on the board?

GD: One of my favorites is the Uzbekistan project. It's something that we've taken on as a Council. We really didn't need to, but we're trying to get soybeans into the country and nobody else wanted to help them and they needed soymeal. From that, we've really gotten a good relationship with Uzbekistan going. We've had people from Uzbekistan come to Minnesota and tour and to learn more about what's going on in Minnesota and raising soybeans here. We've also shipped soybeans to Uzbekistan, which is a difficult thing because it is a landlocked country.

Q: Many checkoff investments are made to impact our future growers. What are some checkoff-supported projects coming down the pipeline that you're excited about?

GD: We're looking at what the future of soy transportation is. That's a huge factor in soybean marketing. As we get more crushing plants on the horizon here in the United States, we have more soybean meal that needs to get exported. With the change in our weather, our main route out is either the Mississippi River going south – and that has been a challenge the last few years with the drought – or we also have trains going west to Grays Harbor that takes care of a lot of the northern

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Our sense of community weakens as the news that binds us disappears



By Reed Anfinson

There is no doubt that if print journalism disappears, so will a citizen's knowledge of local civic news.



Reed Anfinson

In America, 76 percent of the communities are under 5,000 population – more than 14,600. These communities most likely cannot sustain a news operation based on digital revenue alone. We don't have the views or advertising to generate anywhere near the income needed.

Despite the loss of nearly 2,500 newspapers in America, despite the loss of tens of thousands of reporters, and despite the inability of many quality internet news sites to make a profit leading them to cut staff or close, we still hear and read the overly optimistic promises of a rich journalistic internet world.

The lies are exposed in the reality of steadily declining coverage of public bodies and life in our communities.

We've been told that it can be folly to "romanticize print as somehow superior to digital-only" news. We subscribe more to a famous quote often attributed to Albert Einstein: "The definition of insanity is doing the same thing over and over and expecting different results."

For two decades, we've been promised a revolution of civic participation built on the broad, deep knowledge citizens will gain from online reporting. That it will be a participatory process where we educate one another. The reality of the

past two decades has exposed the faults in this thinking.

What we have experienced is an internet world that has fractured society into warring social and political groups no longer willing to agree but viciously attacking one another. Death threats, shunning, misinformation and ridicule are more common than harmony, compromise and enlightenment.

Where a newspaper closes fewer people vote, fewer people run for office, more incumbents are re-elected, people become more rigid in their voting and malfeasance in office increases.

Lies gain power, and the truth is harder to find. With the coming explosion of artificial intelligence software that allows anyone to craft eye-catching and reasonably sounding internet stories and videos that are entirely false or misleading, our ability to sort truth from lies will become increasingly challenging.

Print journalism matters

Print's loss matters; the impact of its absence visible. Rather than a representative democracy strengthened by more knowledge on the internet, we find wherever a newspaper has disappeared the opposite is happening. Where a newspaper closes fewer people vote, fewer people run for office, more incumbents are re-elected, people become more rigid in their voting and malfeasance in office increases.

It is visible in the empty reporter desks in newsrooms where the print product

has declined as newspapers transition to digital only. What isn't visible, at first, is the impact of the lost reporting.

Five underlying qualities of journalism give community newspapers equal standing with the government, business and social powers that make up a community.

Survey after survey shows that the local community newspaper is the most trusted news source. We are trusted because people know us and feel they can give us direct feedback if they think we are unfair or slanted in the news we write.

Our financial strength, now significantly weakened, gave us the resources to challenge power when it would frustrate the public's right to know. Individuals lack the interest and finances to challenge government officials and attorneys.

We show up – day after day, month after month, year after year. The public officials know that we will write stories about their actions or inaction at every meeting. We will follow up, reminding citizens of past successes and misdeeds.

Our knowledge of the laws that govern public officials, such as the Minnesota Open Meeting law, ensures transparency and accountability. Citizens lack this knowledge allowing them to be deceived in their efforts to attend meetings or gather public information.

But perhaps our most powerful attribute today is our physical presence.

Newspapers have a deep reach among citizens in their communities. Elected leaders know that a story printed in the newspaper

will circulate throughout the towns and rural areas. It is found on the store counter, around the house, in the library, and in the café every day of the week – its headlines, advertising and photos catch your eye.

Headlines in print reach out to everyone who passes by. People who don't subscribe still see what is happening in their community at no charge. Without the print newspaper, many would never see those headlines or stories.

Nothing replaces the community newspaper's ability to hold those in power accountable. But as our financial strength, staff with knowledge of laws protecting citizen rights, persistent coverage, and physical presence erode, American representative democracy is weakened.

Consider District 40B in the Twin Cities. A DFL candidate runs for office, wins and then is disqualified because he did not live in the district. It threw the state Legislature into dysfunctional chaos, with Republicans having 67 seats to the DFL's 66. Because 68 votes are needed for action, all progress in the House stopped.

How could this happen? District 40B, which includes Roseville, lost its newspaper several years ago. If there was still a newspaper there, a reporter would have investigated the candidate's residency, and we would have seen a legitimate candidate running for office.

Without newspapers, how many more times will this happen in the coming years?

As they have lost print subscribers and advertising dollars, some newspapers increasingly focus on their digital products. They put up paywalls and, in the process, exclude most of their residents from the news of their community.

If the news that binds us together in common purpose is gone, if the stories we share about our fellow citizens disappear, our sense of community weakens. When we don't feel shared responsibility, the vital work that improves our schools, healthcare, public safety, recreational facilities and cultural experiences fades. These aren't exaggerations; they are realities based on what happened in communities that lost their newspaper.

