IN CELEBRATION OF FARMERS

BY KATHIE STARKWEATHER, KATHIES@CFRA.ORG

National Farm to School month is upon us. Remember it’s about getting fresh, healthy, locally grown food to our children. Remember it starts with the Farmer.

Anybody knows the challenge who has tried to grow food in a pot, a small garden, vertically, horizontally — the heat too much, the frost too soon, the pests too plenty; the rain too scarce.

But the love and enjoyment for what you are doing pulls you through the difficulties of growing food. The sense of accomplishment you feel as you see your plants grow, flower, and produce. The amazing taste and color of those foods you’ve just toiled over. Providing something for your family.

Most of us get to do this as a hobby. If we have a hail storm or drought, we are disappointed and frustrated, but it does not impact our income or our family too much.

Take that love and all those challenges and risks, multiply it many times and you have a farmer. A farmer who is willing to take those risks to do something he or she loves, in large part because they want each of us to have the wonderful food. They are willing to work from dusk to dawn to do that and try to make a living at it.

I know two young women farmers who started a small vegetable farm. They have off-farm jobs as many farmers and farm families have to do in order to exist. And while they are fortunate to do work they enjoy, their true passion is growing food and providing it to people like you and me. They want children to eat tasty squash, peppers, and carrots.

On September 11, 2014, Governor Heineman officially proclaimed October as Farm to School month in Nebraska. October is also National Farm to School Month. Local school food service directors and superintendents, farmers, students, and organizations showed their support by joining the signing of the proclamation and presenting the governor with a tasty and colorful example of Nebraska foods. Eggs from Prairie Pride Poultry in York; cheese and veggies from Clear Creek Organic Farms in Spalding; and garlic, squash, tomatoes, peppers and more from Cook Grow Sew in Lincoln filled this basket above the brim. Join us in celebrating, and connect with us to help bring the farm to your school and community.

Those pictured above are, from left to right: Billene Nemec, UNL Buy Fresh/Buy Local; Jeremiah Picard, Nebraska Farmers Union and Cook Grow Sew (farmer/co-owner) from Lincoln NE; Dan Hromas, Prairie Pride Poultry (farmer/owner) York NE; Governor Heineman; and Sarah Smith, CFRA, Nebraska Farm to School Lead. | Photo by Dave Hromas

GOVERNOR PROCLAIMS OCTOBER AS NEBRASKA FARM TO SCHOOL MONTH!
REMEMBERING PADDY SOLBERG
BY JOHN CRABTREE, JOHN@CFRA.ORG, AND TRACI BRUCKNER, TRACI@CFRA.ORG

We learned in August that our great friend, Paddy Solberg, had passed away.

We’ve mentioned Linus Solberg in our newsletters over the years. If you work on farm policy here at the Center for Rural Affairs, then you’ve met Linus. And once you’ve gotten to know Linus, even a little, then you were also afforded the pleasure of meeting Paddy Solberg as well.

Linus and Paddy were not simply husband and wife. They were partners, in farming, business, and in caring for their family. Whenever we worked with Linus, we were also working closely with Paddy. While Linus was more often the public face of the work the Solbergs did to create a better future for rural and small-town America, Paddy spoke out too.

Paddy welcomed us into their home, and on many occasion, offered us a place to stay and a warm meal before we hit the road again. Most importantly, she offered us her true and unwavering friendship and support for our work on behalf of family farms and rural communities.

She was kind, gregarious, absolutely genuine, and incredibly funny. Her accent reminded you that she had traveled the world, but her home reminded you that this Iowa hog farm was where she settled. We are blessed for having known and worked with Paddy. We miss her deeply, and we know we will not meet her like again. Love and peace in all things Linus, Penny, Sean, and all whose lives were touched by Paddy.

CENTER SEEKS MISSION-ALIGNED CAPITAL

WANT TO HELP OUR MISSION AND EARN A GOOD, SAFE YIELD ON YOUR FUNDS?

