



CENTER *for* RURAL AFFAIRS

YOUR RURAL NEWS FOR OVER 40 YEARS | LYONS, NEB. | POPULATION 851 | MARCH & APRIL 2017



Matt and Emely Hendl have settled in the Utica, Neb., area, and, with the help of their mentors, plan to offer agritourism and education to others. For now, they are renting a house in town, with the Utica sign in their front yard. They are also helping the Center for Rural Affairs plan an inaugural Veteran Farmer Conference set for June. | Photo by Rhea Landholm

VETERAN FARMER HOMESTEADS WITH A KICK

BY RHEA LANDHOLM, RHEAL@CFRA.ORG

Three years ago, Matt and Emely Hendl didn't picture themselves as farmers.

They thought Emely would support their family with her government service job after Matt retired after 20 years in the U.S. Navy.

However, after changing their minds a few times, they decided to move their daughter, Annika, dog, cat and hamster, to the Platte River valley in Nebraska to pursue an altogether different venture: small-scale farming.

CULTIVATING INTEREST

Matt and Emely began their agricultural adventure in Connecticut. They lived on 7.5 acres with a small-scale organic farm on one side and a Community-Supported Agriculture (CSA) farm on the other.

Emely helped the organic farmer raise microgreens and herbs and sell them at the local market.

And, after visiting with the owner of the CSA farm, the couple decided they could produce their own food, starting with chickens.

"I thought a little bit bigger than we needed to," Matt said. "It was the first time I hadn't been under-way, attached to a submarine."

He cleared out a 50-foot by 60-foot area, using lumber that was on the land to create fence posts and build a chicken coop. And ended up with 22 chickens.

"Every single one of them had a name," Matt said. "They were everything from Bob and Marley to Baby Alligator and Twilight Sparkle. Our daughter was just like a little chicken whisperer."

—SEE [VETERAN FARMER](#) ON PAGE 3

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NOTE FROM THE EDITOR

BY RHEA LANDHOLM, RHEAL@CFRA.ORG

Recently, we hosted “Vang: A Drama about Recent Immigrant Farmers,” a story of eight immigrants coming to the U.S. to find solace and a livelihood in farming.

The two actors illustrated stories that ring true throughout rural America. After, the audience participated in a panel discussion featuring four immigrants: two beginning farmers, a Center for Rural Affairs staff member, and a community leader. They told touching stories about their experiences, both positive and negative.

The Center for Rural Affairs works in rural communities, assisting immigrant entrepreneurs, community leaders and new farmers. We are proud of the



work we do to help these individuals achieve the American dream.

This edition of our newsletter focuses on RESPONSIBILITY placed upon each of us to contribute to our community and society. Our responsibility lies in

welcoming new Americans as they find success in their new home.

Our responsibilities continue with assisting beginning, veteran and socially-disadvantaged farmers gain access to land and information; encouraging renewable energy; urging developers to extend broadband internet into rural areas; and taking care of our water, acting as good stewards for future generations.

We also have a responsibility to vote, electing local, state and national officials; and we have a responsibility to keep those officials accountable to their constituents by letting them know about policies that we care about.

Want to get involved? Contact us at info@cfra.org.

REPORT EXAMINES FEDERAL CONSERVATION PROGRAM

BY RHEA LANDHOLM, RHEAL@CFRA.ORG

The Center for Rural Affairs recently released “Pathways to Land Access,” a report by Anna Johnson with support from Glen Ready.

The paper is a study of the Conservation Reserve Program - Transition Incentives Program (CRP-TIP), administered by the U.S. Department of Agriculture, Farm Service Agency (USDA-FSA).

In “Pathways to Land Access,” the authors investigate implementation of CRP-TIP in Iowa, Nebraska, North Dakota and South Dakota. The program was created by the 2008 Farm Bill.

“The program allows a retired or retiring landowner who has land

enrolled in CRP to receive two additional years of payments if land is transitioned back into production through being sold or leased to a beginning, socially-disadvantaged or veteran farmer or rancher,” Johnson said. “In effect, CRP-TIP creates a pathway for beginning, socially-disadvantaged and veteran farmers and ranchers to access land.”