At 95 percent of the public meetings we cover, we are the only person in the room who isn't an elected official or staff. Though there is an online link to the meeting, no one tunes in. Without a community journalist in the room, the stories of your local government won't be told.

A newspaper's physical presence is a constant reminder that there is news you should be paying attention to in your community.

Print is patient. It is present. It is a physical reminder of community. It is community pride and spirit. Print is local.

Newspapers are a public good that deserves public support. Urge your members of Congress and the Minnesota Legislature to support legislation that helps finance their future.

Anfinson is co-owner of the Swift County Monitor-News in Benson, The Stevens County Times in Morris and the Grant County Herald in Elbow Lake. He spoke at the February Full Board reception.

Gail Donkers

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soybeans. But what is going on out to the east? Last year we did a trip to Halifax, Nova Scotia. If you ship out of Duluth through the St. Lawrence Seaway, Halifax is basically the end of the line as far as the United States and it also has a huge port there that can really facilitate a lot of shipping.

We're just looking down the pipeline as far as what our options are. Maybe not, this year or next year, but maybe in 20 years what should be or could be a better option for us. And then as we are growing our business out of the Duluth port as well, we have shipped soybeans to Morocco out of there. We took another leap and went to Amsterdam to look at the port in Amsterdam and Brussels to see what the opportunities are in that area and what some of the challenges are that we need to figure out and how to overcome them.

Q: What do you think is the biggest misconception other farmers have about

the soy checkoff program? How would you respond to their concerns?

GD: I think probably the biggest misconception would be that the checkoff dollars are wasted. I don't feel that is true at all. In Minnesota, especially, I think that we do an excellent job of being very conscious about how every dollar is spent. We are very cost efficient. It's something that we as farmers do every day, but we carry what we do on the farm into what we do at Minnesota Soybean as well. We're very cost conscious.

Q: Where can another farmer go to get more information on how their dollars are being spent?

GD: I would say invite your directors to come in and talk to your county soybean annual meetings and that type of thing and share what's going on. Also, look up **Mnsoybean.org** and click on the MSR&PC side to find out what's going on with the different checkoff dollar projects.

Note: This article is reprinted with permission. It originally appeared in the November 2024 issue of Soybean Business.

Theresa Bentz

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Research Institute (AURI) to test the material and get it ready for commercial markets.

Wool landscape fabric should last five years, Bentz said. It suppresses weeds and slugs don't like it. It is flame-retardant, retains moisture and is chemical-free. When it breaks down, it adds nitrogen to the soil, and it doesn't mold or mildew. The prototypes they are creating are more expensive, at least initially, than plastic landscape fabric, but both hope that with continued research they can streamline the process and bring the cost down.

To learn more about Get Bentz Farm, visit their website **getbentzfarm.com**

NFU holds 123rd anniversary convention, honors former Sen. Harkin



National Farmers Union (NFU) welcomed more than 450 family farmers, ranchers and supporters to Oklahoma City for its 123rd anniversary convention.

"This is a challenging moment for family farmers. Rising costs, corporate consolidation and uncertainty around federal programs—including the lack of a renewed farm bill—are creating real hardships," said NFU President Rob Larew. "Yet through it all, the state of Farmers Union remains strong, resilient and prepared to turn the policies set at this convention into action for a stronger future in agriculture."

The finalized policy priorities approved by NFU's delegates include three special orders of business: Fairness for Farmers, Family Farming and the Farm Bill and Family Farming and Our Federal Government.

NFU hosted many prominent speakers to share their wealth of knowledge and expertise, including:

- U.S. Rep. Angie Craig, D-2nd District
- Vanessa Maria Graber, Journalism and Media Education Director, Free Press
- Chuck Hoskin, Jr., Principal Chief of the Cherokee Nation
- Harrison Pittman, Director, National Agriculture Law Center
- Majority and minority staff from the Senate and House Agriculture Committees

NFU also announced a Farmers Union Week of Action to take place May 5-9. Farmers Union members will join together both in Washington, D.C., and in their communities across the nation to call on Congress to make farmers, ranchers and rural Americans a priority.

Harkin honored

NFU honored former U.S. Sen. Tom Harkin of Iowa with the 2025 Award for Meritorious Service to American Agriculture, its highest distinction.

"Sen. Tom Harkin was steadfastly committed to American family farmers throughout his life and 40-year career in the U.S. Congress," Larew said. "NFU is proud to honor him with the 2025 Award for Meritorious Service to American agriculture, recognizing his dedication to family farmers and our communities. He's been a friend and a staunch ally to Farmers Union for decades. We congratulate him on this well-deserved recognition."

Harkin made agriculture a priority during his time in the U.S. Congress, serving on the House Agriculture Committee during his 10-year stint in the U.S. House of Representatives from Iowa's 5th Congressional District. Harkin then served five consecutive terms in the U.S. Senate, including serving as chair on the Senate Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition and Forestry.

During his tenure in Congress, Harkin always served in the best interests of his family farmer constituents. Notably, Harkin co-authored the Biofuels Security Act of 2006 to promote renewable fuels and energy security. Harkin also held assignments on the Subcommittee on Hunger, Nutrition and Family Farms, the Subcommittee on Rural Revitalization, Conservation, Forestry and Credit, and was co-chair of the Senate Rural Health Caucus, where he advocated for more robust health care policy. He helmed the Senate Agriculture Committee during the negotiation and passage of the 2008 Farm Bill.

In his early life, Harkin spent time working on farms in the Des Moines, Iowa, area, which instilled in him from a young age the importance of family-based agriculture. Since retiring from the Senate in 2014, Harkin has continued his service to American agriculture by founding The Harkin Institute for Public Policy and Citizen Engagement at Drake University, with a goal to connect people with policy.

