2021 SPRING

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The Weekly Round Up

Republican Journal

APRIL 2021

Being a partner, being a leader

Orth shares his experiences

BY MATT JOHNSON
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Rural Lancaster farmer Derek Orth took a step toward learning more concerning presenting agriculture in the public by participating in the American Farm Bureau's Partners in Agriculture Leadership (PAL) Class.

Orth had been selected to participate in the Bureau's 10th PAL class, which began in 2019. PAL is a leadership honors program that helps those in agriculture strengthen their roles as advocates. Only 10 participants across the nation were selected to participate.

Orth shared his experiences in the program with a column in the Wisconsin Farm Bureau's District 3 March newsletter. He said there are many things that can help a farmer get ahead in agriculture, but a lot of it has to be coming across as positive about the entire industry.

Among seven key points Orth mentioned were making connections in the industry, connecting with schools, creating virtual farm and production tours, being vulnerable to show the current struggle of farming in America, being positive, sharing the stories of others and inform people, but don't consider it education.

Each independent point touches on the other and gives those in ag a way to consistently keep themselves and members of their community informed about the state of the industry.

It isn't just a matter of making connections inside of agriculture, according to Orth, but being present on social media and in the community in groups that may have no members in the agricultural community.

One of the first experiences Orth had with the program was a trip with his classmates to New York City, where they visited an urban Whole Foods grocery store.

"Being a dairy farmer I went to the dairy section and started asking people about the milk they were buying and why they were buying it," Orth said. "I found that to be really interesting because they had a lot of different answers. Many of them had never met a dairy farmer before."

Orth said it's easy for a consumer to not know exactly what ingredients are in their dairy products. However, that's not to say consumers are uneducated, instead they may simply be misinformed. "I don't like hearing the phrase, 'We need to educate the consumer,'" Orth said. "Many times our consumers have PH.D's or advanced degrees. I find it more helpful to share stories with consumers."

Orth points to a recent farmer-created video that he watched regarding a farm that raised a variety of crops and livestock. "There was a woman talking on the video while she was standing in a strawberry patch," Orth said. "She had been holding a baby goat that had not been doing well. As she was discussing the strawberry portion of the operation, the goat died in her arms.

"It's heartbreaking to watch that, but these are things we deal with every day," Orth continued. "The more people we meet to share our stories and who see what our lives are like, the better advocates we can be for agriculture."

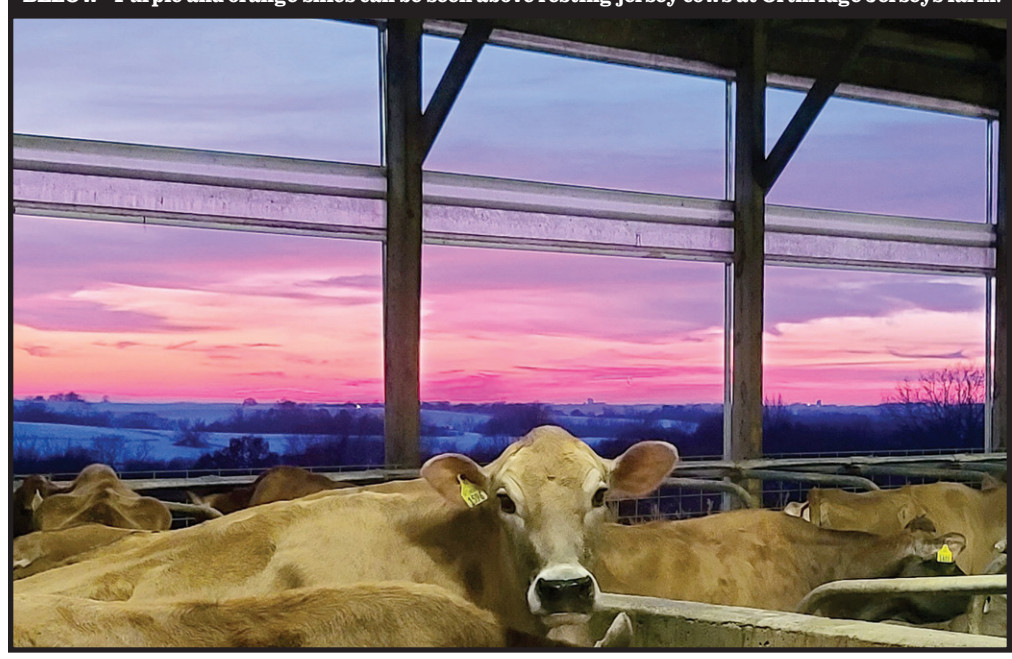
It's no secret that farm commodity prices have suffered significantly for a number of years. Corn and soybean prices are far from higher prices they brought seven years ago. It's another situation that people who don't live in agricultural communities may not know.

Orth said farmers don't want pity, but they're human.

"Just because someone drives past a farm and sees a large truck or tractor — that doesn't mean it's all a huge success," Orth said. "I think it goes back to sharing a story that leads to a question. And that furthers the discussion."

Derek and his wife Charisse farm with his parents on their

Orth | SEE 9A



ABOVE - Rural Lancaster farmer Derek Orth participated in the American Farm Bureau's Partners in Agriculture Leadership (PAL) Class.
BELOW - Purple and orange skies can be seen above resting jersey cows at Orthridge Jerseys farm.

‘Green power’ and agriculture

Wind and solar projects are growing on SW Wisconsin farmland

BY STEVE PRESTEGARD
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The landscape of the Driftless Area and its farms features a growing number of renewable energy projects.

The Montfort Wind Energy Center features a series of wind turbines south of U.S. 18 between Montfort and Cobb.

The Quilt Block Wind Farm features its own line of wind turbines along Wisconsin 81 in the Lafayette County Town of Kendall.

Just east of the Montfort project is the Badger Hollow Solar Farm, a 300,000-watt solar project in the Iowa County towns of Eden, Mifflin and Linden. NextEra Energy proposes a 200,000-watt solar farm on about 1,600 acres of land along U.S. 61 between Potosi and Lancaster.

Northern Lafayette and southern Iowa counties also are the proposed site for the 120- to 200-turbine Uplands Wind project, proposed by Pattern Energy of San Francisco.

Each of the projects has its proponents and detractors, though fewer than the proposed Cardinal–Hickory Creek power transmission line project, a 345,000-volt line from north of Dubuque to Montfort, then along U.S. 18 and U.S. 18/151 to the Town of Middleton.

“Large scale renewable energy projects are very compatible with farming in Southwest Wisconsin,” said Matt Johnson of Albany, of the Land and Liberty Coalition, which promotes utility-scale energy projects. “For wind projects, farmers can continue to grow crops around the base of wind turbines. Typically only a quarter of an acre of land is needed for a wind turbine base. There are often maintenance roads as well to access the turbines. But the rest of the farmland besides the quarter acre for the base of the turbine and maintenance roads, can be used for growing crops such as corn, soybeans, etc.

“When farmers voluntarily participate in a utility scale wind project they usually receive annual payments per turbine for the operating life of the project. These payments are often quite substantial. These guaranteed annual payments for the life of the project can help the farmer stay in business by providing a steady stream of income that they then can use to pay down equipment debt and stay afloat. Farms go out of business every week in Wisconsin, and wind projects can provide annual guaranteed income for some farmers. Between the annual payments and the income from crops the land can provide a dual income for farmers. When the wind project is decommissioned the quarter acre of land where the base of the turbine was can then be used for growing crops again. So in summary farming is very compatible with utility scale wind projects.”

The growing number of renewable projects in an agricultural area might make some wonder how compatible farms and large-scale energy projects are.

“It can be compatible, but what has been proposed by Pattern and done by other developers in the state is not fully maximizing the potential synergies,” said Dodgeville native Andrea Luecke of All Impact Consulting, a Washington, D.C., “clean energy” consultant. “The contracts local landowners are being asked to sign are full land easements — which means that the landowners have no say as to the location of the renewable energy project or any accessory roads or buildings.

“The contracts are one-sided and give priority to the developer in terms of siting. Once the wind and solar is installed, the landowner can cultivate or graze around it, but the risk of stray voltage on livestock has been documented and the soil around the renewable energy system may require amending before it is farmable.”

“Land lease payments or turbine payments can provide significant revenue for decades,” said Johnson. “This money is a set amount per year that is agreed upon. This money can be used by the farmer as they see fit. They could pay off equipment debt, pay off their house or just stay afloat in these difficult times.

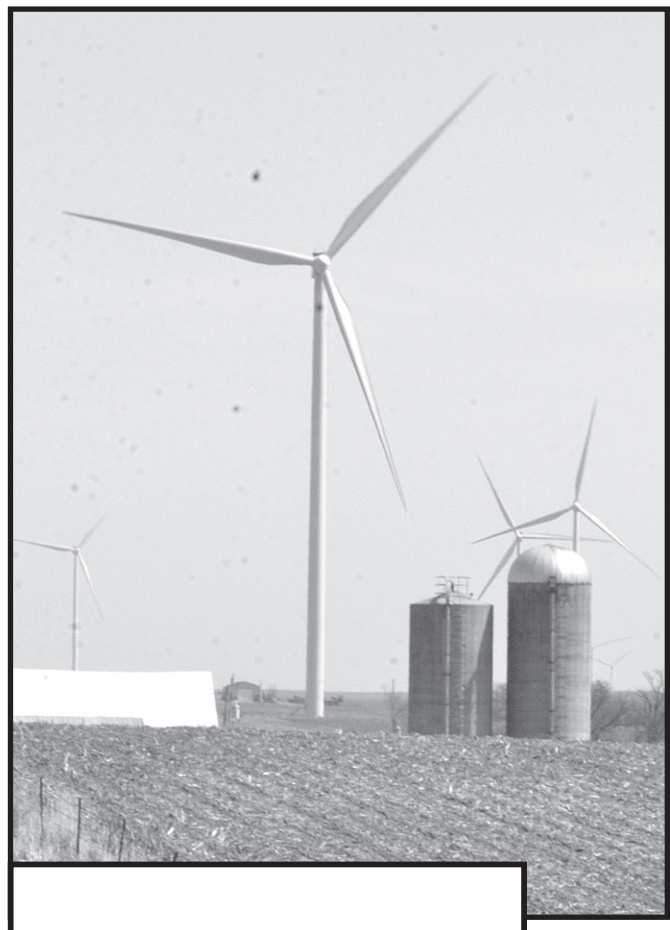
“When utility scale projects are developed and constructed they also create hundreds of construction jobs in the local area. These local workers may also be purchasing food grown by the farmer. Economic activity in the local region can also provide economic growth for rural areas. Also when renewable energy projects are above 50 megawatts or more the taxes from that project that the developers or utilities pay goes into a shared revenue program. That shared revenue program provides local and county governments with revenue payments. For renewable energy projects in Wisconsin every 1 megawatt provides $4,000 of revenue that is split between the town(s) the project is in and the county or counties the project is in. For example, a 200-megawatt solar project will bring in $800,000 of shared revenue for decades split between the town and county. This money could be used for roads, infrastructure, Fire/EMS services, etc.”

The Quilt Farm and Montfort wind turbines dot farm fields, but their impact goes beyond what you can see.

“These are massive industrial projects,” said Luecke. “During installation there will be a lot of construction activity. I wasn’t able to find out how deep or wide the buttressed foundation would need to be to support wind turbines the height that Pattern is proposing (nearly 700 feet), but for a turbine that is about half the size, they need to construct a 15- to 20-foot-deep concrete foundation, drive pylons, and bring in about 30,000 tons of cement for the base, which spans approximately 40 feet across.

“It is important to note that the water table is quite shallow in Southwest Wisconsin and the soil is sandy so there may be other considerations forcing the bases to be even wider and deeper than what I referenced. There could also be unintended contamination to groundwater as in the contracts the developer states that the electrical cables and other buried material

Green | SEE 5A



Wind turbines are more and more prevalent on land around southwest Wisconsin as projects for wind and solar power continue to be approved.

Clear benefits result from aerial cover crop program

BY GILLIAN POMPLUN

In 2014, USDA-NRCS District Conservationist for Crawford County, Karyl Fritsche, launched the county's innovative aerial cover crop program. Fritsche worked with Crawford County Conservationist Dave Troester on the program.

Under Fritsche and Troester's oversight, the number of acres planted in cover crops grew almost 150 percent in four years. In 2019, the two selected Adam Kramer of Black Sand Granary in Patch Grove to be their partner for transitioning the program to the private sector.

Kramer expanded the program into Grant County, and in his first season, more than doubled the acres planted. This type of public-private partnership is quite rare due to the challenges for the private sector in navigating the complexity of federal programs and requirements.

Since the program's inception in 2014 through the 2020 growing season, total acres planted have grown from 1,855 acres to 12,003 acres. This represents a more than 650 percent increase. In 2014, as a result of the acres planted, NRCS calculates that 3,895 tons of soil were saved, the equivalent of 194 semi loads. In 2020, 25,200 tons of soil were saved, the equivalent of 1,260 semi loads.

Assessing the gains

The innovative program and its success has attracted the interest of researchers from USDA-NRCS looking for ways to understand the benefits of the practice, and demonstrate its results. Josh Bendorf of the NRCS Earth Team partnered with Fritsche and Kramer in 2020 to report on the gains from covers crops in Southwest Wisconsin. Bendorf volunteered his time for the project, while pursuing a masters degree at Iowa State.

