When I first started at the Center for Rural Affairs, I made sure to bring my lunch from home. I figured there wouldn’t be a lot of options in Lyons. So it was a pleasant surprise to find Soup-N-More, a natural foods grocery, just down the street.

As the name suggests, it all began with soup. A few years ago Rebecka Fleischman wanted to do something with her thanksgiving leftovers. So she started dehydrating her own vegetables, throwing in some spices and giving away these ready-made soup mixes to family and friends.

Word soon spread, and Rebecka developed a small customer base. She remembers traveling to their first food show and selling out within hours.

“That’s when I realized we had a business,” she said.

Rebecka and husband Allen started by converting the living room into a commercial kitchen. But they quickly outgrew the space. And that’s when they turned to REAP for help.

The Center’s Rural Enterprise Assistance Project (REAP) is a small business development program unlike any other. REAP is Nebraska’s largest supporter of microenterprise, assisting entrepreneurs often when no other lending capital is available. REAP provides new and existing businesses technical assistance, financing, networking, and business training.

REAP worked with Soup-N-More to secure a US Department of Agriculture RMAP loan to purchase a storefront building. It was important to act quickly while the building was still available, so

—See Savory Business on page 2.

A Savory Small Business Just Down the Street
By Kat Shiffler, kats@cfra.org

Rebecka Fleischman has a passion for healthy food, and that means delicious ingredients for her customers. You can enjoy those in person at the Soup-N-More storefront in Lyons. Or join more far-flung customers via soupmore.com.

Source: Jamie Horter
Pumpkins got a spotlight one night earlier than usual this year in Santee, Nebraska. On October 30, members of the Santee Sioux Nation and others in the community gathered for an event that celebrated pumpkins to promote growing, cooking, and eating fresh, healthy foods.

In Santee and many places like it, fresh foods aren’t widely available. In fact, they’ve been missing from store shelves for so long that many people don’t know how to cook them. Or they don’t like how fresh foods taste compared to the processed, packaged foods that are so easy to get.

Unfortunately, these high-calorie low-nutrient processed foods contribute to rising nationwide obesity and diabetes rates. On reservations like Santee, these rates are sky-high.

How can people start eating healthier? Growing fresh foods in a garden and being able to buy affordable fresh foods at a store or farmers market are pieces of the puzzle. But for a community to change its food culture, people also need the cooking skills, time, and desire to eat unfamiliar fresh foods that take a little more effort than the packaged norm. That’s where teaching cooking skills and sharing tasty, easy dishes made with fresh, affordable foods comes in.

At the community night event, the Santee Garden and Market Project partnered with the Santee Community School to help make fresh foods more accessible. One hundred fifty students and parents enjoyed a homemade meal featuring fresh pumpkin in every dish and took home recipes to recreate the dishes. Then, children decorated pumpkins with markers and stickers. The pumpkins were theirs to keep, bring home, and later, cook.

One night of fresh foods doesn’t change people’s diets for the long term. But the more fresh foods are available and appreciated in Santee and all of our communities, the more we grow a healthier food future for all.

More information about the Santee Garden and Market Project, including the pumpkin recipes featured in the community dinner, is available online at cfra.org/santee.

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REAP loan specialists expedited the process. In under two weeks the Fleischman’s had the key.

Today their commercial kitchen and natural food store supports four employees, seven local farmers, and over a dozen local vendors. Over the internet, they sell their products all over the country and to several foreign countries. With REAP’s help, Soup-N-More is now a thriving business and a rural success story – and lucky for me, it’s right here in Lyons!
Social Media Use & Small Businesses
By Marie Powell, mariep@cfra.org

Social media use is exploding among rural small businesses. That’s one of the findings of the Center’s 2012 Small Business Needs Assessment. Let’s take a closer look.

**Social Media Use by Age**
- 20-29: 65%
- 30-39: 72%
- 40-49: 65%
- 50-59: 50%
- 60+: 39%

No surprise: social media use is highest among younger business owners. But don’t count out the over-50 crowd. A whopping 89 percent of these business owners use social media.

**Social Media Use by Gender**
- Female: 48%
- Male: 34%

Females used social media significantly more than their male counterparts. Given that, can you guess which of the following businesses are more often owned by women or men?

**Social Media Use by Business Type**
- Retail: 53%
- Online: 50%
- Other: 49%
- Service: 43%
- Agricultural: 35%
- Manufacturing: 28%
- Construction: 0%

You’d be right if you picked construction, manufacturing, and agricultural businesses as male-dominated. Women are more likely to own and operate the other four types.

You can find the complete Small Business Needs Assessment at cfra.org/reports.

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**Land Link Sneak Peek**
By Virginia Meyer, virginiam@cfra.org

**Aspiring Goat Farmers Seek Opportunity**
A young couple would love an opportunity to develop their own goat operation. They’re loaded with experience – wrangling, horse training, organic vegetable production, and goat ranching.