We have a special opportunity for you! We’re offering a chance to invest in mission-aligned capital (minimum $10,000) to strengthen our capacity to work on issues important to small towns and communities in rural America.

This opportunity is 100 percent backed by cash collateral and will provide a rate of return determined by your level of investment. For more information, contact Hank Rohling, hankr@cfra.org.

INVEST LOCAL, CONTINUED FROM PAGE 8.

are making such funds easier to establish.

If you are an entrepreneur, you could try soliciting local investors to finance your startup or growth.

What would this look like in your town if more people also “invested local”?

I don’t know all of the answers. But I do know if we wait for outside investors to save our small towns, we will be waiting a long time.

It’s time to send less of our investment money to Wall Street, and more of it to Main Street.

The future of small towns will be built by the people who live there.

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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USDA Boosts Small and Family AG Producers

By Traci Bruckner, tracib@cfra.org

Small farm and ranch businesses just got a boost from the U.S. Department of Agriculture! Through the Value Added Producer Grant Program (VAPG), USDA is investing $25 million in 247 businesses in 46 states. The funds will be used to create or expand value-added agricultural products.

The VAPG is a competitive grants program. It is targeted to beginning, socially disadvantaged, veteran, and small and mid-size family farmers and ranchers. Grants can be used to support business and marketing planning. Or they can fund feasibility studies to test out new niche markets or provide working capital to support a value-added enterprise.

We advocated to create this program back in 2000. We’ve worked ever since to make improvements, especially in farm bill debates. In a great move, the 2014 Farm Bill prioritized projects that best serve beginning and small and mid-sized farmers and ranchers. A new priority was added for returning veteran farmers and ranchers as well.

One of the projects awarded in our home state of Nebraska went to Prairie Pride Poultry of York, established in 2013 by Dan Hromas. Dan is a disabled veteran who served in both Iraq and Afghanistan. He is the second veteran farmer in the country, and the first in Nebraska, to be certified under the Homegrown by Heroes initiative.

Dan’s award will support marketing and delivery of his locally produced farm-fresh eggs. They come from his heritage-breed Rhode Island Red hens raised on pasture. Dan sells his eggs to three grocery stores. When supplies are ample, he also sells them to Chances R, a fantastic family-owned restaurant in York. Dan also sells through a nearby farmers market once a month.

When I spoke to Dan about this grant, he wanted to make sure I include the fact that he is a disabled veteran. Dan wants to help other veterans who are interested in farming access programs like VAPG and the Homegrown by Heroes initiative. If you know a veteran Dan could help, you can find Prairie Pride Poultry on Facebook and Twitter.

Same Great Service, Less Mail!

By Marie Powell, mariep@cfra.org

We love keeping you informed about rural issues. Our newsletter has been doing that in various ways and lengths for over 40 years.

We’ve asked you from time to time how often you want to receive the newsletter. Without fail, you have told us, “Do it however is most convenient.” Paper, email, social, even face to face, whatever works best and conserves precious resources.

So in 2015 we’re changing things a little. You’ll be receiving this newsletter every other month. We’ll increase the news we post online and send electronically. If you are signed up to receive our emails, you won’t miss a thing. (You can sign up at cfra.org – just look for the “Stay Connected” box.)

Even if you’re not online, you still won’t miss important news. We’ll send you the best of the news in your mailbox. Plus, we’ll keep your rural and state radio and newspapers filled with the news and topics important to rural communities. Expect some surprises when it’s not a newsletter month too!

So, less mail, same great service. Sounds like a positive change to me. Let me know if you have questions or comments.
This is the second in our series looking at the development of clean energy transmission in Upper Iowa. Writer Loren Flaugh gave a talk earlier this year at Iowa State University, sharing his interest in understanding the role transmission plays in helping our small towns grow.