The maps generated from the research reveal that most areas in Crawford County's most flood-prone watershed, the Kickapoo River, showed soil organic matter (SOM) gains of between 100 tons per acre to greater than 1,000 tons per acre.

"Increases in soil organic matter mean that the enriched soil can hold ten times its weight in water," Bendorf explained. "What this means is that the soil is capable of infiltrating more water during precipitation events and preventing the water, soil and nutrients from running off and eroding into surface waters."

Fritsche was proud of the growth in the program she helped to launch, and observed that by 2020, the program had touched every watershed in Crawford County.

"In particular, we've seen very significant gains in the Kickapoo River watershed," Fritsche said. "If we had begun this program even sooner, I think the floods we saw in 2018 would have looked very different."

In assessing the gains in available water capacity (the capacity of the soils to infiltrate water and prevent runoff and erosion), areas in Crawford County's Kickapoo River basin and in northwest Grant County showed overall an increased capacity of between 30-50 gallons per acre, with an increased capacity greater than 200 gallons per acre in some areas.

Carbon sequestration

Another big gain from the acres planted was in the amount of total organic carbon (TOC) that was sequestered in the soil. Overall, in Crawford County, the increased amounts of TOC sequestered ranged from greater than 1,000 tons per watershed to between 100-150 tons per watershed. Many areas in northwest Grant County saw gains of between 300-500 tons per watershed up to greater than 1,000 tons per watershed.

Carbon sequestration is the intake and storage of the element carbon. Because the soil soaks up carbon that would otherwise rise up and trap heat in the atmosphere, trees and plants such as cover crops are important players in the mitigation of the impacts of climate change.

"We estimate that as a result of the aerial cover crop program, we have seen increases of between 50-60 percent in the amount of carbon sequestered in the soils of Crawford and Grant counties," Bendorf said. "Because organic matter is estimated to contain about 58 percent organic carbon, each percent increase in SOM results in about a 1.72 increase in sequestered carbon."

According to the website, 'Project Drawdown,' "the world cannot be fed unless the soil is fed. Regenerative agriculture enhances and sustains the health of the soil by restoring its carbon content, which in turn improves productivity.

"Regenerative agricultural practices include:

- no tillage,
- diverse cover crops,
- in-farm fertility (versus external nutrients),
- no pesticides or synthetic fertilizers, and
- multiple crop rotations.

"Together, these practices increase carbon-rich soil organic matter. The result: vital microbes proliferate, roots go deeper, nutrient uptake improves, water retention increases, plants are more pest resistant, and soil fertility compounds. Farms are seeing soil carbon levels rise from a baseline of one to two percent, up to five to eight percent, over ten or more years, which can add up to 25 to 60 tons of carbon per acre.

"It is estimated that at least 50 percent of the carbon in the earth's soils has been released into the atmosphere over the past centuries. Bringing that carbon back home through regenerative agriculture is one of the greatest opportunities to address human and climate health, along with the financial well-being of farmers."

Increased profitability

Growing cover crops and increasing soil organic matter also has great potential to reduce the amount of fertility inputs required on farms. This is because the farmer, by increasing SOM, is growing the nutrient richness of the soils on their farm. This has potential to reduce farm business costs and increase profitability.

On the low end of estimates, the nutrient values of the soils in Crawford and Grant counties in areas participating in the aerial cover crop program range from $250 to more than $5,000 per watershed. At the high end of the estimates, they range from $500 to more than $5,000 per watershed.

The nutrient value is estimated by NRCS to increase 0.1 percent per year on fields planted with overwintering cover crops. This means, with a sustained practice of planting cover crops, percentages of soil organic matter and the corresponding nutrient values in the soil will continue to increase over time.

The watersheds in question are smaller subwatersheds (HUC-12). For instance, the Tainter Creek Watershed is a HUC-12. Each of these subwatersheds combine to make up larger watersheds, for instance the Kickapoo River, which is a HUC-8 watershed.

Bendorf estimated that a

Aerial | SEE 8A

Stream protection important for healthy soil, plants, cattle, people

BY TED PENNEKAMP

With 2021 Wisconsin Water Week just having been celebrated March 8-12, it is a good time to discuss stream water monitoring and the effect of good quality water upon farming in Crawford County and across Wisconsin.

Bruce and Sue Ristow of rural Soldiers Grove are two of several volunteers in Crawford County who monitor the quality of water in area streams. In fact, the Ristows are in their 11th year of monitoring a 3/4-mile stretch of Tainter Creek that runs through their property. In 2020, the Ristows received a Wisconsin Volunteer Stream Monitor Award from the University of Wisconsin-Madison Division of Extension and the Wisconsin DNR.

The Ristows are conservation farmers who raise grass-fed beef utilizing managed grazing techniques to protect and maintain the portion of Tainter Creek that runs through their property. Monitoring water quality on their farm through the Water Action Volunteers program, the Ristows are innovators in water quality protection and sustainable agricultural practices in Southwest Wisconsin. In addition to stream monitoring, the Ristows work with the Tainter Creek Farmer-Led Watershed Council, and have a willingness to teach others about the importance of water quality.

"Water Action Volunteers stream monitoring is a great way to be connected to the water resource and to learn more about the water quality of your local stream," said Peggy Compton, Program Manager, Water Action Volunteers, UW-Madison Extension/Natural Resources Institute. "And, I think when we better understand something it makes us want to protect it. That's where conservation practices and rotational grazing come in – as these practices can help

Stream | SEE 11B (NEXT SECTION)

Green

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will not be removed during decommissioning."

"We fundamentally believe that farmers and landowners should have the option to develop their land and participate in a solar or wind project if they have a chance to," said Johnson. "For wind projects the land the projects take out of production is a low amount and after the project is completed it can be used for growing crops again. For solar projects the land that has panels on it will have significant nutrient build up after the solar project is decommissioned and be even more productive for farming. Again most projects use pollinator mixes or grass seed mixes to provide nutrients for the soil."

One of the most hotly debated wind energy topics is whether or not claimed negative health effects are real.

"Given the size and number of these industrialized wind turbines, there is no doubt the red blinking lights, blade flickering, and the low frequency sound that these turbines make are annoying and can negatively affect quality of life and even health in some people," said Luecke. "It is like how some people get seasick or nauseous while riding in a car, while others don't."

"In terms of lights, blade flicker and sound, developers and manufacturers have improved their wind turbines significantly in the last few decades," said Johnson. "Wisconsin has also the Wisconsin Public Service Commission rules and regulations in regard to utility scale wind projects."

Public Service Commission chapter 126 regulations for wind projects limit noise to, measured from "the outside wall of a nonparticipating residence," 50 decibels between 6 a.m. and 10 p.m. and 45 decibels at night. "Shadow flicker" is limited by the regulation to 30 hours per year.

"The problem is that technology advancements are occurring faster than our state's ability or interest to regulate them through ordinances or setbacks. The turbines get bigger and bigger while our ordinances remain the same. Unfortunately, in the case of the Pattern project, the community is being asked to wait until the project is installed to see if it will present a negative health impact to them personally, but by then it is already too late. In Iowa and other places where large-scale wind has really taken hold, there are numerous complaints being filed and, unfortunately, it appears their only recourse is to sell if they can and move.

"It is clear that the wind industry is ignoring these claims because it is bad press and would slow down business prospects. And renewable energy proponents and advocates are ignoring these claims because they believe sacrifices must be made to fight climate change. To get to net zero emissions by 2050 will take a tremendous amount of sacrifice and change, which is why I too am pushing for more renewable energy, but strongly believe appropriate siting and consumer protections are critical. Some places are simply not appropriate for large scale wind and solar and are better suited for less invasive and industrial carbon offset strategies."

The first phase of Badger Hollow is scheduled to come online in April after a delay caused by COVID-19 that limited the ability of Invenergy, the solar project developer, to bring workers to the area. The second phase is scheduled to be completed in 2023.

"Farmers voluntarily participate in utility scale solar projects," said Johnson. "When farmers and landowners participate in a project their leased land will have rows of solar panels on them. Underneath the solar panels and around them projects now quite often have grass seed mixes or pollinator mixes. What these grass seed mixes or pollinator mixes do is provide nutrients for the soil where the solar panels are. So for example a 30-year solar project may have pollinator mixes providing nutrients for the soil for the life of the project. When the project is decommissioned and removed that soil has decades of nutrient build up. It is now likely some of the best soil for crops in the country as it has rested for decades. Some solar projects also use sheep or cows to maintain grass around panels. Again this is another opportunity for farmers to have panels on their land while also feeding their sheep or cows.

"The guaranteed land lease payments can help these farmers stay in business. As corn or other commodity prices fluctuate, the land lease payments farmers receive help provide a hedge against that."

One of the criticisms of the proposed Potosi/Harrison solar project was the possibility of a "heat island" created by the solar array.

"The net impact of solar projects significantly reduces global warming and large scale wind and solar are technologies that will quickly allow us to displace fossil fuel — which is vital for fighting climate change," said Luecke. "However, it is true that large scale solar farms can have micro-climate impacts at the site of the installation. Some studies have found that large systems will raise the temperature in the immediate area of the installation by 3–4 degrees Celsius," or 5 to 7 degrees Fahrenheit.

"To reduce these localized heating impacts the system can be designed so that vegetation, a natural cooling buffer, is planted among the installation. So instead of a single solar system, it is broken up into several quadrants with vegetation planted in between. The county and the state should incorporate this as part of their regulatory approval process."

Luecke believes other changes could be made to make renewable energy installations more compatible with existing agriculture.

"There are many options for helping to mitigate climate change that do not rely on renewable energy," she said. "Soil regeneration — amending the soil so that is able to soak up more carbon — or tree planting are great strategies for preserving the land while contributing positively to the environment and our agrarian, rural lifestyles. Some states are working on incentivizing landowners who undertake soil regeneration or forest carbon offsetting as a strategy. Hopefully this will be an option for Wisconsin landowners in the coming future.

"Allowing wildflowers to grow among large renewable energy projects has gained in popularity, allowing for landowners to help strengthen our critical pollinator population (bees are the most endangered species in the U.S.) or harvest honey."

Adjusting animals to achieve their best life

BY KAYLA BARNES
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Animal chiropractics is a fairly new practice, having only begun in the early 1930s with a college officially coming to fruition in the late 1980s.

Dr. Mackenzie Cunningham of Shullsburg knew she wanted to work with animals. Growing up her family always had some sort of animal, be it horses, dogs, cats, the like.

After graduation from Shullsburg High School in 2010, she went to the University of Wisconsin-Platteville to complete her undergraduate degree in animal science. She had planned on going to veterinarian school but her junior year, she decided on a different path.

"My main deterrent was the possibility of surgery," Cunningham said. "I'm not squeamish or anything but just the idea of having to do that – I wanted to help them but not be in the medicine part. The thought of animal chiropractic came to mind and helping the animals more naturally."

For a couple of years in high school, Cunningham worked for Dr. Julie Frank at the Shullsburg Chiropractic Clinic. Cunningham went to Dr. Frank as a patient with her family and Dr. Frank expressed an interest for someone to work during the summer.

"As we worked together we talked about our interests and she was the one that brought up the idea of animal chiropractic. She definitely helped me along the way."

To become an animal chiropractor in Wisconsin, one would need to either be a veterinarian or a chiropractor and since Cunningham had decided against veterinarian school, after UW-Platteville she attended Palmer College of Chiropractic in Davenport, Iowa in October 2014.

Dr. Mackenzie Cunningham works to adjust her horse during a therapy session. After her own experience with a chiropractor, she went on a journey to become an animal chiropractor.

Since Palmer was strictly a chiropractic school for humans, Cunningham would then need to attend a school for animal chiropractics. But life got in the way for a little while.

After she graduated from Palmer in June 2018, she began working as an associate at a chiropractic office in August. She had her son Macon in November and went back to work in January.

"At that point I decided I wanted to do animal chiropractic more." So she ended that job in July and started animal chiropractic school in October 2019.

There are only four schools approved by the Animal Chiropractic Certification Commission in the United States where that type of education can be obtained: Options of Animals in Wellsville, Kan., Healing Oasis Wellness Center in Sturtevant, Wis., Parker College of Chiropractic Association in Dallas, Texas and Animal Chiropractic Education Source also in Dallas, Texas. Cunningham attended Options for Animals.

The once a week course took five months to complete. Cunningham graduated in February 2020.

"It was a longer road than I had planned but I am happy with where I am at."

Since her graduation, the world took a turn and COVID-19 put a damper on seeing patients. Over the last year she has been seeing both people and animals but not as often as planned.

"I've been splitting my time as needed. My son is home full time so that makes life a little more complicated. But juggling him and the business, we are making it work."

She lives between Shullsburg and Benton with her fiancé, Morgan Steger, on his family farm. Steger's family has grown up breeding and raising horses. Together they do a lot of rodeo activities with their horses such as roping.

"With us in the horse industry we know a lot of people in the area that have horses, but I see basically any animal but mostly horses and dogs."

Many of her furry clients are show animals such as pigs, steers, sheep and goats. She does have some cat clients and was once asked about chiropractics for a chicken and an alpaca.

"All animals are really great candidates. Anything with a spine I will check it out."

Since animals can't tell their human companions when they are in pain or have discomfort, it is all up to the owner to understand their animal.