They’re not know-it-alls. They want to learn even more about livestock breeds and profitable grazing practices. Eventually they want to build a goat herd. They’ll put them to good use too. They want to rent them out to graze invasive weed species.

**Energize a Farmstead in West Central Nebraska**
A farmstead situated on 167 acres on the North Platte River Valley seeks an energetic person(s). The land hasn’t been farmed in years, and the owners want to revive it. Maybe you’re the one(s) to bring sustainable agriculture practices to the small farm.

The owners want a diversified farm embracing permaculture, organic, free-range, low input, and holistic practices. Do you have experience in sustainable agriculture and a strong commitment to environmental and social sustainability? We may have an opportunity for you!

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**Have Farm Dreams?**
Interested in the farmstead? Know of an opportunity for these goat enthusiasts? Give me a call, 402.687.2100, or send an email to virginiam@cfra.org.
Lame Duck Must Confront Tough Decision on Taxes

By Chuck Hassebrook, chuckh@cfra.org

The central decision confronting this lame duck session of Congress is what we must give up to bring the federal budget closer to balance, including tax cuts for high-income Americans.

In 2000, we had a $236 billion budget surplus. But following 9/11, our nation fought two wars – and cut taxes rather than pay for them. A financial meltdown sunk us into the deepest recession since the great depression, reducing tax revenue and prompting new stimulus spending.

The wars exacted real fiscal and human costs. War spending totaled $1.3 trillion dollars through 2011. And 100,000 American troops served overseas – disproportionately from rural areas and modest-income families. More than 6,600 died. Another 45,000 to 90,000 have suffered traumatic brain injuries with persistent symptoms requiring specialized care.

While service members and their families made profound sacrifices to make our nation secure, the rest of were not asked to pay even the wars’ financial costs. They were added to the deficit. We received a tax cut.

It is appropriate to ask the richest Americans – those who can afford it – to give up their tax cuts as their shared sacrifice to reduce deficits and make our nation more secure. Repealing their 2003 tax cuts would raise $850 billion over 10 years. That would cover 2/3 of direct war costs.

That would include reinstating limits on itemized deductions and personal exemptions for upper-income taxpayers, going back to taxing their corporate dividends as ordinary income, taxing high-income capital gains at 20 percent, and reinstating the tax rates of 36 and 39 percent on income over $140,000. Alternatively, tax revenues from high-income taxpayers could be raised by further closing their tax loopholes without raising the top tax rates.

Revenue should also be raised by tightening loopholes on the estate tax for the very wealthy. The current year estate tax credit exempts $10 million from taxation for a husband and wife. But loopholes allow wealthy families to exempt several times that amount from taxation.

The estate tax raises revenue and levels the playing field for ordinary Americans competing for land and markets with those born to great wealth. It protects the free enterprise system, by countering the concentration of wealth and control in the hands of the few.

The richest Americans control a larger share of wealth and income than at any time in our nation’s history. We need their help in reining in the deficit.

Where Did the Term Lame Duck Originate?

“The phrase lame duck was coined in the 18th century at the London Stock Exchange, to refer to a stockbroker who defaulted on his debts. In 1791 Mary Berry wrote of the Duchess of Devonshire’s loss of £50,000 in stocks, “the conversation of the town” that her name was to be “posted up as a lame duck.” In the literal sense, it refers to a duck which is unable to keep up with its flock, making it a target for predators.”

Source: Wikipedia.org
Lame Duck: Get to Work and Level the Energy Playing Field

By Johnathan Hladik, johnathanh@cfra.org

As we recover from the election season’s barrage of insults, advertisements, and acronyms, I don’t blame you if your eyes begin to glaze over when we mention the PTC. Unless you’re a career politician, we can all agree that you’ve earned a bit of a break. You have permission to enjoy an acronym-free life for the next 60 days, beginning the moment you’ve finished this article.

If you are a career politician, though, you don’t get a break. It’s time for you to work. It’s time to extend the Production Tax Credit.

The Production Tax Credit provides the owner of a wind farm 2.2¢ per kilowatt-hour of electricity produced for the first 10 years of operation. That’s a small price to pay for an energy solution that powers rural economic development, spurs manufacturing, creates tax revenue, and moves us past our troubling reliance on fossil fuels.

But not everyone sees it that way. Discussion of the PTC often devolves into an accusation that this important subsidy results in the government picking winners and losers. It’s not right, some say, for the government to favor one industry over another.