Farmers Capital Fund launched

National Farmers Union launched the Farmers Capital Fund, a \$25 million investment initiative dedicated to supporting early- and growth-stage companies that accelerate agricultural productivity while advancing the economic success of family farmers and ranchers at its annual convention.

The Farmers Capital Fund will promote cutting-edge technologies, operational efficiencies and market expansion opportunities that enhance farm profitability. The fund is strategically aligned with National Farmers Union's mission of fostering a fair and resilient food system that benefits both producers and rural communities.

"Family farmers and ranchers are the backbone of rural America, and their ability to thrive depends on access to innovation and opportunity," Larew said. "The Farmers Capital Fund is a crucial step toward ensuring that emerging technologies and new business models work for independent producers—not against them. By prioritizing economic sustainability, productivity and profitability, this fund will help shape a stronger, more equitable future for agriculture."

Administered in partnership with Open Prairie, the Farmers Capital Fund will focus on sectors ranging from ag-tech and automation to conservation, efficiency and value-added food production.

Open Prairie CEO and Managing Partner Jim Schultz noted: "We are honored to expand our relationship with their farmer and rancher members to develop new investments that impact the farmgate and ranch gate."

Learn more about Farmers Capital Fund at nfu.org/farmerscapitalfund.



MFU members who attended the National Farmers Union Convention. Attendees include: Gary and Jeanne Wertish, Anne Schwagerl, Rick Cedargren, Brent Imker, Eddie and Lynn Jostock, John Larsen, Brenda and Nate Rudolph, Luke Sanders, Bennett Smith, Paul Sobocinski, Melany Thomas, Carol and Steve Anderson, Linda Larson, Steve Linder, Josh and Cindy VanDerPol, Ted Winter, Aaron Chervestad, Julia and Rebecca Keddy, Winona Anderson, Claudine Arndt, Jeff Diamond and Janet Kubat.

123rd anniversary National Farmers Union Convention



Delegate Paul Sobocinski advocated for a change in crop insurance policy.

Nearly 30 Minnesota Farmers Union members attended the 123rd anniversary National Farmers Union Convention held in Oklahoma City. There were informational speakers and a lively policy debate. Learn more about MFU's award winners in the next issue of *Minnesota Agriculture*.



Paul Sobocinski and Ted Winter talk with former Iowa Sen. Tom Harkin who received the Award for Meritorious Service to American Agriculture.



MFU President Gary Wertish spoke in favor of a special order supporting Ukraine.



National Youth Advisory Council members Becca and Julia Keddy of Wadena County were interviewed by Jamie Dickerman of Red River Farm Network.



Delegate Luke Sanders of Swift County with the national award the county received at the national convention.



Steve Linder of Red Lake County, left, and Eddie Jostock of Wabasha County prepare for the policy session.



Delegates Rick Cedergren of Chisago County, Melany Thomas of Clay County and Brenda Rudolph of Morrison County.



MFU Executive Committee members Ted Winter and Linda Larson.

President's message

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that Ukraine needs to remain a free and independent country.

Estonia was forcibly incorporated into the Soviet Republic in 1940 and remained under Soviet control until 1991. The Soviets exported Estonia's farmers to Siberia and



MFU President Gary Wertish met with Estonian Ambassador Kristjan Prikk at Farmers Kitchen + Bar.

collectivized its agriculture. The nation had 120,000 small farms at the beginning of the Soviet tenure and 190 collectivized farms and 120 state farms by the 1990s.

After being recognized as an independent country, Estonia moved its economy toward market capitalism and moved to decollectivize its farms. Estonia joined the

European Union and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization in 2004.

We talked about how farmers are doing in both countries and how the actions happening in Washington, D.C., are impacting people. We shared an overall concern about high prices and tariffs.

It was with this in mind that Nobles/Rock County Farmers Union President and Executive Committee member Ted Winter made a motion to send a letter to Minnesota's congressional delegation in support of Ukraine during the Feb. 22 Full Board meeting. The motion passed and the letter was sent Feb. 24.

Here are excerpts from the letter.

"On behalf of Minnesota Farmers Union, I am writing to share our organization's support for a free and independent Ukraine. Russia's war against Ukraine has not only important implications for democracy abroad but also the state of the agricultural economy in Minnesota. I urge you to support the Ukrainian people in their fight for freedom."

"In recent years I've had the opportunity to hear directly from Ukrainian leaders about the dire conditions facing people in the country, including farmers. In 2023 I joined Gov. Tim Walz for a conversation with Heather Conley of the German Marshall Fund (GMF), and Oksana Markarova, the Ukrainian Ambassador to the U.S. This included

harrowing stories about the daily dangers faced by Ukrainian farmers as they work to continue to feed their country, Europe, and people around the world.

"Recent events have called into question the United States commitment to supporting Ukraine. We ask that you reject any efforts to abandon the Ukrainian people."

Administration actions

With so many executive actions coming from the Trump administration, it is difficult to keep up with what is happening. Here's a look at a few actions.

On Feb. 26, Agriculture Secretary Brooke Rollins announced a five-point, \$1 billion strategy to combat avian influenza.