"It all depends on the client or owner. If they notice that their animal is acting strange or not performing correctly, they bring it to me to see what I can do to help."

Show animals are judged on having a flat back. Cunningham adjusts the animals working out the humps or bumps on their backs to give them that show ready look.

Each session varies on the amount it takes to adjust an animal.

"You can't get a dog to lay down like a human and you can't get a horse to lay down. Everything stands."

The schooling teaches chiropractors how to do everything with the animals standing up.

Cunningham states that the main difference from adjusting a human is the pressure used to adjust them is a lot lighter than people.

"Animals are actually quite delicate. It doesn't take much pressure—it takes minimal force to adjust a horse."

She added that it does take some persuasion and patience to work with the animals.

"A person you can tell them to move their body into certain positions. The animals usually don't know me. They don't know what is going on. When I start getting into it, they realize it feels good and that it is something that is helpful. It is interesting every time."

Cunningham could not stress enough the importance of finding someone who is qualified and trained to do animal chiropractics. There are 40 states that require some form of veterinary involvement in chiropractics on animals. She said there are many people on social media who state they can perform these types of adjustments on animals but it may not be the case.

"If they are not trained

Adjusting | SEE 8A

One man - a century of farming

BY DAWN KIEFER
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Some people farm for many years, retire and move to town.

Jerry Durst has never fully retired and he has no plans to move away from his beloved farm.

He also just so happened to turn 102-years-old this past Valentine's Day.

As further proof of his family's genetic longevity, his "kid sister" Lauretta 'Dimp' (Durst) McGlynn turned 100 two days after his birthday.

Since Jerry continues to hold the dairy license in his name, it can safely be said that he's been farming for just under a century.

He started as a small boy helping with chores on the dairy farm of his parents, Adam and Lauretta (Dederich) Durst, who were wed in 1914. Jerry was the third born of five children, with his sister Margaret (Durst) Pringle-Heitke the eldest, born in 1915, and next his brother Joseph, who was born in 1916. Jerry's birth in 1919 was followed by sister Dimp's in 1921 and brother Francis's in 1923.

The origin of the Durst family in Bear Valley was the arrival in 1867 of Jerry's grandfather Lorenz Durst, who headed there because he knew the Greenheck family. Other members of his family followed him to America. Lorenz married Margaretha Hess, and Jerry's father Adam was the ninth born of their ten children. The hard-working landowner ethic instilled by Lorenz has carried down to ensuing branches of the family tree.

Jerry and his siblings were raised on their parents' farm on State Hwy. 58 near Stibbe Hill, not too far from US Hwy. 14. That proximity to the Durst family farm proved helpful to many people during the Great

Jerry Durst has done a lot of things in his 102 years. He raised a family on the family farm. What he hasn't done is retire.

Depression. Jerry says his family always had ample food to eat and his mother often had an abundance of garden produce to spare. He said she would welcome people to help themselves. He says his family ate a lot of potatoes and sauerkraut, as well as meat and eggs. "People from (Richland) Center came and bought eggs," he says. He also admits to having a fondness for pumpkin pie. Willow Creek ran through a corner of his parents' farm and sometimes his mom wanted fish and so he and his brothers would go catch some.

During his youth and well into adulthood, Jerry was accustomed to farming with horse-drawn wagons and implements. He worked hard even as a youth and didn't have time for many of the leisure activities or sports teams that some of his fellow students did. He recalls there being horse pulling contests decades past, similar to tractor pulls, but he never wanted to make his horses do that. "I figured they had to work hard enough as it was," he says.

Even though the family had no motorized equipment, Jerry's parents were the first in Ithaca Township to own a car. A family photo shows Adam and Lauretta in the car along with their first baby, Margaret. Their next car was a 1927 Auburn, which can be seen in the background of many family photos.

All farmers must contend with the whims of Mother Nature and Jerry's family was no exception. One year during the 1930s he recalls that there was a terrible hailstorm around the fourth of July. His family lost their crops and their wood-sided house was damaged. The wind put holes in the siding and broke windows. "The roof was shot and cattle got hurt," Jerry says. "We had to scrape together to feed the animals. I worry about hail and wind more than anything."

During his time as an Ithaca High School student he worked for his room and board at the farm of his aunt, Theresa Durst, and was able to put some money in the bank. There were no school buses then and so he walked to and from school. He graduated from high school in 1936.

Outside of school he learned to play guitar, without the benefit of knowing how to read notes. His brother Joseph played the fiddle and they, along with some cousins, played at barn dances. "We cleared out the hay mow," he says. But he points out that there weren't very many dances, because everyone had to work. In any case, at one of the dances he met a beautiful girl from a Plain-area farm named Florence Wankerl and they got married in 1941.

When the USA entered World War II Jerry was called for service, but he had a severe stomach condition that required surgery and he didn't pass the physical. During his early twenties he smoked cigarettes for about five years, but at age 26 he gave away his last pack just before he underwent surgery to have an outlet in his stomach. "I noticed a big difference," he says.

But his older brother Joseph did pass the physical and was sent overseas to Europe. He was a tank mechanic and drove tank. On

Durst | SEE 9A

Dr. Mackenzie Cunningham with fiance, Morgan Steger, and son Macon.

Adjusting

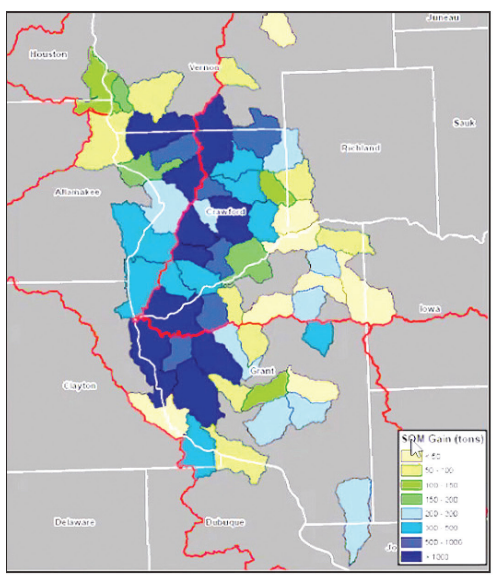
FROM PAGE 6A

correctly, they could adjust something wrong and cause even more issues and make it worse."

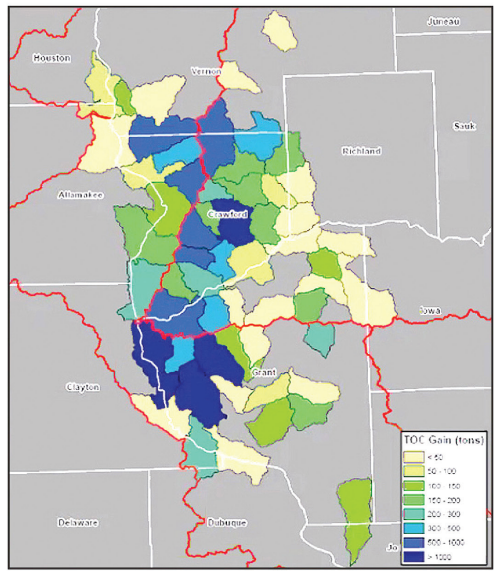
With only the four colleges that offer animal chiropractics in the United States, there are not many animal chiropractors around and Cunningham would like to see that changed.

"We could always use some more."

She hopes if things ever go back to normal, she will be able to go to schools and organizational meetings to discuss exactly what she does and encourage more to use a chiropractor for animals or go into the field.



Soil Organic Matter (SOM)



Total Organic Carbon (TOC)

Aerial

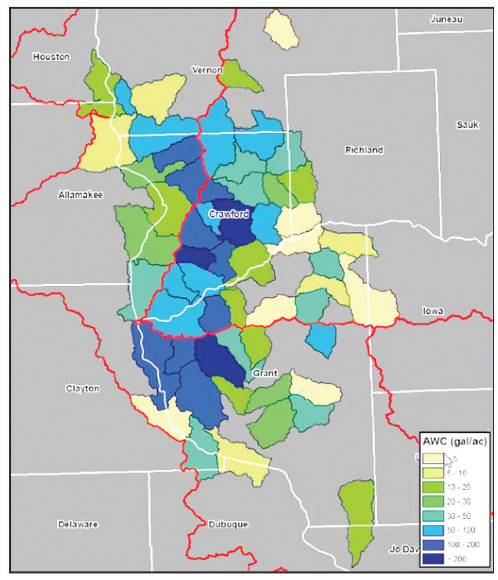
FROM PAGE 4A

farm which sees an increase of one ton of SOM per acre would break even on their return on investment after 15 years, and would begin to see a net gain of $450 per acre after 30 years. With an increase of one-and-one-half tons of SOM per acre, the break even point would occur after 10 years, and the producer would begin to see a net gain of $450 per acre after 20 years. With an increase of two tons of SOM per acre, the break even point would occur after eight years, and the producer would begin to see a net gain of $450 per acre after 15 years.

Conclusions

As a result of their research, Fritsche and Bendorf draw the following conclusions about the gains for areas participating in Black Sand Granary's aerial cover crop program:

- All watersheds in Crawford County have been impacted by planting of cover crops, with between 100-1,000 tons of SOM and total organic carbon added to the soil
- The increased water-holding capacity of the soil resulting from the increases in SOM is of great importance in flood-prone regions
- An added nutrient value of greater than $1,000 per watershed is common, with greater and faster increases in dollar value of the nutrients corresponding to greater and faster increases in the biomass of the soil
- Looking ahead, despite the successes already achieved, the good news, according to Bendorf and Fritsche is that there remains plenty of room for continued growth.



Available Water Capacity (AWC)

Durst

FROM PAGE 7A

August 19, 1944, in the Battle of Chartres, France, the tank Joseph was driving got shot at and caught fire. He perished in the blaze and the family was devastated by his death.

The family's deep Catholic faith helped them through their grief and other difficult times to come. In response to Pope Pius's request that all-male choirs be established wherever possible, the Durst Choir at St. Mary's in Keyesville was formed and continued for many years.

When Jerry was still a bachelor, in 1938, he bought his farm from an uncle, splitting expenses and income half-and-half. Jerry also worked on another farm to get some pay.

Jerry says that, although rural electrification got started during the 1930s, World War II put a stop to further advancement of it due to shortages of material and manpower. And so his farm did not get electricity and indoor plumbing until the 1950s. Before they got electricity, they'd hang a kerosene lamp on a hook in the barn so that the cows couldn't kick it. Through the years, he typically had 20 cows. Even after the farm got electricity, they continued to use a windmill to pump water.

Jerry always raised corn, hay and oats and recalls threshing bees. "The women cooked all the meals and you ate well," he says. "You met all your neighbors."

He continued to use horses for some years and says, "If not for horses, no one could have farmed." His first tractor was pulled out of a neighbor's weeds and paid for with $25. "I borrowed parts and got it going for a few years," Jerry says. He has a Case 1929 styled up for shows that he doesn't use anymore and he got his first Allis-Chalmers in 1946. Many Richland County residents are well-familiar with the Durst clan's legendary love of the orange tractors. In fact, the family hosted several large shows during which much equipment was gathered together.

After he and Florence got married they always had a huge garden and raised all the potatoes for the Keyesville church school, where their children attended through eighth grade before going on to high school in Ithaca. Jerry drove school bus for four years, somewhere along the way.

Jerry says he has mixed emotions about the changes wrought by time. He says there are better tractors now and so you don't need to punish horses. "Now people have horses just to have them around," he says. He notes that antifreeze was a good invention, because he recalls having to drain water out of cars so it wouldn't freeze. His first car was a 1915 Driscoll. "I always bought used cars," he says. "Dodge was the main ones."

But other changes make him sad. He says that modernization pollutes the air. Decades ago, he says, people didn't drive so much. "Now it's 24-7 driving, and airplanes," he says. When he was a kid he and his brothers would sled down the hill onto Hwy. 58 with no worries, because no cars were on the road.

He says, "Years ago you knew your neighbors better, from church and threshing. Now you hardly know them. We used to have a house party with a little home brew. Nothing in excess." He was focused on church, a central part of his life -- then and now.

