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FARM GIRL JOURNAL CAPTURES THE UNFETTERED JOY OF GROWING UP ON A FARM

BY JOHN CRABTREE, JOHNC@CFRA.ORG

Living in rural and small-town America is not a challenge, or a burden. I love living in a small town, having the ability to know my neighbors, and a genuine feeling of connectedness to the land and natural world. I can look out of my window at our garden, our flowers, the birds (and squirrels) at our bird feeder. If that isn't enough, in two minutes I can be in the countryside.

All that is not to say there aren't challenges in rural and small-town America. Of course there are, and I get to spend my days working with people from small towns all across America to address those challenges. There is nothing wrong with rural America that rural Americans cannot fix, given a fair chance.

I was recently reminded, however, about what I love best about rural and small-town life by an essay in a new journal that was delivered to our office. *The Farm Girl Journal*, brought to us by Editor-in-Chief Rosie Hipps, discusses the 2016 lambing season at her farm near Lyons, Neb.

Rosie doesn't shy away from describing the hardship of lambing in a blizzard, or the challenges of working with livestock. But she



Meet Rosie Hipps, the "Editor-in-Chief" of her brand new magazine, *The Farm Girl Journal*, as she discusses lambing season at her farm near Lyons, Neb. | Photo submitted

does make it possible to see life from a different perspective, with reverence, responsibility, a lot of maturity for someone who hasn't

been around much more than a decade, and the unfettered joy that only a farm kid can know.

—SEE [FARM GIRL JOURNAL](#) ON PAGE 2.

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FARM GIRL JOURNAL, CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

Here is an excerpt:

Lambing season is upon us, and there are adorable baby sheep popping out everywhere. Lambing season is a very big thing for us considering that we own a considerable amount of sheep. When lambing season starts we have a lot of responsibility, but in the end it always works out.

If you own sheep or are thinking of starting a herd, one thing you need to know is that sheep have an obnoxious habit of lambing in the coldest weather possible. Our sheep started lambing at about the middle of December. But after one mamma had her baby no one else went until the blizzard. Then we had lambs popping out of our ears!

The lambs we have are bigger now and we only have two pregnant moms who haven't lambed yet. But we had some hectic weeks that is for sure!

Right after the blizzard at the coldest point possible, all of the ewes lambed. We ran out of pens, it took almost an hour to feed and water them all, but we had fun, running on the bars separating the pens while holding chunks of alfalfa about seven pounds each.

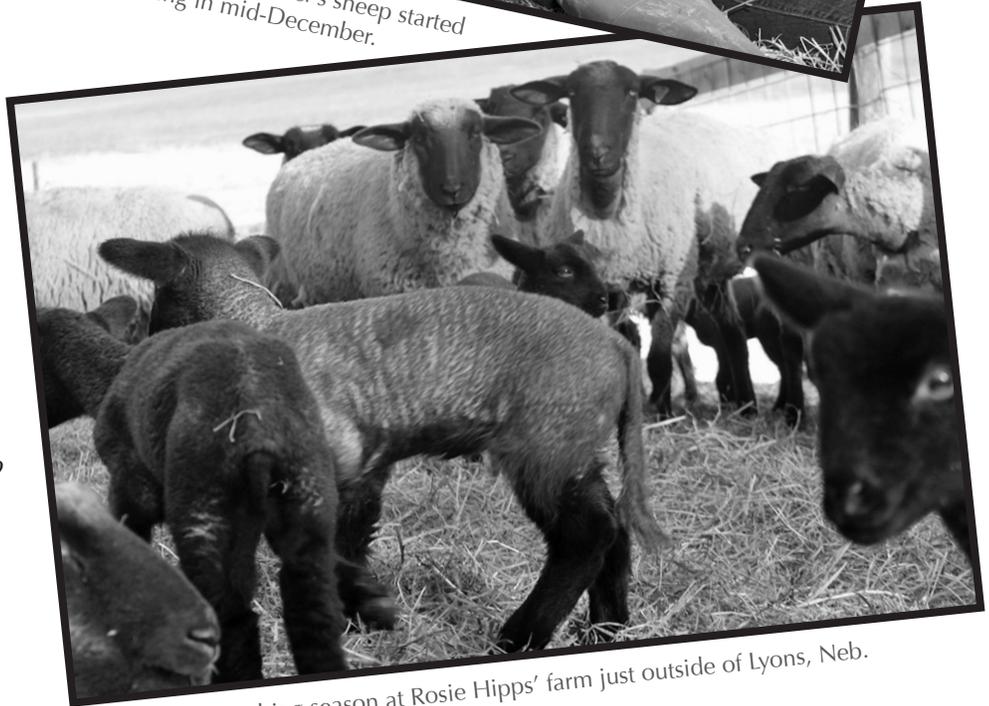
Banding the girls was easy because we only needed to band the tails, but the boys, WOW that was tough! They would wiggle and run away! But now almost all of them are banded and I have several lamb friends.