1. USDA will expand its Wildlife Biosecurity Assessments and free biosecurity audits will continue for all HPAI-affected farms. USDA will deploy 20 epidemiologists as part of its increased biosecurity audits and USDA will share up to 75 percent of the costs to fix the highest risk biosecurity concerns identified by the assessments and audits, with a total available investment of up to \$500 million.
2. APHIS will continue to indemnify producers whose flocks must be depopulated to control the further spread of HPAI. Up to \$400 million

Camp registration is now open Learn more at mfu.org/camp

Summer Youth Leadership Camps

Northern Camp for ages 9 to 13

Monday, June 23 to
Friday, June 27

MFU Lake Sarah
Campground,
20049 Campground
Rd SE, Erskine

Southern Elementary Camp for ages 8 to 11

Tuesday, July 8 to
Friday, July 11

Sibley State Park, 800
Sibley Park Road NE,
New London

Southern Junior Camp for ages 11 to 14

Monday, July 14 to
Friday, July 18

Sibley State Park, 800
Sibley Park Road NE,
New London

Senior High Camp for ages 14 to 18

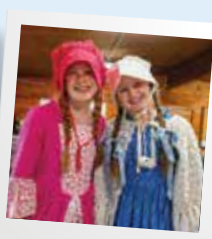
Sunday, July 20 to
Friday, July 25

Sibley State Park, 800
Sibley Park Road NE,
New London

Day camps for ages 6 to 10

Held from 10 a.m. to
4 p.m. daily.

- Twin Cities, June 10-12, St. Paul
- Southern Day Camp, Aug. 5-7, Albert Lea



3. USDA will work with the Food and Drug Administration to expand supply in the egg market.
4. USDA will explore vaccines, therapeutics and other strategies for protecting egg-laying hens. Up to \$100 million will be available for this effort.
5. USDA will explore options for temporarily increasing egg imports and decreasing exports, if applicable, to supplement the domestic supply.

"The U.S. suspension of foreign aid now threatens to effectively leave the field wide open for China to expand its influence," writes R. Michael Schiffer, former assistant administrator of the USAID Bureau for Asia in a Council on Foreign Relations article. "Russia, too, may seek to exploit the vacuum created by the U.S. retreat from foreign assistance."

The Mayo Clinic and the University of Minnesota are the primary recipients of NIH funding in Minnesota, according to the Reformer article, but other institutions and private companies receive funding as well. If the cuts take effect, Minnesota medical research takes a \$117 million hit, according to estimates from education policy analyst James Murphy.

“Particularly in the face of market uncertainty, high input costs, and continued challenges with animal disease, inadequate staffing at the local level could result in farmers having difficulty accessing critical programs. For example, if farmers who qualify for a farm loan are not able to access that funding in a

As you can see, we are tracking many things at the state office. Give me or any staff member a call if you have any questions or concerns.

Membership

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meaningful and effective county convention, it's important to plan and communicate the date of your convention early, preferably with input from your county members. To help drive attendance, please call members to personally invite them to your county convention rather than relying solely on the postcard notification sent by the state office. Make sure to have an agenda for the meeting so the meeting stays on track, and we were reminded that it always helps to have good food at the meeting.

Effective Advocacy - During Government Relations Director Stu Lourey's section on effective advocacy, he emphasized that MFU is a bi-partisan organization and the secret to effective advocacy involves building genuine relationships and focusing on our policies and priorities, not politics. To be an effective advocate, it's also important to keep the door open with people who do not agree with you initially or may not agree 100 percent, as you never know when their thinking may shift or when they may come back to you to continue the dialogue.

Workshop

During the workshop section of the training, we wanted to crowdsource ideas to four questions or prompts. The prompts and thoughtful, clever responses from attendees are below. In some cases, similar responses were consolidated:

Prompt: Share an idea for how to help new members integrate into our community. This can be a county-level or state-level idea.

- Tour their farm or business.
- Organize a community project together – adopt a roadway or organize a fundraiser.
- Have a meet 'n' greet. Invite the member to an event, be their "guide" and introduce guest to "target" people (people who have similar interests, markets and challenges). I did this recently with a farmer – invited her to a social, told her about other people there and made sure to introduce her to them.



Sen. Amy Klobuchar visits with Isanti County Farmers Union President Alan Teich as Membership Organizer Peter Ripka looks on.

- Offer to accompany the member to the first couple of meetings. Ask them if they would like to be an officer.
- Do a personal interest survey. Use the results to connect members.
- Host a "Welcome to MFU" after hosting a "What's MFU and what's in it for me?"
- Seek out more beginning farmers.
- Ask new members what matters to them and plug them in to engage with other members with similar values or ask members how they can apply their values to their MFU engagement.
- Ask who we can support in our community and then make a plan to support (i.e. card, farm work, donating money, etc.)
- Have regularly held events and make it easy to attend.
- Outreach should help more.
- Invite new members to speak and describe their operation.
- Send regular emails to members.
- Help each other share ideas.
- Personally invite members to county conventions and provide a free meal.
- Have a call for new members to explain the state convention and what happens there.
- Reach out to people who may belong to a different organization and share information about MFU, see if their values are aligned with us.
- Invite new members to social events, not political events.

Prompt: What kind of community do you want MFU to be? How do we do that?

- Caring and helpful! We can do this through community events.

- Welcoming. Make it clear there is a place for all types of farmers at MFU when we are out in the wild.
- More diverse. We can do this through continuing our advocacy and education on farms and encouraging more members to be involved.
- I think of MFU as extended family – familiar, supportive and friendly. Potlucks and events on farms always feel comfortable and friendly to me.
- An active, engaging community that is open to discussing any issues someone in the community has.
- Fun.
- Safe.
- A bipartisan one, so invite an Independent to join.
- I want MFU to be welcoming, inclusive, effective and accountable to members. And fun!
- Community should be welcoming and open to diverse ideas.
- Have great connections with each other.
- MFU community should be inclusive, not exclusive.
- Update bylaws.
- An organization that supports family farmers and consumers. Let's provide education about our history and mission.
- I want our local MFU to be an active promoter of ag issues for our area.