Johnson and Ready interviewed FSA state officials, surveyed FSA county employees, and talked with program participants to support recommendations for improving enrollment and usage.

They found that several factors affect usage: knowledge of the

program; the existence, or lack thereof, of a strong relationship between the prospective farmer or rancher and landowner; and the agricultural economy.

Johnson and Ready outline their findings and recommendations in the report.

To view a copy of “Pathways to Land Access,” visit www.cfra.org/Pathways-to-Land-Access.

This report was conducted under a cooperative agreement with Farm Service Agency, National Sustainable Agriculture Coalition, Center for Rural Affairs and Dakota Rural Action.

PAPER & E-NEWS

This newsletter is available both electronically and in print. To receive it online, sign up at the Center’s website, cfra.org, or email us at info@cfra.org.

Editing and layout by Rhea Landholm
Printed at West Point News, West Point, Neb.

The Center for Rural Affairs is
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VETERAN FARMER, CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

Then the couple was wowed by their CSA neighbor. She won a women entrepreneur award for those 25 years or younger, competing against women who worked at large corporations.

"That made us think, if someone from small town Connecticut can do something like that, we can too," Matt said.

STARTING ANEW

While making their decision of where to go next, they looked at the Midwest for its agriculture and proximity to family. However, Matt said he still has a bit to learn.

"As one of the most senior ranks in the military, I was used to knowing what I was doing," Matt said. "I feel like I'm starting over. I have no idea what I'm doing."

"We said, We'll just come," Emely said. "People would call us homesteaders. We're not pioneers, but what we want to do is essentially homesteading with a kick."

PLANTING ROOTS

Matt started agricultural courses at the University of Nebraska at Lincoln in the fall. The couple also has found mentors in Del Ficke and Kerry Hoffschneider (Emely's high school classmate).

"We have good mentors who won't let us fail," Matt said. "We're so appreciative and humble that they're able to give us this opportunity."

The Hendls are helping out at Ficke Cattle Company, owned by Del, while using the land to work on their own projects.

GROWING ASPIRATIONS

First on the to-do list is starting a destination farmers market at Ficke Cattle Company, outside of Pleasant Dale, Neb.

Additionally, the Hendls would like to pursue agritourism, providing a place with cheese tasting, beekeeping classes and more.

The couple is inspired by agritourism on the east coast, particularly for people who did not grow up on farms.

"They are able to smell the farm and hear the sounds," Emely said. "When you see the sun setting on a hill with cows on it, and you're drinking a coffee, that's serenity."

The Hendls would also like to host school field trips.

SOWING KNOWLEDGE

Another future venture for the Hendls is providing agriculture education and training.

"A lot of people are coming to this state who have never lived here, like me," Matt said. "They don't have an agriculture background but, they want to know where their food is coming from."

One way is to provide mobile chicken tractors and laying chickens – two at a time – for rent.

"People are scared about what they don't know," Matt said. "We want to provide an avenue to get educated and to get more comfortable, kind of like what we're doing, and what Del's done for us."

The couple has been encour-

aged by the sense of community and support they've received.

"In the military, that is what you strive for," Matt said. "To be able to get that in a community that isn't the military is amazing."

"We're not afraid of the hard work," Emely said. "Our goal is to be able to work from home and provide the love and the information to people. We have the plan and the dream. We're ready."

SUPPORTING NEW NEIGHBORS

Matt and Emely are helping the Center for Rural Affairs and Legal Aid of Nebraska plan "Answering the Call: Veteran Farmer Conference" on June 22 in Seward, Neb.

The conference is free and will provide veteran farmers an avenue to network and an opportunity to discover available resources and services.

On the schedule is a morning of presentations and discussions, a local foods lunch, and two farm tours in the afternoon.

Registration opens May 1. More information can be found at www.cfra.org/AnsweringTheCall or by calling 402.687.2100.