Even though it was hard I would not take back any of it. Now we are almost done and have had an amazing lambing season, barely any losses and lots of fun.

– Rosie Hipps, Farm Girl Journal



Rosie Hipps and her brother's sheep started lambing in mid-December.



It's lambing season at Rosie Hipps' farm just outside of Lyons, Neb.

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.

You may also correct your mailing address and fax the back page to 402.687.2200, or call the Center for Rural Affairs at 402.687.2100.

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WIND TURBINES BRING ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT DOLLARS TO A SMALL TOWN IN MINNESOTA

BY LU NELSEN, LUCASN@CFRA.ORG

Wind energy has grown a lot over the last few years. Energy produced from wind farms has become competitive with fossil fuels, and development of new wind projects continues across the country.

The Great Plains and Midwest are well positioned to continue playing a lead role in the future of renewable energy development. Especially since states in the region boast some of the best wind energy resources.

Renewable development is a natural fit for many rural communities, bringing benefits that help grow economies and improve the lives of residents. Development has the potential to provide a lot in return to communities. Developers and workers feed into local economies, landowners receive annual payments, and wind farms generate property tax revenue that goes to counties.

Small towns like Lakefield, Minn., provide a great example of how wind energy development can bring in new dollars to a rural community. In 2010, Lakefield had over 100 turbines planned or installed in the area.

The turbines brought new construction jobs to the area and created permanent jobs in the community. Jackson County, where Lakefield is located, also expected about \$700,000 annually in tax revenue from area wind turbines.

This revenue meant the county and towns have more money for valuable local services like schools, fire and rescue, and police. Workers stimulate local businesses around the community with their spending.

In wind-rich states like Minne-



Rural development is a natural fit for many rural communities, bringing benefits that help grow economies and improve the lives of residents. | Photo by Wyatt Fraas

sota, wind energy provides landowners and communities a chance to bring new opportunity to their areas. Whether it's payment to landowners, new economic activity, or new tax revenue; development brings real and tangible benefits to rural communities.

Minnesota already produces enough wind energy to power over 830,000 homes, meeting the needs of users in Minnesota as well as neighboring states. That development has brought about 2,000 jobs, over \$5 billion in invest-

ments, and \$9 million in land-lease payments to landowners.

Although challenges exist for new wind energy development, Minnesota and towns like Lakefield continue to reap the benefits from new wind development. Building new wind energy not only provides clean and renewable power, but opens up new possibilities for rural communities.

To learn more about the benefits of wind energy to rural areas, visit cfra.org/clean-energy.

PRESIDENT'S BUDGET IS A GOOD START TO THE APPROPRIATIONS PROCESS

BY TRACI BRUCKNER, TRACIB@CFRA.ORG

In February, the president released his budget, which includes \$25.5 billion in discretionary funding for the U.S. Department of Agriculture for the next fiscal year. The release of the budget serves as a guide to the Congressional Appropriations process, signaling where the administration would like to focus discretionary funding.