Prompt: Share an idea for a member event in your county. This could be an event you've already hosted, or it could be something you haven't tried yet.

- Host a cider tasting at a local orchard that is a MFU member
- Anything with food; maybe cultural foods and cooking experiences
- An ice cream social
- Food systems book club
- Have a community project!
- Yoga with Matt
- Meet and greet followed by a show/play/event
- Pizza party!
- Theater experience, tacos and beer
- Host guest speaker like a climate specialist or environmentalist
- Attend a sporting event

- Host an on-farm show, music!
- Tour a farm-to-school cafeteria
- Working luncheons
- Picnic
- On-farm or business event about a local issue

Prompt: What ideas do you have to drive attendance to county conventions?

- Food, entertainment, prizes – also encouragement that members can “just be there”
- Have each county officer provide transportation to the event for an assigned member
- Get legislators there to talk about legislation
- Have a compelling speaker, buy dinner, put an ad in the local paper
- Make the county conventions fun as well as effective
- Help members financially to attend the convention

- Have a door prize (mentioned several times)
- Feed them good food and don’t make them pay for it or prepare it (mentioned several times)
- Incorporate an interesting activity such as a pasture walk or farm tour into the meeting
- Invite and encourage people to suggest resolutions ahead of time
- Have Becky Lourey call and invite members to the convention

Closing

Since I became the membership director, we’ve offered the county officer training every other year. At the close of this last training, it was suggested that we invite county leaders to gather ahead of the February board meeting in the “off years” so our leaders can work together to set goals and plan out county activities. I love this idea and will make sure this happens

One of my personal goals is to help foster a positive and productive culture within

Minnesota Farmers Union. I want us to be a community that enjoys accomplishing important work together, where nobody feels alone. To do this, I believe it means showing up to organizational functions ready to work on behalf of the collective. It means providing space for everyone to speak who wants to speak and practicing patience for different personality types and ideas. It means giving everyone a warm welcome and letting them know they belong, even when they are brand new. We show up as our best selves when we lift others up around us and when no single person dominates because we understand it is our collective efforts that give us strength. I saw this in action during our county leaders’ training, and I feel grateful for all who are joining in this endeavor.

The thoughtful responses to our prompts have provided us with plenty of food for thought. What about you? Are there any answers that especially resonate with you? Other answers you would add? Feel free to share with me at claudine@mfu.org.

Pear Zucchini Bread

From time to time, MFU is asked to donate coffee as part of an event sponsorship. We received a note from one person, thanking us for the coffee and saying it paired well with the Pear Zucchini Bread she served at the event. Here’s a recipe from food.com.

Ready in 1 hour 10 minutes. Yields 2 loaves.

Ingredients:

- 2 cups chopped peeled pears
- 1 cup shredded zucchini
- 1 cup sugar
- 1 cup packed brown sugar
- 3 eggs, beaten
- 1 cup vegetable oil

Directions:

Preheat oven to 350 degrees. In a large bowl, combine the first 7 ingredients.

In a smaller bowl, mix flour, pumpkin pie spice, baking soda, baking powder and salt until well blended, and add to egg mixture. Fold in pecans.

Pour into 2 greased 8x4x2-inch loaf pans. Bake 50-60 minutes, or until a toothpick inserted in the center comes out clean.



- 1 tablespoon vanilla extract
- 3 cups all-purpose flour
- 2 teaspoons pumpkin pie spice
- 1 teaspoon baking soda
- ½ teaspoon baking powder
- ½ teaspoon salt
- ¾ cup chopped pecans

Cool in pans for 10 minutes; remove to a wire rack to cool completely.

Find it online at <https://www.food.com/recipe/pear-zucchini-bread-280665>.

Share your recipe with other readers of *Minnesota Agriculture*. Send it to janet@mfu.org.

Teachout accepted into Cooperative Leaders program

MFU Education Assistant Will Teachout has been accepted into the Cooperative Leaders and Scholars (CLS) program.



Will Teachout

This eight-month program was created by the Cooperative Development Foundation (CDF) and National Cooperative Business Association (NCBA) CLUSA to build capacity and support networks for the next generation of leaders engaged in cooperatives and cooperative development. Designed to deepen and broaden participants’ knowledge of cooperatives and the role the model plays in meeting communities’ economic and social needs, CLS contributes to attracting, engaging and retaining talent within the community.

“The participants in the CLS program are the future of the cooperative movement. CDF is proud to support their growth and ongoing leadership,” said Julie Bosland, CDF Executive Director.

Government relations

continued from page 6

concerned that what is being reported as widespread, across-the-board layoffs or buyouts will add to the stress facing family farmers as they prepare for spring.

"We're also motivated to share our opposition to these layoffs because USDA employees are people who have chosen to dedicate their professional career to helping farmers. Some have newly moved to our communities and others have families who are relying on what historically have been stable federal jobs. All of them deserve our respect."

Minnesota Sen. Tina Smith submitted this letter into the Congressional Record before pressing USDA for answers on staffing cuts during a committee hearing.

"What the administration is doing right now goes absolutely counter to, I think, what is a shared bipartisan goal," Smith said. "I hope that we can find a solution that will make sure that our farmers across the country have the support that they need."

Smith and other Democratic members of the committee also signed a letter led by Sen. Amy Klobuchar, pressing USDA Secretary Brooke Rollins for answers on staffing cuts.

The MFU Full Board also passed a resolution to contact Minnesota's congressional delegation in support of a free and sovereign Ukraine.