A closer look shows the government has been playing favorites for years. It’s true that between 1994 and 2009 renewables combined received $5.93 billion in federal subsidies. But it’s also true that between 1918 and 2009 the oil and gas industry received $446.96 billion. The nuclear industry was given $185.38 billion between 1947 and 1999. In fact, the coal industry was given $3.17 billion in 2007 alone. This doesn’t include negative externalities created by mining and burning coal. Experts claim these would cost utilities an extra 18¢ per kilowatt-hour of electricity produced.

The PTC expires on December 31. If it isn’t extended, we lose at least 37,000 American jobs. We’ll never see the 1,100 jobs created every time a major wind farm is built. We’ll miss another opportunity to see rural communities thrive.

The lame duck session presents a final opportunity. It’s time to level the playing field. It’s time to get to work. It’s time to extend the PTC.

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Lame Duck Inaction on Farm Bill Will Halt Innovation

By Traci Bruckner, tracib@cfra.org

Congress has plenty of unfinished business to tackle during the lame duck session. Will the Farm Bill be one of them? Chances are better that you might be reading this just as we find out they are not going to get the Farm Bill done, but will instead kick the can down the road to next year.

Here’s what is at stake if they fail to act during the lame duck session. Funding for conservation and several important rural programs is in jeopardy, programs that help create a future for beginning farmers and ranchers and rural communities alike.

The Beginning Farmer and Rancher Development Program will stop making grants to provide training, mentoring, business and marketing planning, and much more for beginning farmers and ranchers.

When you talk to beginners, the three barriers to entry are capital, access to affordable land, and lack of training opportunities. The beauty of the Beginning Farmer and Rancher Development Program is that it provides training that helps beginners build their farm business plan so they can access capital. It also provides linking opportunities, helping break down the land access barrier by matching beginners with those who are retiring.

The Conservation Reserve Program Transition Incentives is another program that will screech to a halt with Congressional inaction. This program helps beginners to gain access to land coming out of long-term land retirement contracts under the Conservation Reserve Program. In exchange, the beginners must be willing to put that land back into production under a conservation plan.

The Value Added Producer Grant Program helps farmers and ranchers establish high-value, niche markets. A small amount of funding came through the Continuing Resolution, so it can continue in the short term. But the program still will not have as much as either the Senate or House versions of the Farm Bill provides.

The same is true for the Rural Microenterprise Assistance Program (RMAP). It has a small amount of funding, but the Senate version of the Farm Bill will allow the program to go much further in helping rural small business development.

Congress needs to pass a Farm Bill that funds these forward and innovative programs.
Corporate Farming Notes
By John Crabtree, johnc@cfra.org

According to Chris Willis, KXAN Lead Investigative Reporter in Austin, Texas, some of Texas’ wealthiest corporations save tens of thousands of dollars in property taxes under a provision of the Texas constitution that allows for reduced valuations of land used for farming and ranching.

However, when Circuit of the Americas built a Formula One racetrack near Elroy, Texas, the company designated 617 acres for “agricultural use.” Circuit of the Americas told Willis that the land produces no sports entertainment or agricultural revenue. Estimated property taxes on the 617 acres would be $171,209 per year at market value. With the special agricultural designation the company pays only $1,563.

Brazilian-based meatpacking corporation JBS USA has reportedly secured an option to purchase two additional US beef packing plants in Nampa, Idaho, and Omaha, Nebraska. With a combined daily slaughter capacity of 2,200 head for the two plants, the acquisition would increase JBS daily slaughter capacity from 26,300 to 28,500 head.

The company would control over 30 percent of the US fed cattle market. The purchase would move the world’s largest meatpacking corporation from 3rd to 1st largest among American beef packers. Another byproduct: control of the fed cattle market held by the four largest packers would increase to over 85 percent.

Crop insurance premium subsidies cost taxpayers $7.4 billion in 2011. And 26 farm corporations received more than $1 million each in crop insurance premium subsidies in 2011 alone.

The Heritage Foundation’s Romina Boccia reports that in 2011, the federal government provided $1.3 billion to cover the administrative and operating expenses of crop insurance companies. That translated into $1.7 billion in profits and a 30 percent average return on investment, according to Bloomberg.

While not directly involved in agriculture, crop insurance companies are certainly “farming” something.

Energy Internship: Seeking Awesome Now
By Johnathan Hladik, johnathanh@cfra.org

The Center for Rural Affairs works hard to stand up for rural America. Our impressive track record over the years is shaped not just by our work ethic, but by the quality of employees we hire. We depend on committed, passionate, and capable staff members to make the Center for Rural Affairs one of the most effective rural advocacy organizations around.

Would you like to join our team? Know someone who might be a perfect fit? We’re currently looking for an Organizing and Policy intern to help our energy work expand. Take a look at cfra.org/intern for a position description, or email me at johnathanh@cfra.org to find out more.