The president's budget is non-binding, and appropriators do not have to follow suit. However, it can have an impact on the many programs we all care about – conservation, beginning and socially disadvantage farmers, and rural development in particular.

CONSERVATION

The president's budget, for the first time, makes no cuts to the Conservation Stewardship Program and the Environmental Quality Incentives Program. These programs are critical for farmers and ranchers who face increasing challenges from climate change, severe weather, and the relating impact to soil and water quality. We will work to ensure Congress follows suit so the Natural Resources Conservation Service is able to meet the high demand for these programs.

BEGINNING AND SOCIALLY DISADVANTAGED FARMERS AND RANCHERS

The budget includes an increase for Direct Operating Loans by 16 percent. This will help more farmers to access Farm Service Agency loans to help meet their annual operating costs. The budget also maintains last year's increased funding level for direct farm ownership loans. These loans help



As part of an appropriations fly-in, Mark Peterson (right) meets with Iowa Congressman David Young (left) to talk about important funding issues that support top-notch conservation practices like cover crops. | Photo by Traci Bruckner

beginning farmers and ranchers purchase land; 75 percent of the funds are targeted to beginning farmers and ranchers.

The Outreach and Technical Assistance to Socially Disadvantaged and Veteran Farmer and Rancher Program is provided \$10 million in funding. This program previously received \$20 million in mandatory funding. The 2014 Farm Bill cut the funding in half and added veterans to the program's focus. This expanded the scope of the program while only providing half the normal level of funding. We hope Congress will increase the funding level so that it can better meet demand.

RURAL DEVELOPMENT

We are excited to see the budget includes an increased request for the Rural Microentrepreneur Assistance Program (RMAP), which provides loan capital and technical assistance funding to organizations that in turn provide that as-

sistance to rural small businesses.

For example, the Center's Rural Enterprise Assistance Program provided a loan and technical assistance to Chandler Sandhill Honey in Anselmo, Neb. They have over 350 beehives and market local honey. More funding for RMAP means more rural entrepreneurs will have access not only to capitol but also business planning and technical assistance.

The budget also includes additional funding for the Rural Energy for America Program, which provides loans and grants for renewable energy systems and energy efficiency improvements.

NEXT STEPS?

Stay tuned as the budget and appropriations process moves forward. We will keep you updated as Congress begins to debate funding issues. Your calls and letters to members of the Appropriations Committee make a difference.



Nebraska residents talk with Sen. Les Seiler (District 33) about access to health care during a lobby day the Center co-sponsored to show support for LB 1032, the Transitional Health Insurance Program Act. This bill would provide 77,000 hard-working Nebraskans access to health insurance. | Photo by Traci Bruckner

BEYOND THE GAP

BY JOHNATHAN HLADIK, JOHNATHANH@CFRA.ORG

March marks the six-year anniversary of the Affordable Care Act being signed into law. The uninsured rate is now at 11.9 percent, the lowest ever recorded. Approximately 17 million more Americans have health insurance today than before the law was passed. Hospitals across the nation have saved tens of billions of dollars on uncompensated care.

Despite this progress, over 5 million Americans remain uncovered. They are unable to access health insurance because they fall into the “coverage gap.” These are individuals who make too much income to qualify for Medicaid, but too little to be eligible for the tax credits that make private health insurance affordable.

Over 70 percent of this group has at least one full-time worker in their family; an additional 12 percent of households include at least one individual employed part-time. More than 80 percent live in a home with income below the Federal Poverty Level. Nearly one-third of these households carry medical debt, the primary cause of bankruptcy in the United States.

The last statistic is the most alarming: 100 percent of those stuck in the “coverage gap” live in one of 18 states. That is because the other 32 states and the District of Columbia have expanded Medicaid. The rest have not, including our home state of Nebraska (see photo).

The majority of states that have expanded access

to health care have adopted programs modeled from the Affordable Care Act. Six states, however, took a different path.

Instead of looking to federal law, they opted instead to create their own program, tailoring the design to meet the unique needs of their population. Traditionally conservative states such as Indiana, Alaska and Montana all chose this option in 2015. Louisiana will join them in 2016.