Trade war

On the eve of his joint address to Congress, President Trump hiked tariffs on imports from Mexico, Canada and China, the United States' three biggest trading partners. At midnight on March 4, 25 percent tariffs—essentially taxes on imports—went into effect for Mexico and Canada, except for Canadian energy which was limited to 10 percent. For China, the existing tariff was doubled from 10 to 20 percent.

These countries were quick to respond with retaliatory tariffs on exports, and agriculture was hit hard. This includes a 10 to 15 percent tariff on meat and soybeans China purchases from the United States.

Minnesota Farmers Union has worked to draw attention to the harm a trade war would do to family farmers and rural communities. In October, Wertish led a national press conference with agriculture leaders from Minnesota and across the country imploring a future administration to take a balanced approach to trade. In November, delegates to the State Convention passed a Special Order of Business on Fair Markets, making opposition to tariffs a priority.

In February, MFU hosted Sen. Klobuchar to highlight the damage proposed across-the-board tariffs would do if they went into effect. In March, Wertish joined Klobuchar as her guest to the president's joint address to Congress, in large part to emphasize the financial harm of tariffs.

"Gary represents so many family farmers and other Minnesotans who are worried about making ends meet because of the administration's proposed tariffs, funding freezes, and mass layoffs," Klobuchar said. "He will be a voice for all Minnesota farmers at the President's Joint Address."

Wertish said that farmers are "watching Washington and wondering what a potential trade war, layoffs at local USDA offices, and proposed cuts to Farm Bill programs are going to mean for their farms and communities. This only adds to uncertainty and challenges going into spring planting."

Trump cited trade deficits with Canada and Mexico along with fentanyl as reasons for the tariffs. On the Social Media site Truth Social, he told farmers to focus on domestic sales.

"Get ready to start making a lot of agricultural product to be sold INSIDE of the United States. Tariffs will go on external product on April 2nd," Trump wrote. "Have fun!"

In response to tariffs, Minnesota Gov. Tim Walz and Agriculture Commissioner Thom Petersen joined Goodhue County Farmers Union President Danny Lundell and his wife, Mary, on their farm for a press conference.

State ag bill moves ahead

On the state level, DFLers won the Special Election in Roseville, shifting the balance of power in the state House back to a 67-67 tie.

On March 10, the Minnesota House took a final vote to approve an agriculture bill. The bill, SF1552, led by Sen. Rob Kupec, DFL-Moorhead, and House Ag Chair Paul Anderson, R-Starbuck, would right size reporting requirements for small grain buyers including independent elevators, feed mills, and farmer co-ops. It does this without compromising MDA's ability to evaluate their financial position.

Other MFU priorities are also moving forward, though most will be carried in omnibus bills—large, catch-all budget proposals for each jurisdiction.

In the House, Anderson led a bill, HF770, to provide \$30 million in additional bonding authority to Minnesota's Rural Finance Authority (RFA). MFU member Matt Hardy of Rust Hill Ranch in Chisago County testified on his experience buying his farm with the help of RFA's Beginning Farmer Loan Program, their most popular loan.

"Not only did this program help me get started, it's continued to save me money and allowed me to reinvest in my operation," he shared with the committee. "The lower interest rate I was able to lock in with the help of the Rural Finance Authority saves me enough interest expense each month, for example, to purchase one ton of hog feed."

Wertish and MFU Executive Committee Chair Carol Anderson both serve on the Rural Finance Authority board. The bill passed on a voice vote and was referred to the committee on Capital Investment.

MFU also provided testimony in support of Anderson's bill, HF979, to fund the Board of Animal Health. Also important to livestock producers—particularly those in the northern part of the state—MFU testified in support of bills, HF601, John Burkel; SF469, Mark Johnson, allocating funding to the accounts that reimburse farmers for livestock killed or crippled by wolves, or crops or feed damaged by elk.

In the Senate, MFU leaders Tessa Sadae Parks and Brad Kluver testified before the Tax Committee in support of Senate Ag Chair Aric Putnam's, DFL-St. Cloud, bill to eliminate the cap on funding for the Beginning Farmer Tax Credit, SF1419, so that no farmer is turned away from the program. This year, around 40 percent of applications were declined due to a lack of



APRIL 1945

The basic philosophy of a cooperative is to share, not to give. Its success is founded on the inherent desire of people to help each other. A cooperative grows as its members learn the value of working together and sharing in its success.

Liberals throughout the nation are under attack. They are not under attack because they are wrong, but because they face the facts and point them out. If it is a sin and a crime to talk with a man, or to work with a man, or to be friends with a man merely because he belongs to an organization whom someone else does not like, then things have come to a pretty pass in America. I thought we were more democratic, more tolerant.

ATTENTION MEMBERS!

Is your contact info up to date?

Email changes to claudine@mfu.org.



APRIL 1985

"The question facing the American people today is whether society should stand by while the family farm structure of agriculture is dismantled. We are confident that most Americans recognize that family farmers have served the nation well," said Rocky Mountain Farmers Union President John Stencil in testimony before the House Agriculture Committee. Delegates at the recent NFU convention adopted a policy stating that the 1985 Farm Bill must be built upon the concept that fair prices for farm products is the key to keeping the rural economy healthy.

More than 25 of the state's counties lost at least 7 percent of their farm operations in 1981 and 1982, according to the Department of Education. The state lost about 7,500 mid-sized family farm operations during 1981 and 1982, according to the department. Nearly 42 percent of the state's economic production is based on the production of food and fiber.