RENEWABLE ENERGY FACT SHEET

SOLAR HAS A BRIGHT FUTURE; TAKE IOWA FOR EXAMPLE



The **solar energy industry is poised for explosive growth** over the next decade and has potential to bring massive economic and environmental benefits to rural Americans.

Learn about these benefits and how you can help create a strong foundation for this emerging market.

BRIGHT JOBS OUTLOOK

349 full-time solar workers in 2015* at 47 companies in Iowa; plus 626 part-time solar workers

373,807 employed by the U.S. solar industry in 2016, more than twice as many employed by the coal industry

PLUMMETING COSTS

Solar energy is rapidly becoming cost-competitive with fossil fuel and wind energy, and in some countries is now the lowest cost energy source available.

Cost of a watt of installed residential solar (U.S. average)

2009:

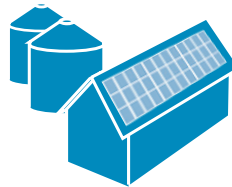
\$7.06

2016:

\$2.93

TAX BENEFITS LEVERAGE PRIVATE INVESTMENT

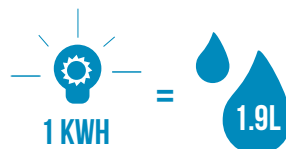
From 2012 to 2016, Iowa invested approximately \$16 million in the solar tax credit to leverage \$123 million+ in private investment of solar energy systems.



On-farm solar accounts for a substantial percentage of Iowa's 2,500+ solar installations. Solar salespeople, installers and electricians live and work in rural communities, where they pay taxes, shop at rural businesses, and send their kids to rural schools.

PROTECTING RESOURCES

While in service, solar panels do not generate pollutants. An average 500-megawatt coal plant generates 200,000 tons of sludge and 125,000 tons of coal ash every year.



For every kilowatt hour of coal energy replaced with solar, we save 1.9 liters of water.

**according to the Solar Foundation*

To find similar statistics for your state, visit www.thesolarfoundation.org



A NEIGHBORLY DISPUTE: ADVERSE POSSESSION

BY JOHNATHAN HLADIK, JOHNATHANH@CFRA.ORG

Joe and Carol Schmieding's property included a waterway and a driveway running along its east side.

Land east of the parcel sold in 2001. The exact location of the property line was not determined, so the couple and their new neighbors signed a shared-use agreement for a driveway.

Five years later, Joe discovered a survey marker that marked the boundary line. However, when Joe prepared to modify the driveway and waterway in 2010, the neighbors sued for adverse possession.



Carol Schmieding, middle, and Joe Schmieding, right, visit with their Sen. Mark Kolterman, left, at Nebraska's Unicameral. The couple testified in favor of LB 359, regarding adverse possession, at a hearing earlier this year. | Photo by Jordan Rasmussen

WHAT IS ADVERSE POSSESSION?

Adverse possession allows a trespasser to acquire title to land that is not being fully utilized. Developed under English common law, the concept is meant to encourage productive use of land that is neglected, ignored or forgotten. The need arises when a parcel becomes a financial strain for local governments and a source of frustration for neighboring landowners.

Today, this law is often manipulated to take advantage of landowners acting in good faith. In such cases, we believe that a trespassing party should not be financially rewarded for his or her misdeeds.

WHAT HAPPENED IN COURT?

The court determined that although the Schmiedings were legal owners, the neighbors could acquire the parcel via adverse possession due to continuous use of the driveway.

"We spent decades on upkeep of the lane and ditch and lost the property in the end," Joe said. "We were reimbursed nothing."

WHY DID THE SCHMIEDINGS LOSE?

The couple lives in Nebraska,

where five elements must be proven to establish adverse possession.

Use of the property must be actual, requiring use of the property; exclusive, used only by the trespasser; open and notorious, occupancy is not hidden from the owner or general public; hostile, done without permission of the owner; and continuous over a 10-year period.

Under Nebraska law, a victim of adverse possession remains responsible for any taxes or fees assessed on the parcel during the 10-year period. This is true even though the trespasser successfully demonstrated exclusive and hostile use.