I was raised on a steady diet of advocacy for economic justice and stewardship of our land, air, and water. My dad put the fire in my belly, and this DNA surely thrives amid the culture and work of the Center for Rural Affairs.

My role with the Center leads me to you, our faithful friends and prospective new ones all across America, to build relationships and gain essential support. I’m here to help you find your best way to stand up for rural America.

Now Introducing: Hank Rohling
By Hank Rohling, hankr@cfra.org

I’ve lived in rural Michigan and Iowa and suburban Ohio and Indiana. And though my wife and adult daughter and son still live in Indiana, I love it here in northeast Nebraska’s wide open spaces. I enjoy hiking rugged trails, fishing, golfing, and making friends - like you.

Hank recently joined the Center’s team as our Major Gifts Development Director. We are excited to welcome him to our staff and Lyons.
Across the Nation

**Michigan:** Number of Deaths by Entrapment in Grain Bins Remain Steady

By Casey Francis, caseyf@cfra.org

The New York Times reported on silo safety. They noted the story of Tommy Osier of Sterling, Michigan, who died at 18 in a silo accident. He was breaking up the damp and crusted corn in the silo with a steel rod when he became trapped.

The Times explains, “Even as the rate of serious injury and fatalities on American farms has fallen, the number of workers dying by entrapment in grain bins and silos has remained stubbornly steady.” There have been 80 deaths by silo accidents since 2007. Deaths occur in silos when grain falls uncontrolled or unexpectedly and either crushes or asphyxiates the victim.

**Minnesota:** Business Finds Success in Rural Community

By Casey Francis, caseyf@cfra.org

Marr Valve Co. in Granite Falls, Minnesota, has a 24,000-square-foot facility. The company has earned manufacturing success by what Prairie Business calls, “keeping it rural.” By locating in a rural area the company has benefitted both its workers and customers.

The 20 employees, most with a tenure ranging from 10 to 28 years, earn an hourly wage from $18 to $30. Prairie Business notes that workers have “seen annual, 2 and 3 percent wage increases in the last decade, with the exception of the 2008, when the recession hit.”

**Family Farming, continued from page 8.**

rural life. It concluded:

*As farm size and absentee ownership increase, social conditions in the local community deteriorate. Communities surrounded by farms that are larger than can be operated by a family unit have a few wealthy elites, a majority of poor laborers, and virtually no middle class. The absence of a middle class has a serious negative effect on social and commercial service, public education, and local government.*

We don’t have the option of returning to the family farm communities of a generation ago. But we can build strong 21st century rural communities based on their key strength. Family farming afforded people who work – the common person – the opportunity to shoulder the responsibilities of ownership and enjoy its benefits. That strengthened their stake in their community and nurtured their sense of responsibility.

Today, there are new opportunities for owner-operated rural business. Ecotourism enterprises like Nebraska’s Calamus Outfitters, are drawing high-dollar bird watchers from both coasts to supplement income from the family ranch.

Hundreds of small Iowa farms are flourishing by supplying the gourmet food supplier Niman Ranch with low-stress hogs raised on straw or pasture. Nebraska food entrepreneurs are marketing together under the auspices of Grow Nebraska, to sell high value food products from jams and jellies to salsa, wine, and dried meats.

Nonfarm entrepreneurs are reaching national and even international markets for nonfarm products. After driving west on a recent vacation, we found a small pottery business in the rural reaches of the Nebraska Sandhills that offer quality exceeding that found in the pricey shops of Estes Park, Colorado. And self-employed rural entrepreneurs are cost effectively providing business services – marketing, design, accounting, etc. – to distant companies over the Internet.

We’re still fighting for family farms that raise commodities, as you can see in our advocacy for tighter limits on mega farm subsidies. But we are also working to create the new 21st century opportunities for rural Americans to own the fruits of their labor.
From the Desk of the Executive Director

Critical Role of Family Farming in Strengthening Rural Communities Reduced by Commodity Production

By Chuck Hassebrook, chuckh@cfra.org

I cut my teeth at the Center for Rural Affairs fighting for family farming in late 1970s and farm crisis of the 1980s. We were driven by the critical role of family farming in strengthening rural communities and shaping the character of rural life. But its role is being reduced as commodity production concentrates on fewer and larger operations. That elevates the importance of developing both nonfarm microenterprises and new markets for small family farms.

Who farms matters, as was documented by a 1982 report to the US Congress summarizing research and agriculture and economics. I was raised in the barn and on the tractor on my family’s farm near Halse Center, Nebraska, punctuated by dinner table conversations about the little guy getting pushed out of agriculture.

I was raised in the barn and on the tractor on my family’s farm near Halse Center, Nebraska. My family farming is in my blood. Family farming is in my blood. I was raised in the barn and on the tractor on my family’s farm near Halse Center, Nebraska. My family farming is in my blood. Family farming is in my blood.

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