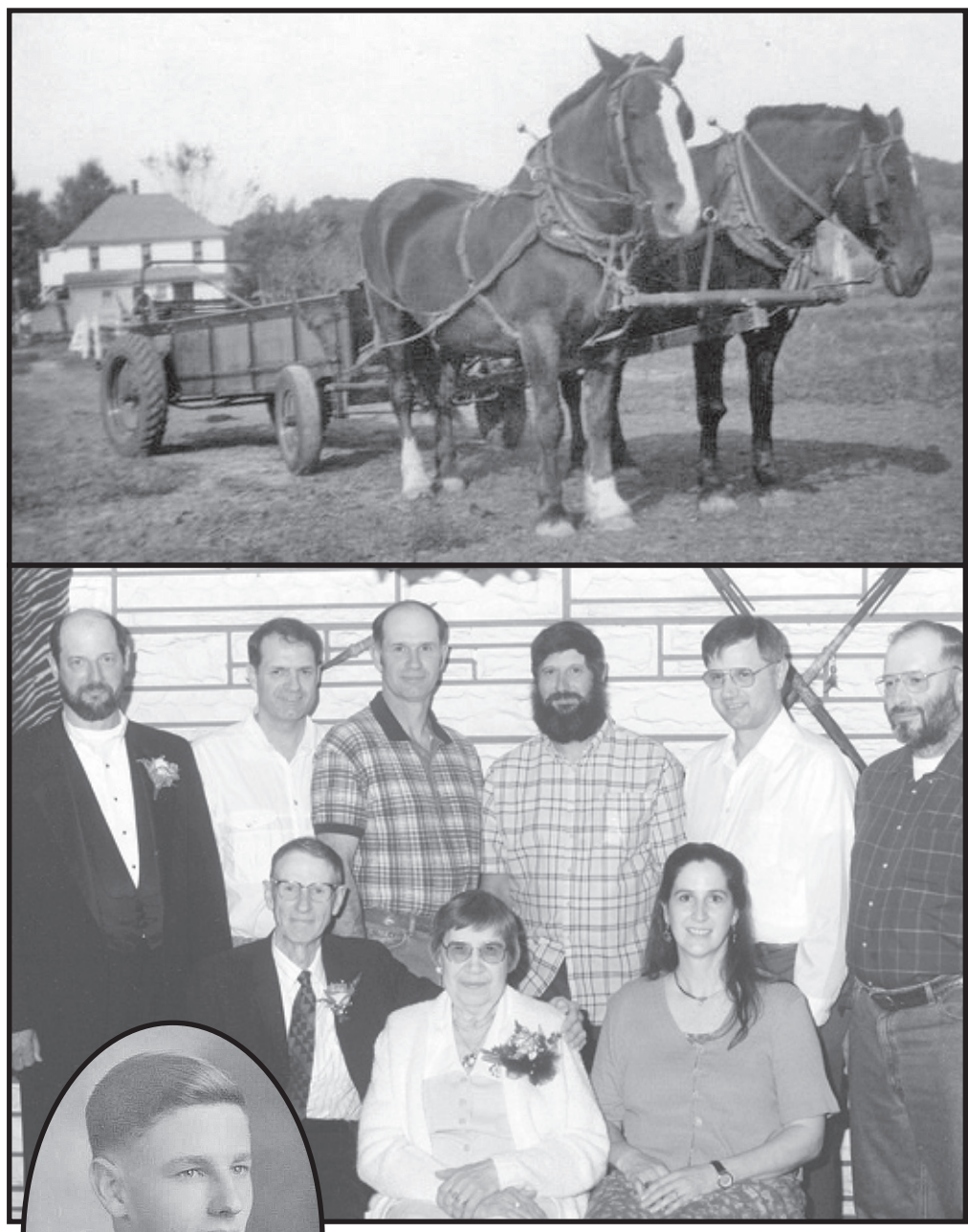
These days he forgoes the beer, but enjoys a little bit of schnapps in water at night. He advocates drinking two cups of heated water each morning upon awakening and suggests not drinking very cold beverages at all. "Don't eat a lot in the hours before bed, because your heart works too hard," he says. "Your body needs to rest. You're better off going to bed hungry."

He credits all the walking he's done over the years for keeping him in good health. "My lungs are still good," he says. "I could still do more pull-ups and outrun young men if I didn't break my hip some years back. I came out of it, but it still bothers me because one leg is shorter. I got hurt pulling a limb out of a tree when a cable broke. I fell on a bale thrower and punctured an artery. I almost bled to death. When the ligaments were put together I can't lift my foot all ways. It took five pints of blood to save me, but I'm stubborn."

Florence passed on in 2012 at age 89 after 71 years of marriage. Their six sons and one daughter all reside in the Richland County area. They are John, Joe, Lawrence, Jerome, David, Pete, and Margaret Rossing. Only John and Joe no longer farm. David and his son Duane farm with Jerry on Keyesville Ridge. They milk 70-75 cows and have beef, too.

Jerry has 30 grandchildren, 82 great-grandchildren and 37 great-great-grandchildren.

He continues the tradition of his Catholic faith by attending Sunday service each week at St. Mary's in Keyesville.



Images from the life of Jerry Durst, who never gave up farming, from the early days using horses in the 1930s on a farm without electricity and indoor plumbing until the 1950s (top); raising a family of six sons and a daughter with his late wife Florence, who he married in 1941, and it's been 84 years since his high school days

One of Derek and Charisse Orth's daughters, Zeeva, spends time in the Orthridge Jerseys farm yard.

Orth

FROM PAGE 2A

dairy, Orthridge Jerseys. They have two young daughters, Zeeva and Jaylee. Charisse, who was raised in Stitzer, is Grant County's 4-H Program Coordinator. Derek Orth is a director for the Grant County Chapter of the Wisconsin Farm Bureau Federation.

One of the projects each PAL participant completed was creating a website that has images and information on their agricultural operation. Orth's website can be found at https://derekorthspeaks.com

Amanda's path to the farm

BY EMILY SCHENDEL

There is an old adage, "It takes a village to raise a child." But, what if we worked together as a village to help others realize their dreams as well?

Southwestern Wisconsin Shepherdess Amanda Caldwell was one such individual. Lifted up by the village around her, to realize her farming and homesteading dreams.

Sitting in her living room in rural Hillsboro, the sunlight pours in the large windows of her home, which was once a working dairy barn.

Slowly, Amanda and her husband Ben have been turning their own farmstead into their own little slice of paradise.

The couple along with five sons, own Woollyhorn Farm. Currently focusing on Icelandic Sheep and pastured meat animals with dreams for so much more.

"I was born in Norfolk Virginia and lived on the East Coast all of my young life," Amanda shared. "I moved to Wisconsin on my 16th birthday."

Later when she was 19, Amanda was missing her mother who had relocated to the western side of Wisconsin after living in the Racine area. Longing for a sense of home and family, Amanda decided to pack up her things and try life in the Driftless Region.

"I moved into a crappy apartment in Coon Valley to be closer to my mom," Amanda shared. "Later I was lucky to have moved to a more rural home outside of town. My landlord had beef steers and that was really the first time I had ever been around livestock. I was still a city girl then," Amanda shared with a laugh. "Around the time I had my first son and I became hyper obsessed with how my family and I were eating. And that really became a segue way into a more conscious lifestyle. I eventually moved to La Crosse, I started working at a natural foods store there and I started realizing I wanted to be more connected to the land and more connected to what we put in our bodies."

Amanda later switched jobs to working at a more high stress call center. The money was good, but the work was demanding and had begun to wear on her. However, she found solace when visiting her mom's hobby farm and the idea began to develop that maybe that was something that would be a fit for her as well.

"The job was great in some ways but in others it was very difficult," Amanda recalled. "My mom purchased a small eight acre hobby farm and that really helped give me the push. She had chickens, ducks, goats, and it was all so nice. I set a goal for myself to one day have something like that too. I started just wanting three acres and some chickens. But then I met my mom's goats and my dreams grew from there. Until finally, the opportunity came. I quit my job and I moved to rural Soldiers Grove and I decided to give farming a shot."

Amanda Caldwell started her farming journey a few years ago and quickly fell in love with the Icelandic breed of sheep. Entering the second year on their farm in rural Hillsboro, Amanda along with her husband Ben and five sons are anxiously awaiting the arrival of many new lambs from their flock. Icelandics like Frida, pictured here with Amanda and goat companion June Bug, are a hardy triple purpose sheep. Farmers like the Caldwells look forward to the new life springing forward in the form of bouncing happy lambs in the spring.

As a child, Amanda always sought out animals. So it was no surprise to those who knew her, when she gave her new life her all.

"Growing up I was always outside searching for animals," Amanda recalled. "I loved to spend time playing in the woods and swamp. I loved Steve Irwin and thought I would become a veterinarian or biologist. I often would bring home snakes and turtles and raise baby birds when they fell from the nest. So when I had the opportunity to rent a little slice of a farmstead I did it with my whole heart. I left my job and was a single mom to my three sons, and next thing I knew I had 40 chickens, 12 turkeys and ended up buying some enormous crossbred fiber sheep from a friend. I ended up having somewhere around 88 different animals, not including meat chickens. I quickly learned how hard farming truly is. My landlord would often check in on my sheep and give me little pointers here and there for them, but I really did learn a lot of things in those early months the hard way. I lost my first sheep when my son gave it a five gallon bucket full of oats and it ended up dying. It was a $500 vet bill to find out there was nothing she could do. It was raining that day and the sheep died of bloat wrapped in a towel, laying in my lap."

The hardships of farm life didn't deter Amanda however. She stuck with it and continued doing her research and settled her heart on a future that included Icelandic Sheep.

"They (Icelandic Sheep) are a true triple purpose animal (meat, milk and fiber) but they're like the cats of the livestock world, you have to put in the work and earn their love and I in turn love that challenge," Amanda shared.

Icelandic sheep are a breed of Northern European short tail sheep. A mid sized breed, they are very cold-hardy and are commonly used for their meat, wool and even milk. They are traced back to the Norwegian Spelsau sheep that were brought to Iceland a thousand years prior to stock you see today. Through the choice breeding, the animals have adapted to harsh climates and are notably efficient herbivores.

According to the Icelandic Sheep Breeders of North America website, "Due to their large rumens, and the selective pressures of their history in Iceland, the breed is feed efficient. The animals are cold hardy and have a strong reactive immune system. The sheep have evolved over 1,100 years under difficult farming conditions in Iceland, with a resultant sturdy and efficient constitution. A defining quality of the Icelandic breed is the ability to survive on pasture and browse. Historically, Iceland is not a grain producing country due to the climate and the breed has survived through its thousand year history on pasture and hay."

Icelandic sheep tend to spread out and make good use of pastures. It is noted that they are "good browsers and seem to enjoy eating brush and wild grasses."

According to Oaklahoma State University "The breed is famous for its wool around world, but in Iceland it is bred almost exclusively for meat. Lambs grow fairly fast on good pasture and should reach 80-10 pounds in four to five months. In Iceland, they are not fed any extra grain and are slaughtered straight off mountain pastures."

In addition to their fast growth rate and beloved fleece, Icelandic sheep are also very prolific in their fertility. Twin lambs are considered the norm with this breed with triplets and quads not unusual. To top it off, they are also known to be fantastic mothers with a shorter gestation than some.

"I sought out these sheep after doing a lot of research and drove to Lodi to get my first four," Amanda recalled. "But right away I found myself struggling with them realizing when I got home that they were all very sick." The sheep, Amanda later discovered after two had died, were loaded with liver flukes and coccidia, fatal parasites.

"They had a low chance of survival, but they made it. I had a short time to learn a lot about veterinary care for my sheep."

Around the time that her first Icelandic Sheep came into her life, so did her now husband Ben.

Although the pair had known each other for many years previous, sharing a common goal of raising their children on a farm brought them closer than ever before.

Soon, Ben too left the city life in Manhattan and got back to his roots in the Driftless. Growing up on a farm in Sacramento and later in rural Liberty Pole, coming back to Soldiers Grove and joining Amanda felt like home.

"I would call him when he still lived in New York to vent about my farm struggles because I knew he'd understand," Amanda recalled with a smile. "Ben had come home to visit his dad and we were able to be together in person. It wasn't long after that he moved back for good. He made it clear that we had the same goals. He moved back and helped me in so many ways."

Although the pair shared the dream of homesteading and farming, renting wasn't for them.

"We decided to move into town into a home Ben owned so we would be able to focus on finding a property to buy," Amanda explained. "It was a really hard decision for me to part with my sheep and other animals, but my friend John Cruz stepped up and he took all of my animals for me and wouldn't accept a dime for their care for the 18 months he had them. I was able to take a few chickens to live in town with us but John stepping in really allowed me to bookmark my dream and come back to it when we found the right home for them."

Amanda shared that during this time John also taught her hands on butchering skills she would continue to use this day.

Around this time, Amanda also met her mentor, Bonnie Wideman.

"Bonnie is really important to me," Amanda said, as she gestured to a photo of her hanging on her wall. "But you wouldn't know it if you saw our first meeting," she continued with a hardy laugh. "I was really getting into raising sheep and a lot of people were telling me 'You should talk to Bonnie' when it came to sheep. I was introduced to her at a party and told her I was pursuing Icelandic Sheep and she said to me "why would you want Icelandic Sheep?" and turned to talk to someone else. But later, she responded to a post I had made on Facebook about needing help my sheep. She came out to John's house where my sheep were staying while we were in the process of finding our new farm, and taught me how to shear them in a milking parlor. We kept in touch, and shortly after Ben and I were married and my son Forest was born, she invited me out to do some work on sheep skins. It retrospect it felt like it was a test, to see if I was really on board with the full life of raising sheep. But it became more than that. I shared my whole life story, some of the deepest secrets I never told anyone. We truly bonded and she became like my sheep fairy godmother."

After their bonding experience, Bonnie asked Amanda to bring her animals to her home, where she would be able to be with them a little more often in more of an apprenticeship style role under the seasoned shepherdess.

"It was like a traveling circus of my animals bringing them from my friend John's house to Bonnie's farm," Amanda recalled. "But having them there, she was able to teach me all about raising my animals organically like I had always wanted to. She taught me everything and really inspired me and helped me to feel empowered. Having the farming, homesteading and Icelandic Sheep community around me, to influence me and embrace me really helped set the tone for where I'm at today. A lot of people have been really patient with me dealing with questions about my animals, and I am so thankful for everyone who brought me up to speed on this life. There are still so many people, especially in the sheep world who are my friends and mentors, who never hesitate to answer my questions day or night when I am struggling."