WHAT ABOUT OTHER STATES?

Several states have taken steps to prevent this outcome.

- 18 states require payment of property tax to prove adverse possession. Each requires the trespasser pay property taxes on the parcel during all or a portion of the continuous period of use.
- Colorado requires the trespasser pay all property taxes owed on the parcel for 7 of 18 years of continuous use. The trespasser

must also compensate the record owner for any taxes paid over the remaining 11 years.

- Alaska considers paid property taxes as proof of use in an adverse possession proceeding.

WHAT CAN BE DONE IN NEBRASKA?

Because of the Schmieding family, Sen. Mark Kolterman and Center staff, lawmakers in Nebraska are considering a bill to close this loophole. LB 359 would require the trespasser to compensate the original owner for property tax payments made over the 10-year statutory period when the parcel is lost to adverse possession.

A second piece of legislation requiring payment of property taxes as a component to a successful adverse possession claim is being discussed for 2018.

"Our story is just one instance where adverse possession has been used to disadvantage a property owner," Joe said. "This bill is a step forward in compensating landowners who have met these responsibilities, yet lost the property."



Center for Rural Affairs staff helped secure a bill in the Iowa Legislative Session that improves funding and programming for water quality management. This model can be duplicated in other states. | Photo by Wyatt Fraas

NITRATE, BACTERIA A CONCERN FOR RURAL COMMUNITIES

BY STEPHANIE ENLOE, STEPHANIE@CFRA.ORG

Amid growing public awareness, rural residents are becoming more well-versed on water quality challenges. Nutrients, bacteria and sediment levels in surface waters endanger human health, wildlife habitat and outdoor recreation.

Many are particularly concerned about nitrate levels in drinking water, as high nitrate levels are associated with blue-baby syndrome, birth defects, and bladder and thyroid cancer. In Iowa alone, a study conducted from 2006 to 2008 found that 12 percent of private wells had nitrate levels over the legal drinking water standard of 10 mg/L. A recent Iowa Department of Natural Resources report found that more than 540 water systems are at least somewhat susceptible to nitrate contamination, and the vast majority of those are in rural areas.

Increasingly, rural people are concerned about poor water quality impacting the outdoor recreation industry. Quality of life in rural areas suffers when residents and tourists lose access to high-quality fishing, swimming, boating and other recreation op-

portunities that depend on clean lakes and waterways. In Iowa, this industry generates \$6.1 billion in consumer spending and supports 75,000 jobs.

During the Iowa Legislative Session, several bills were proposed aimed to improve funding and programming for water quality management. One of the Center for Rural Affairs' priorities was to secure a three-eighths of a cent sales tax increase to create a source of revenue for the Natural Resources and Outdoor Recreation Trust Fund.

In 2010, over 60 percent of Iowans voted for a constitutional amendment that created "the Trust" and designated the revenue source as three-eighths of a cent of the next sales tax increase. This

revenue will amount to \$150 to \$180 million for watershed planning, local watershed groups, cost-share practices, lake restoration and outdoor recreation investments that would create economic opportunity in rural communities.

With more than \$430 million in watershed plans and more than \$22 million in cost-share or wetland projects waiting for implementation funding in Iowa, the Trust would create a much needed source of sustained water quality funding.

This model can be duplicated in other states to improve funding and programming for water quality management. Let us know if you are concerned about rural water quality issues.

OUR IOWA OFFICE HAS RELOCATED TO

NEVADA

1210 SIXTH ST. | 515.215.1294

The move allows our policy associates Stephanie Enloe and Anna Johnson better access to the state capitol.

OFFICE HOURS MAY VARY



BROADBAND CAN BRIDGE THE DIGITAL DIVIDE

BY JORDAN FEYERHERM, JORDANF@CFRA.ORG, AND JORDAN RASMUSSEN, JORDANR@CFRA.ORG

The internet is considered a basic human right; it is how some find employment, handle their finances, attend college, work and receive medical care.