More states are on the way. Wyoming Governor Matt Mead has included Medicaid expansion as part of his fiscal year 2017 budget proposal. Virginia Governor Terry McAuliffe has done the same. South Dakota Governor Dennis Daugaard has announced his intent to join them.

Six years later, it is clear the Affordable Care Act has made a positive difference. But challenges remain. A minority of states have stubbornly chosen to leave hard-working residents without access to health care. Those elected leaders have sacrificed the health of their constituents in pursuit of individual political goals.

You have a role to play. Legislation is under consideration in each of the 18 states that have yet to expand access to health care. If you live in one of those states, take this opportunity to tell your representative where you stand. Let’s work together to make the “coverage gap” a thing of the past.



Photo by Wyatt Fraas

WHAT DOES ENVIRONMENTAL STEWARDSHIP MEAN TO TRANSMISSION DEVELOPERS?

BY STEPHANIE ENLOE, STEPHANIEE@CFRA.ORG

Transmission systems across the country are being upgraded to improve grid security, efficiency, and access to local energy sources such as wind. We've found that public input is the key to maximizing benefits and reducing unwanted impacts from transmission lines.

To understand how local organizations and communities can help transmission developers be responsible environmental stewards, I spoke with Dan Hagan and Angela Jordan from ITC, an electric transmission utility. We talked about their siting and environmental management processes.

I learned it's important for transmission developers to do their due diligence first to avoid sensitive areas and species. For example, when evaluating possible routes, ITC uses information available in the public domain to identify important wildlife areas and ecosystems.

They then speak with local experts such as county conserva-

tion staff to gain additional local insight. ITC uses this information – as well as data on existing infrastructure, community assets, and cultural landmarks – to narrow down potential route options.

Once developers have identified a couple of promising route options, they can begin to hold public meetings. Under Iowa regulations, a transmission developer cannot meet with individual landowners along a proposed route until they have hosted public meetings. This may vary in your location.

Dan stressed that ITC welcomed stakeholder input during the regulatory process. But he said they are also careful to comply with all regulatory requirements related to stakeholder communications.

One of the best ways to provide input on a transmission line is to attend public meetings hosted by the developer. Ask questions and help identify sensitive areas or possible siting options.

You might be able to let the developer know about a private

conservation easement that should be avoided. Or maybe you can make them aware of an existing infrastructure that could be used as a transmission corridor.

When it comes time to start building a line, Dan and Angela discussed practices they use to improve their environmental footprint. These include:

- Putting employees through environmental training.
- Adjusting construction time lines to avoid migration and breeding seasons.
- Selecting pole types to reduce impact on surrounding areas.
- Working with local agencies to restore prairie or other habitat within easements on public land.

One of our goals is to encourage developers to use best practices and to work with local communities. If you have ideas for improving the process or have experience working with a developer, please let us know! Send an email to me at stephaniee@cfra.org or call 563.875.0066.

OUR READERS HAVE SPOKEN

BY MARIE POWELL, MARIEP@CFRA.ORG

Last September, we mailed an opinion survey to newsletter readers. We heard back from over 300 of you, a 23 percent return rate. Here are a few highlights.

Overall, you are satisfied or very satisfied with the newsletter content (89 percent). Not many of you have noticed a change in frequency of newsletters (66 percent).

Most of you feel you receive about the right amount of mail and email from us (84 percent). Although a few did note an increase in our fundraising appeals.

As I have long suspected, you indicated interest in a variety of topics we cover. These include farm policy (95 percent), clean energy (93 percent), community development (93 percent), small business (92 percent), health care (86 percent), and corporate farm-

ing (82 percent).

Of the topics you marked as of little to no interest, the arts was singled out most frequently (49 percent). This is interesting as we are bringing more stories about art, culture and storytelling into our work. Our goal is to deepen our depiction and appreciation of rural life. But, please let me know if you ever see an imbalance in our coverage.