Although Amanda will readily admit her husband doesn't share her love for Icelandic sheep, his love for his wife, strong desire to rear children in a farm centered life, and value in high quality animal husbandry helped her bring her biggest dream to a reality.

"Ben deserves a lot of credit," Amanda explained. "He made it a mission to make my sheep dreams possible. He worked to seek out the best property we could afford and make sure I, our kids, and my animals could all have the life they deserve. Three days after we moved in I brought my 13 sheep, I bought a heifer, two pigs, a ton of chickens, and I went directly to Tractor Supply and bought a bunch of ducks and more chickens and he just sighed and said 'Okay' and went with it."

After bringing home their menagerie and with a little more experience under her belt, the family and animals began to tackle the neglected property.

"We first went to check out the home in May but didn't move into it until July," Amanda shared. "We didn't get a chance to really explore the terrain initially so when we moved in the grass was six feet tall and we didn't even know we had a whole wetland and creek running through it. We used an electric net fence and had to walk through and stomp down the grass to put in the fence. I did a lot of crying and falling in the creek that summer. I felt like we had bought the wrong property after realizing it was completely fallow for 20 years and there was garbage everywhere. But we stuck to it. We were a funny bunch out there rotating the grazing animals every single day, still crying every day, but eventually laughing and smiling too. We kept with it and everything started to change for the better."

After all of her years struggling and working hard to get by, Amanda received one of the greatest delights a farmer can experience.

"We had a first live lamb born on our farm early last spring," Amanda recalled. "It was a huge confidence boost. My ewe was struggling to get the lamb out so I had to assist her. It ended up being a huge ram lamb with gigantic horn buds, that we named Fezzik. It was such a huge reward. "

As the spring turned into

Caldwell | SEE 11A

Caldwell

FROM PAGE 10A

summer, Amanda and her family worked together with their knowledge gained during her whirlwind few years and trials by fire in farming life to help rehab her property further.

"Our second year here with rotating the sheep was amazing, and I started to realize that It's not all full of struggle. I watched our pastures transform and develop a lot of biodiversity from rotational grazing. I saw so many new beneficial plants growing. It became such a delight to walk out there in the summer and find new and exciting growth. It continues to be really satisfying and makes me so excited for all of our years to come. I am looking forward to things becoming a place where we can all be together more and I can continue to learn from other farmers about different ways to continue to be a good steward to our land and animals. I am really proud of how far I've come through. We don't buy any meat from the store," Amanda explained. "We have been able to raise or barter for much of what we eat, and have cut our grocery bill by 75 percent. I hope to be able to make the transition more from only feeding our family to also making a profit and providing high quality pastured meat to others."

Currently, Amanda and her husband are able to raise hundreds of pastured meat chickens for sale directly from their farm as Wisconsin law allows less than 1000 birds to be raised and processed on a farmer's own home for sale.

In the future, Amanda hopes to also expand on her pastured pork operation offering rare breed Kune Kune pork raised on pasture for sale to others.

However, due to some legality hurdles with processing, she does not plan to offer her lambs and ewes for sale as a finished meat product at this time.

Wisconsin law requires livestock like lambs and other large livestock be inspected in a facility if for sale, but many farmers like Amanda stick to home processing for their own family due to the connection they have with their animals.

"I'm very particular about how my sheep die," Amanda explained. "I do all of the dispatching of them myself. It's almost like a ritual. When I dispatch them I hold them and I pet them and I make sure they're calm and relaxed. I don't dispatch them until it seems like they are ready, and then I thank them for their sacrifice for our family and complete the job. I save every pelt, and skull and make sure nothing goes to waste, I have a deep love for these animals and I want to make sure they are respected. I've had a really hard time letting go of these parts of my sheep but I'm starting to sell more pelts and skulls and working towards my dreams of making a profit for my family."

As the day wore on, Amanda took time to step out into the sunny afternoon and visit her flock.

As a cool March breeze blew, several round bellied sheep with a look of suspicion in their eyes milled around their dry winter paddock as she gently called to them.

Cautiously, the pregnant ewes slowly approached their shepherdess, with one allowing her to gently offer her affection.

"Do you see that one!" Amanda said softly, but full of excitement, "She's going to lamb any day now! This is why It takes me so long to do chores. I come out here just to feed them and end up staring at them for an hour, hoping they'll start to lamb. But once it happens, they will all start to come fast, and I'm really looking forward to the new life on the farm."

In addition to greeting the new lambs on the farm, as time goes on the Caldwells are looking forward to developing their gardens and cultivating their food forest with help from Ben's dad Robert who is staying with them for the summer to continue to help achieve their goals of being conscious stewards of their land.

The family welcomed their fifth son in January. However, having many little hands and feet on the farm to take care of in addition to the livestock has not slowed the dreams of Amanda and Ben. Rather, it seems to have enhanced their goals of creating a better landscape for their children to experience as they grow as well as sharing what they've learned with others.

"Our long term goals are to have a very diversified permaculture farm that offers seasonal speciality fruits, herbs and other produce in addition to Icelandic breeding stock, sheepskin rugs, hide tanning classes, pastured pork for sale as well as focusing more on breeding pilgrim geese, another love of mine. And of course surviving season three on this land of a family of seven now."

Although we've all endured a year apart, an exciting future dawns on the horizon and examining stories like the Caldwells truly speaks to how much we can accomplish when we work together to share our knowledge especially when it comes to cultivating the land and the love of farming.

Amanda Caldwell started her farming dream with the goal of a few chickens on a couple of acres. It turned out to be so much more, as she shares with her son, Finley.




Best of both worlds?

Livingston firm creates beef, plant-based blended burger

BY DAVID TIMMERMAN
NEWSEDITOR@TDS.NET

The meat industry seems to be in a state of what we call a burger. On one side, a number of companies are spending billions of dollars to create plant-based substances trying to emulate and replace the traditional animal-based burger, while on another side there are moves to try and define the burger as only coming from the center.

But is there another way, one that blends the two worlds together to provide what different consumers want?

The Biddick family, which has been in southwest Wisconsin for six generations, thinks they may have come up with the perfect mix with their new Trelay burger and sausage line.

"There is the trend, that non-beef burgers is taking off," said Jason Biddick, the sixth generation of the family to be in this corner of the state, who after emigrating from Cornwall, took one generation to switch from being miners to farmers.

"We are not trying to do one or another, we are trying to do both," Jason said.

Jason said that his parents, Brad and Peggy, spent a year working on the recipe for the burger blend, which is 70 percent lean beef mixed with kidney beans, quinoa, popcorn, and almonds.

"It has been fun to see how Brad and Peggy created the recipe, in their own farm kitchen, and put it together," noted Theresa Sander, Human Resources.

"There was a lot of trial and error," Jason said of the process. "The first batch was good, but we leaned how to handle it better....What blends well, how does it taste."

"We were trying to find what tasted as close to beef as possible, but still had the health benefits," Jason continued.

The burger blend is under the Trelay Land and Cattle Co. name, which is one that has a significance for the family. That was the name given to the family farm first operated by Jason's great grandparents, Elmer and Ada, who started the seed business in 1906. Trelay is a saying from Cornwall which means "from the place of a grove of trees."

The family has used that for the farm, as well a line of seed that was later sold to Monsanto.

With the burger blend, the name is revived.

"It is pretty neat, a full circle for the brand," Jason said.

They partnered with Prem Meats of Spring Green, which does the processing and packaging for the meat line, which currently includes burger patties, burger, and summer sausage (they are currently working on a jerky as well).

They began selling the burger blend this past November. The rollout is small, with Mills Market, Prem Meats store in Spring Green, as well as the Biddick office in Livingston selling the burger.

For them, this retail sales is a bit of a change. They mainly had been selling their beef to processors, with some of it given to their employees, and a few being sold in halves and quarters directly to people.

However they noticed a change this past year, where more people wanted to know where their food was coming from directly.

Sander recalls what it was like when the first batches went out for resale.

"To me, when we took it to Mills Market the first time, it was that excitement, that initial excitement...you have this child, and you are sending it out into the world," she said.

Jason said that some signage and word-of-mouth is all that they have done to promote the product. They are currently being spotlighted at Community First Bank this month, as well.

"We are trying to see how far this one can go," Jason said. "There are a lot of people trying to figure out the meat market right now - a lot of people are trying to do a lot of things. We are trying to grow it, not too fast, we want people to keep coming back."

Seeing a change in the market and diversifying is something Jason said his father and grandfather, Roger, found themselves forced to do in the 1980s, when the PIC program began. The PIC program was one that paid farmers to take crop ground out of production for a year, which for those selling seed corn, meant a reduction of customers.

That led to the first 25 acres of their land being turned to popcorn production, which led to Rural Route 1 Popcorn, now 3,000 acres.

So back to the burger. It is still early in the sales, so not one product is in higher demand than the other, but they are focusing on the patties, which Sander notes cook up fast and don't have the grease like a 100-percent beef patty.

The distinctive hexagon shape should be cooked at a lower heat because it can dry out faster due to that lack of grease.

It cooks up in about two-thirds the time of a normal beef patty (defrosts faster as well).

TOP - Jason Biddick shows off the current lineup of Trelay beef blend products, which include burger, burger patties, and summer sausage. The burger blend is 70 percent beef, with 30 percent being made up of plant-based items. ABOVE - The staff of Biddick in a recent photo. The Livingston firm was started by Biddick's great Grandfather in 1906.

John and Lori Latham are looking forward to retirement and doing some traveling after they finish selling their dairy herd after nearly 40 years of farming.

Historic farm is coming to end

Was once owned by WI Governor John Blaine

BY DAVID KRIER
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"Times have really changed."

So says John Latham as he sells off his herd and prepares to retire after nearly 40 years of dairy farming. It's a bittersweet moment for John and his wife, Lori, who raised two sons and countless memories on the historic farm that was owned by Governor John Blaine and his partner Henry Austin in the 1920's and 1930's.

Austin was later gored to death by a bull, "probably in the same pen my dad found me in trying to pet the bull," John recalls. "That was the end of the bulls."

"Talk about the land transactions," says John as he pages through the farm's abstract. "Here's a woman named Wealthy Jane Wisdom, who owned it in the early 1900's.

In 1938, the farm was purchased by Harold and Emma Tuffley, who were nationally recognized Holstein breeders in the 1940's.

"They had quite the sale in the 1950's," says John.

John's parents, Everett and Anna Mae Latham, purchased the 350-acre farm on Aug. 28, 1959. At the time they had 20-30 cows.

"It didn't take so many acres or cows to support a family back then," says John.

After graduating from Boscobel High School and receiving the Kronshage Scholarship, John attended the University of Wisconsin-Madison, graduating with a degree in agricultural education in 1982. However, he discovered too late that he wasn't cut out for teaching and in 1984 his life took a turn when his brother was severely injured in a car accident. John returned home to help his parents with the farm and never left.

Latham | SEE 8B

Unique breed of cattle lures couple into hobby farming

BY CORRENE MARTIN
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The sign at the base of the driveway says "Highlander Heaven."

On the hilltops of Todd and Deanna Haberichter's Scottish Highland farm near Bagley, about 25 shaggy-haired, long-horned cattle graze peacefully in the pasture amid views of the Mississippi River and the rolling hills of the countryside.

The Haberichters have raised this unique breed of Highland cattle for 10 years, following in the footsteps of their mentors and former farm owners, the late J. Hans and Barbara Kostrau.

"Al Mann had the farm first. He sold it to Hans and Barbara (in 1984) with the understanding that it would always remain a working farm," Deanna said, proudly sharing that they intend to keep it that way.

Todd was introduced to the Kostraus and Scottish Highlanders in high school when he and his brother, Troy, helped on the farm. It wasn't until he married Deanna and they got to know the retired German couple more personally that they decided to swap living in the village of Bagley for a life on the farm.

A decade ago, upon encouragement from the Kostraus, Todd and Deanna started their own herd with just a trio of Highlanders they got from a couple private dealers. They bought some equipment that supported what Hans and Barbara already had. Then, they raised the beautiful animals together for several years before purchasing the 109 acres (about 40 tillable)in 2013 and moving onto the Ready Hollow property.

"We took baby steps. We bought the equipment before we bought the farm," Todd said, laughing about how they embarked on this mid-life adventure. "It was [the Kostraus] who really gave us the opportunity."

Deanna is in her 26th year of working as an accountant at Casino Queen in Marquette. She grew up in Monona, Iowa, around Holsteins that her grandparents raised on their farm. Todd has put in 23 years as an employee for Waste Management and grew up in the town of Bagley.

The Haberichters are truly in their element these days, raising and selling Scottish Highlanders. Their herd of 25 is pretty large for a hobby farm, according to Deanna. The Kostraus averaged about 38 of the animals.

"An average herd is about six head," Todd noted. "A lot of people buy them as pets."

"Because they're like teddy bears," Deanna smiled.

Highland cattle were historically raised for meat. In Scotland, small farmers kept them as house cows to produce milk as well. They have an unusual double coat of hair, according to Todd, which makes them tolerant of rain, wind and even sunny heat in the highlands. Their long, wide horns can dig through the snow to find food. Their skill in foraging allows them to graze and eat plants that other cattle would pass by.