For sale in the MFU Member Exchange: Brown Swiss heifers, \$400 to \$700, Ken Tschumper, LaCrescent; Two point to three-point conversion for IHC tractor, \$100, Henry Kalis, Walter; Large white F1 open gilts, 250 pounds, \$150, Johnson Farms, Willmar.



Dozens of Farmers Union members have met with legislators at the Capitol. Elaine Torpet and Faye Olson met with Rep. Bernie Lieder, DFL-Crookston, during the northwestern Minnesota Lobby Day.

APRIL 2005

Tim Henning is the Nobles County Farmers Union President. "I've won the silver star award for membership four times," he said. "Good policy helps to drive your membership, and membership work helps us get people involved in developing good policy. I'm proud that our county membership has been active, and we've had the leadership award for activity every year."



Tim Henning

Rep. James Oberstar and Rep. Betty McCollum have signed on as co-sponsors

for legislation placing a tariff on imported milk protein concentrate.

The Central American Free Trade Agreement will be detrimental to the livelihoods of American family farmers and ranchers, said NFU President Dave Frederickson. "CAFTA resembles failed trade policies of the past that further encourage a 'race to the bottom' for producer prices."

Midwest Wireless ad: Two lines, 1,300 minutes, under \$70 per month. Each additional line is just \$9.99 per month. MFU members get 10 percent off their monthly service plan.

funding. The bill passed as amended and was re-referred to the Senate Agriculture Committee. More than 20 agriculture organizations signed MFU's letter in support of the bill.

Specialty crop farmer and Chisago County Farmers Union President Kelsey Love Zaavedra testified before the Senate Tax Committee in support of Putnam's bill to allow small famers to participate in the Ag Homestead Tax Credit, SF1498, regardless of their acreage size if they earn \$5,000 annually in gross income.

MFU also shared support for a bill that would pilot a \$5 per acre tax credit for

acres enrolled in MDA's Minnesota Agricultural Water Quality Certification Program, SF1269, authored by Sen. Steve Drazkowski, R-Mazeppa.

Big Stone County Farmers Union President Peter Schwagerl testified in support of Sen. Heather Gustafson's, DFL-Vadnais Heights, bill to increase funding for the Minnesota Department of Agriculture's Soil Health Financial Assistance Program, SF882.

In the House Agriculture Committee, MFU's Southeast Outreach Coordinator and Rice County farmer Gail Donkers testified in support of Anderson's bill to continue investments in farm and rural mental

health and safety, HF1702. She shared how this investment has allowed MDA to be a national leader in helping farm families and others manage stress, prioritize their mental health, and stay safe on the farm.

MFU has also weighed in support of funding for ag education, additional support for Soil and Water Conservation Districts and repealing the sales tax on fencing equipment. If you have questions, thoughts, or concerns, please reach out to me at stu@mfu.org or (320) 232-3047.



DAN MAHONEY
DEPUTY STATE EXECUTIVE
DIRECTOR, MN FSA

daniel.mahoney@mn.usda.gov

A common question customers may hear when they visit their local Farm Service Agency is, "Has anything changed in your operation?" FSA updates its producer database on an ongoing basis. However, these updates are most timely and beneficial in advance of program enrollment and annual acreage certification. Please report any changes of address, zip code, phone number, email address or an incorrect name or business name on file to our office. You should report changes in your farm operation, like the addition of a farm by lease or purchase. You should also report any changes to your operation in which you reorganize to form a trust, LLC or other legal entity.

FSA and NRCS program participants are required to promptly report changes in their farming operation to the County Committee in writing and to update their *Farm Operating Plan* or CCC-902.

Changes that may require a new determination include, but are not limited to, a change of contract shares, land leases, ownership and cash rent. The size of the producer's farming operation that may affect the application of a cropland factor can also result in a new determination. The structure of the farming operation, including any change to a member's share or the contribution of farm inputs of capital, land, equipment, active personal labor and/or active personal management can constitute a change

Additionally, CCC-941 Average Gross Income (AGI) Certification forms are required to be filed annually for participation in an annual USDA program. For multi-year conservation contracts and NRCS easements, a certification of AGI must be filed prior to approval of the contract or easement

Keep your records updated at the county FSA office

and is applicable for the duration of the contract period. Noncompliance with AGI provisions, either by exceeding the applicable limitation or failure to submit a certification and consent for disclosure statement, will result in payment ineligibility for all program benefits subject to AGI provisions. Program payments are reduced in an amount that is commensurate with the direct and indirect interest held by an ineligible person or legal entity in any legal entity, general partnership or joint operation that receives benefits subject to the average AGI limitations.

Participants are responsible for ensuring that all CCC-902 and CCC-941 and related forms on file in the county office are updated, current and correct. Participants are required to notify the county office of any changes in the farming operation that may affect the previous determination of record by filing a new or updated CCC-902 as applicable. Participants are encouraged

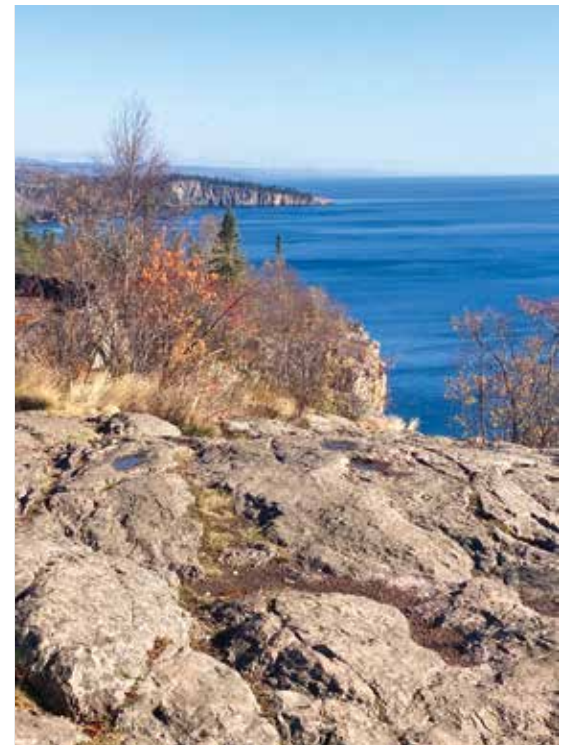
to file or review these forms within the deadlines established for each applicable program for which program benefits are being requested.