Primarily, you dwell in rural places; 60 percent of you live on a farm, ranch or acreage; 21 percent in a small town; 14 percent an urban area; and 5 percent in suburbia.

Most of you are retired (46 percent), and are/were established farmers (40 percent). Around 10 percent own a rural business, and 17 percent are employed in a small town or rural area.



As to political affiliation, 44 percent indicated you are Democrat, 27 percent Republican, 25 percent Independent, and 5 percent other.

On the question of age, the largest group is 75 or older (36 percent), followed by 65 to 74 (30 percent), and 45 to 54 (23 percent). Most of you have a college education, with a bachelors degree or higher (61 percent). Finally, 71 percent are male and 29 percent female.

Many thanks for your participation.

CORPORATE CONTROL, CONTINUED FROM PAGE 8

Interestingly, the debate in Nebraska was not partisan. A mix of liberal and conservative senators landed on both sides of the issue.

Free-market conservatives found themselves split, some saw the prohibition as interference, and others argued the ban was necessary to maintain a free market.

Meanwhile, liberal senators who often fight to improve incomes for working people and protect our natural resources, found themselves voting in favor of allowing Smithfield to own hogs in Nebraska, a move that will diminish returns for farmers and put our natural resources at risk.

The debate was between populists who believe that everyday people deserve a fair shake, and those who believe in – or are re-

signed to – the creeping corporate takeover of our economy and our democracy. That sentiment has far-reaching impact.

This is about whether meat packers will eventually own and control all livestock production. It's also about whether proposed mega-mergers in the seed industry will leave farmers with fewer choices and higher costs. And it's about the pressure big box retailers put on small-town grocers and hardware store owners.

Ample research shows that in communities where family farms control the landscape, incomes are higher, unemployment is lower, and environmental outcomes are better. Similar research shows that a strong small business sector booms local economies.

The increased corporate domination of all sectors of our economy results in less opportunity for everyday rural people.

Rural people are fighting back. Citizens in North Dakota faced a change similar to the lifting of Nebraska's ban on packer ownership of hogs. Grassroots groups, led by North Dakota Farmers Union, launched a ballot initiative. The change in their law will now go before the people this June.

The fight against the creeping corporate control of our economy and our democracy is perhaps the hardest thing we do. But it is so fundamental to the values of the Center for Rural Affairs that we will continue to force the issue in the public square and in the halls of Congress.



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FROM THE DESK OF THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

CORPORATE CONTROL, FAIRNESS AND DEMOCRACY

BY BRIAN DEPEW, BRIAND@CFRA.ORG

The Nebraska Legislature voted in February to end the state’s ban on packer ownership of hogs. Multi-national packers such as Smithfield and Tyson will now be able to own hogs in the state. State lawmakers left the ban in place for cattle – for now.

Longtime supporters will remember that legal challenges led the courts to strike down Nebraska’s broader anti-corporate farming law, Initiative 300, in 2006. Similar laws have been struck down or gutted by court action across the nation.

Senators threw out the state’s ban on packer ownership of hogs on a vote of 34-12, a stark contrast to the vote that put the law in place in 1999. That year, all but

“ *This loss, along with the loss of anti-corporate farming laws across the country, is part of a corporate takeover of the economy and, ultimately, our democracy.*

Fundamentally, it’s a fight about fairness and competition in the marketplace. Competition drives capitalism, makes markets fair, and creates new opportunity. **”**

-Brian Depew, Executive Director

one senator voted for the ban on packer ownership of livestock.

The Center for Rural Affairs has long believed livestock should be owned by farmers and ranchers, not by large multinational corporations. That’s why we vigorously opposed repeal of the law.

This loss, along with the loss of anti-corporate farming laws

across the country, is part of a corporate takeover of the economy and, ultimately, our democracy. Fundamentally, it’s a fight about fairness and competition in the marketplace. Competition drives capitalism, makes markets fair, and creates new opportunity.

—READ MORE ABOUT [CORPORATE CONTROL](#) ON PAGE 7.