Todd explained that raising the breed is pretty low maintenance and easier than nearly any other breed out there.

"All they are is grass fed. We just give them hay and water," he said of the docile breed. "They're very rugged. They clear your pasture of weeds. They won't go under shelter; they like being out in the elements."

In general, Highlanders are good-natured animals, though they are quite protective of their young. Their average lifespan is 15-20 years.

Deanna added, they're easy on the fences and they don't wander too far either.

"Every day, we go up and count them to make sure they're all there and check on their health," she said.

The Haberichters leave their bull with the herd all year long. "That's what Hans did," Todd said. They're able to do this because, upon choosing a different bull every couple years, they carefully select one that they can walk right up to.

Todd pointed out that this means they have calves throughout the year.

Todd and Deanna sell the calves when they're about 3 months old and have used Craigslist or Facebook to do so. New and repeat buyers come from all over the tri-states—as far as central Illinois, Rochester and Green Bay—to get one of their Highlanders, mainly for their temperament and ease in taming. They have had nearly all of the seven different colors the breed can produce, including red, brindle, yellow, white, silver, black and dun (light brown).

Todd said, every few years, they buy a couple new females to bring different genetics into their fold. They usually purchase the cattle from sellers three to four hours away to ensure new blood.

They could butcher and sell the cattle as grass fed beef, which is in high demand, especially in the cities, because they feed them no hormones and give them no shots. However, the Haberichters haven't gone through the certification process to do that. Todd said he isn't sure they will, as they always sell their Highlanders quickly to customers looking to add to a herd or get one as a pet.

Of course, like any business, some years are better than others.

Haberichter | SEE 9B

Todd and Deanna Harberichter raise a unique breed of Highland cattle on their farm near Bagley.

Compost before you spread

BY DAWN KIEFER
EDITOR@RICHLANDOBSERVER.COM

There once was a time when many dairy farmers had to haul manure every day, even during the worst part of winter. However, over time, composting innovations have removed that burden as well as reduced environmental impacts.

Composting manure is not a new concept, but a Richland County native offers custom manure composting and installs on-farm composting systems for operations of all sizes.

Jason Fuller, son of Dennis and Janet Fuller of the Loyd area, owns and operates the Middleton-based company called Carbon Cycle Consulting. He states that many dairy farmers have experienced frustration managing manure and no-tilling. Each day many have had to haul manure even when fields are too wet, which causes compaction and rutting. Fuller realizes that, when a farmer no tills into packed soil, the crop will be uneven and inconsistent. Additionally, freshly applied manure also poses risks of getting carried by runoff, which leaches volatile nutrients into waterways. Thus, dewatering technology and composting are being recognized as viable solutions.

Composting manure allows for consistent spreading when the soil is dry enough to sustain the load and not get compacted. Composted manure nutrients are more accessible to plants because the nutrients have already been digested. Eliminating liquid manure spreading also does away with unpleasant odor.

Fuller says, "Volume reduction comes about as a natural part of the composting process, resulting in a clean end product that is free of pathogens and odor. It can be used for animal bedding or as a stable, non-volatile fertilizer."

Fuller's innovations include customizing manure formulations based on a particular operation's needs. This could include adding humates, calcite and other micronutrients into a product he dubbed Active Carbon, which is a biological fertilizer marketed with an agreement he has with a company called Dimon T Ag. Active Carbon has been applied for 12 years in 13 states on more than two million acres.

Fuller also makes a pelleted form of compost that will result in easier handling.

He says that the compost process begins by creating what he terms either an evaporation or loading lane. This could consist of pen pack bedding -- combined solid and liquid manure with carbon materials that could include corn fodder, leaves and straw. Fuller says, "An aerobic biological process begins. For every ton of particulate, the fuel source that grows the biology, six tons of water is evaporated out. It's a very efficient process, because there's no need to purchase fuel to keep the exothermic process going. It's fueled by the carbon in the waste stream."

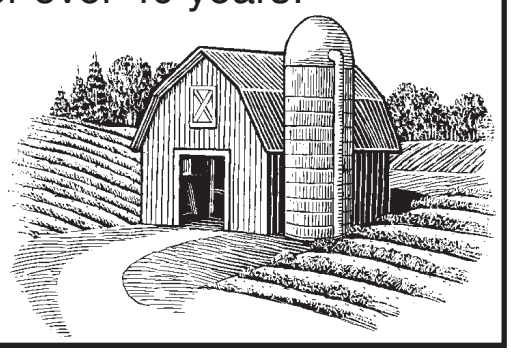
The most time-consuming aspect of the process is the need to turn the manure every few days to maintain the aerobic properties. To decrease that chore Fuller has developed a forced-air system that eliminates the need for turning, which speeds up normal decomposition and results in a finished product in around eight weeks. Fuller says, "Because we've used both the solid and liquid waste streams at the same time, we're seeing about a 70-80 percent overall volume reduction."

His methods provide a logistical benefit, in that less product is taken from the farm to various fields. Also, because farm sizes are greatly increasing in tandem with mounting governmental regulations, his product is getting moved further and further away.

He notes, too, that there are economic benefits. "Since 1,000 gallons of liquid manure has about $15 worth of fertilizer value, 5,500 gallons of liquid manure on a semi tanker is worth around $90 as fertilizer. Some compost is selling for $200-$300 a ton, but we're more conservative on our pricing; more like $80 per ton of compost. A semi load hauling 24 tons of compost is valued around $2,000 -- much higher than liquid manure. But, of even more importance is that one load of compost covers about 24 acres, while you would need about 20,000 gallons of liquid manure per acre -- about three to four truckloads per acre."

In addition to the logistical and economic benefits, Fuller notes that the composted product is superior from the standpoint of nutrients. He says that the compost has already been converted into an insoluble plant-available substance. "The reason why this is important is because the water-soluble form of these nutrients is volatile, allowing it to be released into the water and atmosphere," he says. "The composted product is stable, so it can be applied to living crops without doing any damage. But the greatest profitability is derived from having

Compost | SEE 9B



Peter and Christina Winch at their rural Fennimore farm.
Photo courtesy of the Wisconsin Farm Bureau

"In three months it will..."

Farmers deal with market volatility

BY MATT JOHNSON
TIMESEDITOR@TDS.NET

Volatility in commodity prices and the necessity to deal with the price drop associated with the COVID-19 pandemic left dairy farmers without a consistent way to judge the return on their product in 2020.

The one sure way to judge success, however, is when looking at the bank balance. Too often in the dairy industry it costs more to produce a hundredweight of milk than the price it brings on the market.

"It seems like everything is supposed to get better in three months, but then when that three months gets here, nothing has changed," Peter Winch, President of the Grant County chapter of the Wisconsin Farm Bureau Federation said. "It's been this way for a long time. I wish I could say there's light at the end of the tunnel, but there's not.

"I don't know what will be left in the next five to 20 years," Winch continued. "Farmers are considered 'the eternal optimist,' but there are more and more factors when it comes to budgeting that are out of a farmer's control."

Winch and his wife, Christina, have three children and a herd of 240 dairy cows on their rural Fennimore farm. The Winches are unique in that their herd includes Dutch Belted cattle.

The Winch farm has done much over the years to increase productivity, including using the latest technology to track nutrition and production.

Despite their hard work and preparation, there are situations that nobody can predict — like a global pandemic.

In 2020, the year started with milk priced just above where a dairy farmer could break even — at $19 per hundredweight.

Then after the first quarter with the COVID-19 pandemic in full force, milk prices fell to $10 per hundredweight. That 50 percent decrease basically destroyed the hope of profitability for the year.

Since that time there has been a bounce back in price to between $16-$17 per hundredweight. Farmers of all types have been helped

Winches | SEE 10B

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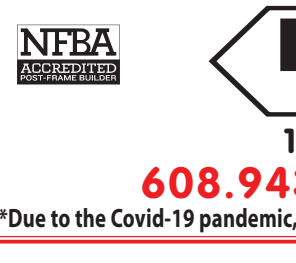

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"At Bytec, we are committed to strict adherence to all DNR regulations and industry best practices," said Steve Byrne, president of Bytec.

For generations, the Byrne family has been synonymous with agriculture in southern Wisconsin, from family farming to agri-business. Bytec is still a family-owned and operated company that understands the unique needs of Wisconsin producers and growers.

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COVID and ag, one year later

No matter what is happening in the world, people still eat

BY STEVE PRESTEGARD
EDITOR@THEPLATTEVILLEJOURNAL.COM

One year ago, opinions of how 2020 would turn out for agriculture ranged from unclear to potentially terrifying.

The COVID-19 pandemic, which began affecting the lives of everyone in mid-March, raised the specter of farmers, farm employees, veterinarians, milk truck drivers and others in the ag supply chain either too sick to work, or working while sick and contagious.

Schools closed throughout Wisconsin by state government order and therefore not purchasing milk for school lunches caused milk prices to sink. That was after a year of price progress following a half-decade of low milk prices.

"We have entered unprecedented times as a society," said Joe Bragger, president of the Wisconsin Farm Bureau Federation. "Our farmers, especially our dairy farmers, are being served a big dose of the sad reality we are living in with the COVID-19 pandemic. With depressed prices the last five years, our farmers were already stressed financially. The confirmed reports of milk dumping and processors asking farmers to cut back their production has only amplified the pressure."

"The products we produce truly are a necessity of life," said Kevin Bernhardt, a UW–Platteville School of Agriculture professor and UW–Extension farm management specialist, one year ago. "We have to keep the ag industry going." While the statement about ag necessity has been said "sort of tongue-in-cheek, that statement has become a reality right now."

One year later, what happened?

"The expectation in the very beginning was uncertainty and chaos," said Bernhardt. "Frankly, no one really knew what would happen (the last pandemic was 100 years ago). However, we do know that markets don't like uncertainty and chaos and tend to go whacko and that certainly happened.

"Another big thing that happened was the impact on supply chains. Prior to the pandemic, supply chains were well-oiled and efficient machines. Supply chains had taken advantage of specialization to eke out additional nickels and dimes of efficiency, which, of course was also enjoyed by consumers in lower prices.

"The pandemic and whole shut-downs of parts of our economy and stay-at-home orders through a huge wrench into the middle of that machinery. Virtually overnight, a whole consumer segment of the food industry shut down (restaurants and cafeterias). The supply chains that supplied that segment lost their customers, but because of specialization, many could not easily switch to some other customer, because their machinery, production lines, processes, labor, etc. was all developed for that one specialized customer.

"On the other hand, those supply chains that served the grocery industry exploded with new demand because everyone was suddenly buying groceries again. Demand for products changed overnight, but the ability to supply that chain took time to catch up. That said, I always find it amazing how quickly an economy can react to an economic incentive. The industry reacted, found new outlets, etc. Yes, some milk was dumped, but the amount dumped was not near as much as the early estimates."

The state's two Safer at Home orders shutting down "nonessential" businesses didn't directly affect agriculture-related businesses and grocery stores, which were on the list of "essential" businesses, but they did force restaurants to serve drive-thru or delivery orders only. However, in mid-May the state Supreme Court invalidated the second Safer at Home order, though restaurants didn't begin serving people in their dining rooms until later in the year, and usually with smaller, more spaced-out crowds than before the pandemic.

COVID's spread resulted in closings of several slaughter plants, which prompted the President Donald Trump to sign an executive order April 28 to keep meat and poultry processing plants open.

Commodity prices sank during the first quarter of last year, but milk prices seesawed throughout the year.

"They indeed sunk, came roaring back, sunk again, etc.," said Bernhardt. "Prices were very volatile. On top of this there were huge problems with negative producer price differentials, which is a result of the milk pricing formulas.

"Corn prices had a similar story. The take-away [is] significant volatility, making planning for future production decisions very difficult.

The Class III announced milk price seesawed from $17.05 per hundredweight at the start of 2020 to $12.14 per hundredweight by May, up to $24.54 per hundredweight by July, down to $16.43 per hundredweight by September, up to $23.34 per hundredweight by November, then back to $15.72 per hundredweight by the end of 2020.

COVID | SEE 10B

Latham

FROM PAGE 2B

"I enjoyed it," he says. "I enjoyed milking the cows, but over the years my role has changed, along with the dairy industry."

At the time the farm had 55 cows and John and his parents were the only ones working it, but things were about to change in a big way.

"The state wanted everyone to get bigger," John recalls. "They gave out tax incentives and lent money to expand. There were just lots of incentives to get bigger."

And, like most other Wisconsin dairy farmers, the Lathams expanded.

"We were buying cattle by the hundreds, but most of the herd grew from within," John explains. "We got real efficient with our reproductive system."

Then the bottom fell out of the dairy business.

"The 80's were terrible," John says. "Corn prices went bad. Interest rates went to 16 percent, and a lot of people lost their farms. We also had the worst drought in 1988, which also pushed a lot of people out of the dairy business."

But the Lathams held on and eventually recovered, although farming has always been a risky business.

"Prices were good, then bad, and the cycle continued like that. It's always been a challenge," says John.

One of the biggest challenges dairy farmers face is finding and keeping help. Currently, the Lathams have 13 employees, mainly Nicaraguans, for whom he supplies free housing and a livable wage.

"We haven't had any turnover in five or six years, which is unheard of in the industry," John says. "Some of these guys are tough as nails. They pay income taxes, Social Security and work hard. We've been fortunate in that regard."