When changes in farm ownership or operation take place, a farm *reconstitution* is necessary. The reconstitution is the process of combining or dividing farms or tracts of land based on the farm operation. To be effective for the current fiscal year, farm combinations and farm divisions must be requested by Aug. 1 of the fiscal year for farms subject to the Agriculture Risk Coverage (ARC) and Price Loss Coverage (PLC) program. A reconstitution is considered to be requested when all of the required signatures are on FSA-155 and all other applicable documentation, such as proof of ownership, is submitted.

To update your records, contact your county USDA Service Center.

Member photos

Rice County member Chuck Ackman shared these photos. Right: the Palisade Head overlooking at Lake Superior. Below: Mountain Ash berries near Grand Marais.



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

Former superintendent enjoys pace and flexibility of working for Green View

By Janet Kubat Willette

Bruce Klaehn was looking for a job that provided gas and go-out-to-eat money when he saw a Green View advertisement in the St. Charles Shopper.



Bruce Klaehn

Green View was incorporated as a Minnesota Farmers Union subsidiary in 1969 to create jobs for older individuals. Green View employees keep rest areas, state parks and MnDOT regional facilities in Duluth, Detroit Lakes, Morris and Winona clean and tidy. The organization employs 650 to 700 workers who complete more than 600,000 hours of labor each year.

Klaehn, a retired educator who finished his career as a superintendent, was looking for a job that was more relaxed than leading a school district.

He found what he was looking for at Green View.

Klaehn works as an alternate at High Forest and Marion Rest Areas along Interstate 90 in southeastern Minnesota. An alternate works when regular employees are unavailable. He also works when there's a vacancy between someone retiring and someone new coming on staff.

Green View employees do regular maintenance, snow removal, lawn mowing and bathroom cleaning at the High Forest and Marion Rest Areas.

"It is a nice position in that you are, during those eight hours, you are your own boss, keeping the place looking as nice as you can," Klaehn said.

There is good camaraderie among the team, even though everyone works their shifts solo, he said. It's not uncommon for a person to come in early to shoot the

breeze with the person coming off their shift. There is a sense of teamwork as everyone is working for a common goal of keeping the rest areas clean and looking nice. And, if one person receives a compliment from a traveler, it is shared among the rest of the team.

Working at the rest areas has opened his eyes into how much work goes into keeping a place looking nice. It's also given him a new appreciation for his father, Loren, who was the head custodian of a school for years.

"I get to follow in his steps, honor him and his legacy," Klaehn said.

He also inherited his father's joy of visiting with people, which is another part of his job with Green View.

The job is flexible and moves at a steady

pace – it's not like his old days of trying to do 12 hours of work in an eight-hour day. It's 180 degrees different than being a superintendent, Klaehn said.

Southern Regional Field Supervisor Keith Ingvaldson, who hired Klaehn, told him he is the first retired superintendent he's hired. Klaehn, 72, has worked for Green View for about four years.

It's a way for him to give back for all those people who have kept bathrooms clean for him over the years. He strongly endorses Green View as a job for retired people. The longest string of regular work is three days and it's normally one or two days in a row. The job offers variety and flexibility.

In addition to working for Green View, Klaehn works for the Minnesota School Boards Association and builds outdoor furniture. He was a teacher and coach in Madelia, principal in Granada Huntley East Chain and superintendent in Grand Meadow and Dover-Eyota School Districts.

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

Calendar of events

Apr. 2 1:30-3 p.m.

People's Town Hall

Hjemkomst Center, 202 1st Ave N., Moorhead

Apr. 3 1:30-3 p.m.

People's Town Hall

Far North Spirits, 2045 220th Ave., Hallock

Apr. 4 6-9 p.m.

Farmers Union Social Hour

Three Twenty Brewing, Pine City

Apr. 5 8:30-11:30 a.m.

Rural Health Forum and Fair

Kasson

See mfu.org/events for more information and the latest news on upcoming events

Farmers Union hosting Rural Health Forum and Fair in Kasson

KASSON, Minn. – Dodge and Olmsted County Farmers Unions in cooperation with Dodge County Public Health are hosting a Rural Health Forum and Fair from 8:30 to 11:30 a.m. April 5 at The Midway building on the Dodge County Fairgrounds in Kasson.


The event will feature exhibitors on a variety of health topics including farm safety, hearing loss, health insurance and family health. Dodge County Public Health, the Center Clinic, Kasson-Mantorville FFA, University of Minnesota Extension and Farmers Union Agency are among the exhibitors. Medical students plan to offer blood pressure, skin cancer and hearing screenings.


Featured speakers are Dr. Robert M. Jacobson, a medical consultant at Mayo Clinic, and Ted Matthews, a mental health practitioner with more than 30 years of experience in counseling in rural areas.

The event is free and open to the public. Learn more at mfu.org/event/rural-health-forum-and-fair.

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Find out about events, policy happenings, photos and more.

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Moorhead	Mari Berggren	(218) 512-0536
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