However, not everyone is able to use the internet to its full potential, due primarily to slow speeds. Residents of rural areas are not always able to access broadband.

The existing digital divide places rural communities at a disadvantage in the realms of health care, education and economic development.

Expanding infrastructure into rural areas will improve health outcomes for residents by allowing access to specialists, increasing cost efficiency, and raising quality of care.

A primary barrier to health care access is geographic distances between patients and providers. The use of technology to deliver health care from a distance, or telehealth, has been demonstrated as an effective way to overcome certain barriers to care. Reliable access to broadband is imperative if we are to capitalize upon opportunities afforded by telehealth in rural areas.

Broadband can provide small towns with the option for virtual instruction to fill the gap between educational needs and availabil-



Broadband infrastructure has not yet reached many rural areas. We must do more to help rural communities gain access. | Adobe Stock

ity. Broadband also extends the reach of instructors and creates economies of scale.

A rural student may not be able to relocate to enroll in a college or university, or may find a two-hour bus ride to school a hardship; however, with a broadband connection, the student can learn a foreign language, take an advanced placement biology course or enroll in a university class.

Further, broadband access boosts rural economic development. Increasing broadband access will be a boon to small town economies by keeping local businesses competitive and attracting new residents.

In a recent study by the Center

for Urban and Regional Affairs, it was found that areas with one to three broadband providers experience a 6.4 percent higher employment growth rate and a 2.4 percent increase to the population growth rate compared to areas without broadband, both vital factors in maintaining a healthy community.

We must do more to help rural communities gain access to broadband. We urge policymakers to consider new and innovative ways of developing infrastructure and promoting competition among providers. By expanding broadband access into rural areas, we are improving the health, education and economic well-being of small towns everywhere.

OUR FUTURE, CONTINUED FROM PAGE 8

For instance, in several large rural states, voters supported minimum wage increases at the ballot box. In our 2013 poll, 90 percent of rural voters expressed support for federal investment in job training and small business development. More than 75 percent support federal investments in renewable energy, roads, water

and wastewater infrastructure.

In the coming months, the Center will put forward policy proposals for congressional consideration. Our proposals will be designed to be included in a tax reform bill and in the upcoming farm bill renewal.

These will be proposals that can attract support from across the

political spectrum, are responsive to the expressed opinions of rural voters, and are designed to create economic and community vibrancy in small town and rural America.

I invite you to join us in creating a government that works for rural people now and for our future.



Solar has a bright future

Inside: A look at economic benefits

FROM THE DESK OF THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

THE PRESIDENT, RURAL VOTERS AND OUR FUTURE

BY BRIAN DEPEW, BRIAND@CFRA.ORG

Rural voters had a moment following last fall's election. The national media showed up in force seeking to understand them. Enough rural voters had switched party allegiance to account for Trump's victory over Clinton in several key Midwest and Rust Belt states.

Frustration over the economic plight facing their community drove many of these voters. For our readers and those who have studied rural issues for decades, this may come as little surprise.

The modern day Midwest and Great Plains was built by settlers seeking economic and political independence. It is a region built on the cultural bedrock of widespread opportunity and the notion

that hard work and dedication are all you need to get ahead.

A farm crisis in the 1980s eroded economic opportunity for many farm families. Free trade agreements of the 1990s undercut the region's manufacturing sector. Parents began to fear their children would not be better off than they had been.

Meanwhile, academic, philanthropic and political leaders spent countless hours designing, promoting and underwriting the economic rise and dominance of America's cities. Comparatively few resources and little intellectual firepower has been aimed to address the very real challenges that rural people face.

Against this backdrop, it's little wonder that on Nov. 8, 2016, rural

voters went looking for a different path forward. We've yet to know what results our collective choice will deliver. What is undisputed is that we need a new path forward.

A 2013 poll conducted by the Center found that rural voters were skeptical of government, but – and this is important – they are skeptical largely because they think government doesn't work for them. Designing a political system that does work to address the economic concerns of small town and rural people is key.

When government works for rural people, we know that rural voters are poised to embrace practical policies to create genuine opportunity.