They've also been fortunate to have two intelligent, hard working sons, but dairy farming isn't in their future, hence the decision to retire.

Jack is 21 and studying biology at UW-Eau Claire. He hopes to become an optometrist.

Ryan is 23 and graduated from UW-Madison with a degree in finance. He currently works for Ceres Capital Partners, a private investment firm that specializes in commercial real estate.

"We've never pressured them to stay on the farm, and actually, Ryan encouraged John to sell now," Lori says. "He said, 'Why not go out on top of your game instead of going bankrupt?'"

"Not to mention the mental stress of the whole business," adds John, who says one of his biggest challenges in recent years has been the weather.

"Probably for the past 15 years the weather has been a real challenge, it's definitely been a factor," he says. "The amount of rainfall has been overwhelming. For example, in 2019 we had 55 inches of rain; our normal is 32."

A more recent challenge has been former President Trump's tariffs.

"They've been huge," says John. "China quit buying dairy products from the United States and we quit selling to Canada and Mexico, that really hurt. Over a two-year span I had to borrow $250,000 just to pay the bills."

As if those factors weren't enough there were the changing costs put down by processors on producers. The Lathams used to sell their milk to Swiss Valley Farms, but lower premiums and higher trucking costs forced them to switch to Grassland Dairy. Now Grassland's costs have risen as well.

"They started charging us for trucking and cut our quality premiums in half," Lori says. "They charge by the mile, but you can't pick where they process your milk. We're like, 'Why can't you ship it to Meister's in Muscoda instead of someplace like Wausau?'"

So after more than 60 years, Latham Dairy will soon be no more. John and Lori have decided to sell their cows and rent out their land after being unable to find a buyer for the farm. As for the buildings, well, they're not sure.

"Do we really want to live here and watch these buildings fall down around us?" John asks. "That's the plan for now. We've got some ideas, but we'll see. We bought a camper and do plan on doing some traveling. It's been a good run."

John likes to share the statistic that large-scale family farms like his that gross over $1 million annually make up less than 3 percent of all farms but produce 43 percent of all agricultural products.

"We're going out of business not because we want to, but it's time to retire," John says. "We've been successful enough to be able to leave on our own terms."

University of Wisconsin alumnus John Latham ('82) celebrated his alma mater by having a huge version of the "motion W" painted on the side of his Boscobel barn in August 2001, only to lose it to fire a little more than a year later.

Haberichter

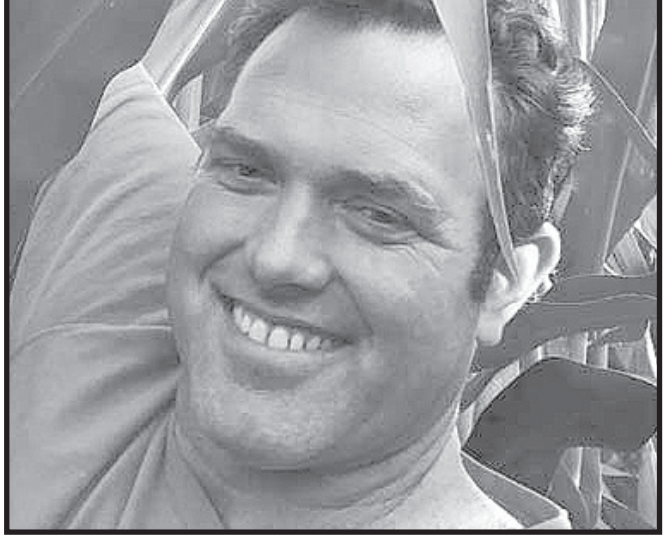
FROM PAGE 3B

"When we first got into this, things were slow. But then about six months after the original groups we had, we started doing well," Todd explained. "We've been pretty fortunate. Everything that's born, we sell."

This past year, during the COVID-19 pandemic, the Haberichters noticed the popularity of their Scottish Highlanders increase all the more. They believe it's due to many people wanting to be self-sustainable during uncertain times by raising their own beef.

This side business has fared well for Todd and Deanna. They hope to keep raising Highland cattle "forever."

Or, as long as, like Deanna says, "People are just gaga for them."



Compost

FROM PAGE 4B

roots and insects working together at building soil. That improves plant health and yields and sequesters carbon. Applying composted nutrients accelerates decomposing and digestion. It's the process of microbial colonies ingesting nutrients, digesting them and excreting them in an altered form that the next species can utilize."

Yet another benefit of composting manure is that a dairy farm can create a secondary marketplace to sell value-added carbon and calcium-based soil amendments to other cash crop producers who do not have access to animal manure.

Carbon Cycle Consulting tailors their service to the individual needs of each farmer, helping to increase the profitability of the dairy farm while protecting the natural resources of the watershed.

Nitrate rules proposal seeks public comment

Most have heard about the drinking water problems in Kewaunee County, where residents have experienced brown water coming out of their taps. This problem with groundwater contami-nation resulted in the Wisconsin legislature enacting 'sensitive area' targeted performance standards for manure runoff in 15 coun-ties on the east side of the state in 2018.

Out of those headlines, a water quality testing effort arose in Grant, Iowa and Lafayette counties – the Southwest Wisconsin Geology and Groundwater (SWIGG) study. Some had suggested that counties in the southern and western parts of the state also had an underlying fractured karst geology, similar to the east-ern part of the state, that could make groundwater more vulnerable to contam-ination.

SWIGG round one results in November 2018 showed 42 percent of wells sampled were contaminated with either nitrate or coliform bacteria. This prompted Representative Robin Vos, Speaker of the Wisconsin State Assembly, to form a Speaker's Task Force on water quality, which held hearings all over the state. The task force made recommendations to the legislature in 2019, and in 2020 those recommendations were considered and passed in the Assembly, but the Senate never took them up.

Also, in 2019, Governor Tony Evers declared the 'Year of Clean Drinking Water.' He directed DATCP, WDNR and the Department of Health Services to collaborate in addressing the widespread problem of nitrate contamination in the state's drinking water. Chris Clayton from WDNR convened a technical advisory committee (TAC) to deter-mine which areas of the state might require more targeted runoff management performance standards than the state's one-size-fits-all rule. The state standards for safe drinking water for ni-trate are 10 milligrams-per-liter or less.

Generally, the TAC's work focused on areas with 'P' soils (porous, like sand); 'R' soils (rocky), and 'W' soils (wet soils). Water quality testing results in databases maintained by WDNR, United States Geological Survey (USGS), and the Center for Watershed Science and Education in Stevens Point were re-viewed.

The basic question were:

• Where in the state are more targeted standards needed?

• What would those standards be?

The TAC met all through 2020, with their work confined to virtual meetings due to the pandemic. Stake-holders from the three agencies and representatives of diverse agricultural sec-tors were invited to partici-pate in the process. The result is proposed targeted runoff performance standards for certain areas of the state.

As part of this effort, the DNR is preparing an economic impact analysis (EIA) for proposed rule WT-19-19 relating to nitrate pollution in groundwater.

The DNR will accept written comments on the EIA from the public until April 10, 2021. A separate public comment period on the rule itself will be held after the EIA is finalized.

To see a copy of the economic impact statement, go to:

https://dnr.wisconsin.gov/sites/default/files/topic/Rules/WT1919FiscalEstimate.pdf

Please submit written comments by email to DNRNR151Revisions@wisconsin.gov or by mail:

Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources, c/o Mike Gilbertson – WT/3 , P.O. Box 7921, Madison, WI 53707.

A separate public comment period on the rule itself will be held after the EIA is finalized, along with a public hearing. WDNR's Chris Clayton estimates that the draft rule will be circulated for public comment in late spring or early summer. It is tentatively scheduled to go before the Natural Resources Board (NRB) in September or October of 2021. From there, it will be sent to the legislature if approved by the NRB. If passed by the legislature, it would be sent to the Governor to be signed into law.

To view a copy of the draft rule, go to:

https://dnr.wisconsin.gov/sites/default/files/topic/Rules/WT1919DraftRule.pdf

Impact explained

At a meeting of the NR-151 TAC on Thursday, March 25, which WDNR team lead Chris Clayton described as "unplanned," a further explanation of the economic impacts of the proposed rule was provided.

According to Clayton, WDNR's draft economic analysis considers the costs for various changes in practices that may result from compliance with the proposed rule requirements over a 10-year implementation period, including:

• Compliance and implementation cost to small business

• Fiscal impact (cost to the state)

• Benefits of implementing the rule

The proposed performance standard for areas to be included in the 'sensitive areas' rule for runoff management aim to keep nitrate levels in private and municipal wells below the federal/state safe drinking water standard of 10 milligrams-per-liter (mg/L).

The proposed standards is to allow less than 2.2 pounds of nitrate per acre per inch of groundwater recharge. Typical rates of groundwater recharge in Wisconsin range from four to eight inches per year on average. State Geologist Ken Bradbury pointed out, though, that depending on the field and the year, recharge rates can vary significantly, and could be greater in wet years and less in dry years.

In addition, a producer's nutrient management plan must account for all sources of nitrogen, including nitrogen applied to fields through irrigation water.

The rule also sets out prohibitions for application of commercial nitrogen fertilizer. Fall restrictions currently apply to Nitrogen Restricted Soils, which account for 72 percent of the entire targeted area. The rule will allow for some exceptions, but no new cost is estimated to come from these exceptions, which are as follows:

• Fall seeded crops – many producers take on this cost to increase soil health and grow a forage crop that can be harvested for feed in the spring

• Fall cover crops in potato rotations to reduce applications of soil fumigants to future potato crops – potato growers take on this cost to gain the benefits of reduced soil fumigants

• Established perennial crops – beef producers and grazers take on this cost to maintain the quality of pasture feed

Liquid manure

The rule also contains prohibitions on application of liquid manure, which applies to a subset of 45 percent of the targeted area. The rule will apply in areas with porous and rocky soils, within 1,000 feet of a community well, and in fields within community wellhead protection areas where testing has shown nitrate levels at 5 mg/L or greater.

The total liquid manure protection area is less than three million acres. Corn acreage is considered for this analysis because it is common in dairy crop rotations, and receives liquid manure applications. These acres account for one of the three million acres. Half of the corn on these acres is grown for ethanol and food additives, and is less likely to receive liquid manure. This means a total of 540,000 acres will be affected by the prohibitions.

In WDNR's economic impact analysis, the assumption is that not all producers will be able to make use of the exceptions (listed below) to manage all manure at their farm within the existing limits of their nutrient management plan.

For this reason, some producers may need to install additional manure storage to comply with the proposed rule. WDNR's analysis assumes the following:

• About 2,500 farms are affected in the liquid manure prohibition area

• Exceptions (listed below) offer low-cost options for managing manure

• Manure storage is the least-cost option to meet the

Nitrate | SEE 12B

Food labeling bill re-introduced into Wisconsin legislation

BY KAYLA BARNES
EDITOR@MYRAJONLINE.COM

A bill authored by Sen. Howard Marklein (R-Spring Green), Rep. Travis Tranel (R-Cuba City) and Rep. Clint Moses (R-Menomonie) about food labeling milk, meat and dairy products was re-introduced on Feb. 5 this year. The proposals passed the Assembly last year but never went to vote in the State Senate due to COVID-19 closing the session early.

Senate bills (SB) 81, 82, and 83 all state that goods like almond milk and plant-based hamburgers cannot market themselves as a milk or meat. Only products that are actually made from milk, meat from a mammal or cheese that is made from milk could market themselves as such.

The "Truth in Labeling" bills are to protect and promote real dairy and meat products to consumers, Sen. Marklein writes.

Sen. Marklein's district, the 17th Senate District, which consists of Grant, Lafayette, Juneau, and Richland along with parts of Iowa, Green, Vernon and Monroe counties, is one of the most agriculture-dependent districts in Wisconsin.

"I consistently hear from farmers who are growing increasingly frustrated with the number of imitation products that are on the market for consumers," Sen. Marklein said. "We want consumers to know the differences between the real, nutritious products grown and made by our farmers versus the fake, lab-grown, plant-based products that are passing for milk, meat, cheese, ice cream and other dairy products in our state. "

Rep. Tranel stated, "Milk is from a cow. Meat is from an animal. Cheese is made from milk. Consumers, farmers and producers deserve clear labeling. Buyers should be able to easily purchase the real food products they intend to purchase. When I select a package of provolone cheese, I shouldn't have to figure out if it is made from real milk or coconut oil and modified starches. I want the real thing."

Several associations such as the Wisconsin Cheese Makers, Wisconsin Corn Growers, Wisconsin Cattleman's, Wisconsin Agri-Buisness and Dairy Business Associations support the bills. The Wisconsin Farm Bureau also submitted testimony to the Wisconsin Senate Committee on Agriculture and Tourism on February 9 in support of the bills.

Constituents from both Tranel and Marklein's districts have shown support for the bills as well.

"They recognize that [these bills] are not a silver-bullet that will solve every problem for our ag-economy, but they are something we can do to protect and promote real agriculture products to consumers," Sen. Marklein said.

The Wisconsin Cheesemakers, Edge Dairy Farmer Cooperative and Dairy Farmers of Wisconsin recently conducted a study to conclude whether consumers know the difference between real cheese and plant-based imitation "cheese". It found that 48% of those surveyed thought the imitation cheese was real cheese.

Why is it important to have these labels on products in the first place? About 90% of Wisconsin's milk goes into making cheese. Without the consumer's knowledge, purchasing imitation cheese could hurt Wisconsin's dairy industry and the economy.

Several states have similar laws in place. SB 81 would only go into effect after at least 10 out of a group of 15 states pass similar legislation by June 30, 2031, to help ease interstate trade concerns and align with the North Carolina and Maryland laws.

SB 83 is modeled after those laws in North Carolina and Maryland. Those states have passed milk labeling laws in the past two years.

Eleven other states including North Dakota and South Dakota have passed laws similar to SB 82. Similar legislation has been introduced in Iowa, Illinois and Indiana.

All three bills have passed the Wisconsin Senate Committee on Agriculture & Tourism. They have also received a public hearing in the Assembly Committee on Agriculture.

Both Tranel and Marklein want the Federal government to enforce these laws to show support for those farmers creating real milk, dairy and meat products in Wisconsin.

COVID

FROM PAGE 7B

The difference, according to Bernhardt, between $12.14 per hundredweight to $24.54 per hundredweight, based on 100 cows producing 25,000 pounds of milk per yeaer, is $25,288 in gross profit in May and $51,117 in gross profit in July.

As of March 3, the February Class III milk price was $15.75 per hundredweight, down 29 cents from January and down $1.25 from one year ago.

As things turned out, the drop in use of milk for school lunches may have been balanced by a jump in milk purchases for homes with children staying home.

"Fluid milk demand had been eroding for several years in general," said Benhardt. "Fluid milk to schools represents about 7% of milk demand and it definitely took a hit in 2020. However, when the stay at home happened, fluid milk was flying off the shelves, demand increased for awhile. By the end of the year, demand settled back to its decreasing pattern.

"Another big plus this year though was the Farmers to Families Food Box Program which provided dairy products and fluid milk through well over a million food boxes."

Predictions of widespread illness on farmers, farm workers, milk truck drivers and veterinarians appear to have largely not come true.

"There were places where there were significant impacts, but not so much industry-wide," said Bernhardt. "Meat packing plants had some tough times due to close working proximity, etc. However, cheese plants and other food mfg places seemed to not be hit too hard. One reason may be that they were already used to masking up, so to speak, and the extra precautions were easier to accommodate. Same with farms. I did not hear of wide-spread problems, but I'm sure there were isolated situations."

Farmers were able to benefit from such government programs as Paycheck Protection Program loans for companies to make payrolls despite lost business.

Bernhardt said the programs "Helped big time. Around 40–42 percent of net farm income in 2020 was from government programs, a major chunk of that being from the COVID relief programs — PPP, [Coronavirus Food Assistance Program] and Food Box Program were some major ones."

Despite COVID's effects, last year was a surprisingly good year for ag, according to federal ag officials.

The U.S. Department of Agriculture's February Agricultural Outlook Forum — which, like most meetings last year, was held online — reported record red meat, pork and poultry production in 2020, despite a 34-percent drop in weekly beef and pork production at the height of the pandemic.

Beef and pork production are expected to increase 1.4 percent this year, and yet prices are expected to also increase due to increasing demand. Exports also are expected to increase in every major commodity group, including grains and feeds, livestock, dairy, poultry, horticultural products and seeds.

One change benefitting farmers in a state where 57 percent of Wisconsin's soybeans, one-sixth of its milk are exported, and ginseng is a major export crop may be different trade policies with the change in presidential administrations. Despite continuing tariffs enacted by the Trump administration, China is expected to be the U.S.' largest agricultural market, and trade is expected to be even or higher in every part of the U.S. according to the Agricultural Outlook Forum.

One looming potential dark cloud for ag this year is energy prices, which were depressed because of the slumping economy last year. Retail diesel fuel prices in the U.S. dropped from an average $2.91 per gallon in February 2020 to $2.39 per gallon in May and October. However, diesel grew to $2.85 per gallon in February as the economy improved, but production of diesel and gasoline didn't increase proportionally.

As of the end of March, 576,000 Wisconsinites tested positive for COVID, about one-fifth of those who were tested at least once. More than 27,000 Wisconsinites were hospitalized, almost 5 percent of those who tested positive. And 6,600 Wisconsinites died — 24 percent of those hospitalized, and 1.1 percent of those who tested positive. Of those who tested positive, 563,000 recovered, and the number of active cases — people sick for up to 30 days — is at almost 6,700. The state Department of Health Services reported that 1 million Wisconsinites had received at least one dose of COVID vaccine by the last week of March.

What was learned from the pandemic, which is not over despite more than 1 million vaccinations in Wisconsin?

"I sense that the lessons learned will be the topic of thesis papers and dissertation for a long time," said Bernhardt. "One lesson was certainly the risk in our supply chains. What we will learn from that risk, how things will or will not change is hard to tell. Will the economic incentive of specialization take us back to the course we were on, or will the value of diversification as a risk management strategy elicit change in how business is done — I suspect some folks much smarter that me will figure out a way to do both. For example, I wonder if the supply chain will continue the march towards specialization, but align with other firms in ways that help protect their risk. Who knows?

"The other, sort of related, lesson is that the ag industry is unique in that no matter what is happening in the world, people still eat. Where they eat, how they eat, etc., may change, but they still eat."

Winches

FROM PAGE 5B

by government programs to mitigate some losses.

The price, however, continues to be below sustainability.

Dairy farmers who buy commodities of all types to help round out their feed rations have heard more bad

News. Feed prices are predicted to climb with corn moving from $4.75 per bushel to perhaps $6 per bushel by mid-summer.

Winch produces a significant amount of his own feed by growing 150 acres of corn silage. His ration mix, however, includes purchased commodities including corn and soybeans.

"When buying we look at what the local price is, but that's driven by the global price," Winch said. "Now we have China buying more corn than ever and it's impacting prices."

In January, the U.S. Department of Agriculture reported that China bought approximately 4 million tons of corn from U.S. growers. That raises corn prices, which is good for cash-crop growers. On the other end of the spectrum, United States farmers buying feed saw their costs increase.

Winch said farmers have to be flexible in what they can buy. Not only are corn prices higher, but soybean prices are expected to increase by $150 a ton.

A spring and summer of good weather could make things easier if the pasture land is covered by lush forage.

Much like every farmer, the eternal optimist, at this point they'll take every advantage that comes their way.

Stream

FROM PAGE 4A

protect and maintain water quality."

Established in 1996, the Water Action Volunteers program supports more than 600 citizen water quality monitors across Wisconsin.

Bruce Ristow said he and Sue use instruments on loan from the DNR and obtained by the Valley Stewardship Network to measure water temperature, clarity, dissolved oxygen, phosphorus, nitrates and nitrites in the stream. High amounts of diss olved oxygen in the water shows that there is not much pollution, said Bruce, who noted that he and Sue have been able to establish a baseline with their portion of Tainter Creek after 10 years of monitoring. "The water quality has been pretty consistent," he said.

Bruce also noted that high water quality leads to a healthy trout population. Tainter Creek is a Class I trout stream that has wild trout and doesn't need any stocking.

Bruce said he and Sue monitor Tainter Creek seven months of the year on the 20th of each month. They monitor the creek on their farm and also at its mouth where it flows into the Kickapoo River. Phosphorus samples are sent to the Valley Stewardship Network. Monitoring results are also given to the DNR. "We're trying to get people to cut down on phosphorus," said Bruce.

Bruce and Sue use rotational grazing in an effort to maintain and improve water quality in Tainter Creek. Bruce said they use five different paddocks of land, with the cattle being in any one paddock for not more than 35 days. In this way, the cattle are not in the creek as often, said Bruce who noted that it gives the water time to recover.

Bruce also said they have three hay fields which are cut once in late June. The hay fields then fit in with the rotational grazing plan.

Rotational grazing is much healthier and allows the grasses to recover. Bruce said he and Sue have regenerative fields. Also, they use no fertilizer or pesticides. In addition, they don't need to buy seed because the grasses "go to seed" and the seed goes into the soil.

Another benefit involves giant red clover which is amongst the grasses. Giant red clover attracts important pollinators such as bees. The thick grasses also attract lots of grasshoppers that Bruce says have been in decline in various areas.

Grass is also better than alfalfa for protecting streams against runoff due to heavy rains and flooding, said Bruce. Runoff is one of the top sources of stream pollution.

"The grass filters the runoff," he said. "It's unreal, when we get a heavy rain or a flood, we get more soil than we lose. We're getting topsoil for free."

Bruce said he likes to help educate other farmers about the benefits of high quality water and grasses, along with rotational grazing. "The research has shown that beef cattle grow better with good quality water and grasses, along with good genetics," he said. "It's a beautiful way to farm. With healthy soil, you get healthy plants, healthy cattle and healthy people."

The Importance of Agriculture Education

BY JULIA NUNES

ALICE IN DAIRYLAND

As Alice in Dairyland, I work in the unique space of agriculture between farmers and consumers. Consumers are becoming more interested in where their food comes from, while producers are increasingly concerned about where and how they will share their message.

This year, National Agriculture Week is celebrated March 21 – 27. It is a time for producers, agricultural companies, schools, government agencies, and countless others across the United States to recognize and celebrate the abundance provided by our nation's agriculture community. This is the perfect opportunity to highlight something that is critical to the future of agriculture – agriculture education.

I'm often asked questions like, "What are you doing to connect with school-aged children?" or "How do we keep the next generation interested in careers within agriculture?" In today's world, the average person is growing further removed from the farm, finding a workforce that has a background or interest in agriculture is certainly a challenge. However, the word "agriculture" in relation to future careers has evolved over the decades to encompass many opportunities for the next generation. Journalism, engineering, pharmaceuticals and medicine, marketing, and computer science are all vital threads in agriculture.

Today, Wisconsin has over 435,000 jobs that are related to the agriculture industry, which has an economic impact of over $104.8 billion on our state. With a generation that is further removed from production agriculture than ever before, we need to reintroduce agriculture into their lives in a way that captivates while providing context. So, the question becomes, how do we meet the future generations where they are at and open their eyes to the endless possibilities?

We need to continue providing opportunities to experience it first-hand. By incorporating a broad range of skills into these activities that require the use of technology, teamwork, and problem-solving, agriculture can become a relevant career for anyone.

Growing up on a dairy farm, I was already exposed to one of the many areas of agriculture, but it wasn't until I started to learn about agriculture that I truly began to treasure my upbringing. Joining ag-focused organizations, such as 4-H, taught me more about areas of agriculture that I was unfamiliar with and how much they provide to their communities. Agriculture education in school is vital to future generations and sheds light on an industry that provides fuel, food, and fiber to many communities.

Incorporating active learning into classrooms is increasingly important, and organizations out of the classroom, such as FFA and 4-H, are integral in inspiring future generations. If we provide engaging and interactive agricultural education, future generations will provide the innovation, creativity, and inspiration that will keep our agriculture industry thriving.

Nitrate

FROM PAGE 5B

prohibition at 200 farms (eight percent of the targeted area)

• Estimated cost to build a concrete lined manure storage structure is $500 per animal unit for the average sized dairy farm in Wisconsin, with the farmer paying $30,000 of the total cost, and cost share paying $70,000

• The total cost to producers over the 10-year implementation period would be $6 million

Liquid manure exceptions

The three exceptions available to producers in managing liquid manure are as follows:

• Application for the establishment of fall seeded crops. It is assumed that most producers will plant cover crops to achieve compliance on corn acreage. Accounting for farms needing to install manure storage, this means the total affected area is 496,800 acres. The calculation assumes cereal rye cover crops will be planted at a cost of $25 per acre with 70 percent cost share. The total estimated cost to producers over the 10-year implementation period is estimated at $3.726 million

• Application to established crops (such as alfalfa). As these crops are established as part of a farm's cropping system, it is estimated that there are no additional costs to the producer.

• Allowing one fall application at a rate reduced to 25 percent or less of rates allowed on a field under the farm's nutrient management plan or NRCS 590. WDNR assumes in their calculation of economic impacts that this option will be preferred, and will be used in combination with the two previous exceptions to manage manure.

Costs summary

The total cost of implementation and compliance for producers over the 10-year implementation period is estimated to be $9,726,00 or $972,600 per year.

The fiscal impact of this rule on state grant programs for cost share-eligible practices is estimated to be $22,694,000 over the 10-year implementation period, or $2,269,400 per year.

Benefits summary

WDNR estimates that abatement of nitrate pollution in groundwater will provide benefits of cost avoidance related to health care, drinking water treatment, and well replacement. Those estimated benefits are as follows:

• Medical cost attributed to nitrate contamination of drinking water in Wisconsin is estimated to be between $23 million and $80 million per year

• The average cost to replace a private well is about $12,000, and the cost to replace a municipal well is between $150,000 and $250,00

• The cost of replacing 10 percent of private wells in Wisconsin that have nitrate levels above the public health standard of 10 mg/L is more than $440 million.

Targeted areas

To see a visual depiction of the areas proposed for inclusion in the proposed standards in southwest Wisconsin, see the map accompanying this story.

Crawford and Vernon counties: there are no targeted areas that are not already covered under the NRCS 590 standard for nutrient management

Grant County: the areas covered are T8N R2W: All Sections, and T5N R5W: All Sections

Iowa and Lafayette counties: Please go to map online to see the areas proposed.