In Part 1, Loren wrote how his interest first quickened when he realized just how many high voltage transmission projects were in the works. He sensed that MISO – the Midcontinent Independent Systems Operator – played an integral part. Yet he wondered, how much did farmers and landowners really know about MISO and its impact on farming operations. This episode tells how he found out.

I decided to conduct an unscientific experiment in the summer of 2012. At noon one day, I walked to the local Cenex gas station/convenience store armed with but one simple question. Cenex is the local farmer’s hideout. Sure enough, six or seven farmers were present drinking coffee, eating, and pondering typical farmer stuff.

After listening awhile, I asked if anyone was aware of MISO and what its primary purpose was. Coming as no surprise, nobody knew what the acronym MISO stood for, so I explained its origin. Still, that didn’t seem to provoke any awareness.

I explained that MISO was the independent, nonprofit entity that oversees the high voltage grid in the upper Midwest. I also explained that MISO’s primary mission was to get electricity to the consumer at the lowest possible cost.

I reported my results to Tina Potthoff at MidAmerican Energy. I explained my suspicions, my approach, and the results. I told her the typical Midwest farmer was clueless of MISO’s relevance. I argued that MISO and the utility companies did a poor job at getting useful information down to the level of the ordinary farmer.

Later in December, the Iowa Utilities Board and many MidAmerican Energy high voltage transmission engineers and right-of-way agents came to Hartley, Iowa. This was the first joint IUB/MidAmerican Energy landowner’s informational meeting to reveal the newly proposed MVP #3 345 kV high voltage transmission line project from O’Brien County to Webster County near Fort Dodge.

Sure enough, MidAmerican had people there to explain why MISO exists and how these MVP projects were analyzed and conceived over many years. MidAmerican’s MISO compliance officer, Jeff Gust, explained why the large Regional Transmission Organizations (RTOs) are vital for maintaining and upgrading the U.S. high voltage electric infrastructure.

He also explained the designation of renewable energy zones scattered throughout the 12-state region. These were designated in response to the 64,000 MW of wind requests that MISO had received prior to 2010. Though MISO doesn’t have the authority to insist that wind energy developers build wind farms in certain areas, it is aware of where wind energy firms are likely to prospect for future wind energy development. Local farmers and landowners were totally clueless of this new policy.

Perhaps some lessons can be learned. I wonder how many times MISO senior high voltage transmission analysts and engineers have appeared on some of the early morning Ag programs broadcast in most Midwest TV markets like Ag Day or U.S. Farm Report? TV programs like these are viewed widely throughout the region and are what reach the ordinary farmer and landowner. MISO should consider having representatives appear on these TV programs at least once or twice a year to explain long-range transmission expansion intentions.

Any future substantial upgrade to the high voltage transmission infrastructure will require a much stronger three-way partnership between landowners, public utility companies, and both the federal and state regulating agencies. Perhaps some of you will work for MISO in some capacity for a career. So keep this notion in mind. Maybe I’ll even see one of you on my TV some morning at 5:00.
FAITH LEADERS AGREE:
ACTION ON CLIMATE CHANGE NEEDED

BY LAUREN KOLOJECHICK-KOTCH, LAURENK@CFRA.ORG

Last month, we gave a very basic explanation of the science that shows us climate change is happening right now. This month, we want to share what faith communities are saying about climate change. No surprise here – they say being a person of faith and addressing climate change go hand in hand.

Religious leaders as diverse as Popes Francis and Benedict, the Dalai Lama, the Eastern Orthodox Bishops, the Conference of American Rabbis, the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, the Indigenous Peoples’ Global Summit, and the World Council of Churches are speaking out about climate change. They strongly support taking immediate and swift action.

Organizations like Interfaith Power and Light, and leaders in faith communities even closer to home are sharing that message too. Care for creation and for one’s neighbor were prominent messages at discussion panels hosted by the Center for Rural Affairs this year.

In Polson, Montana, Dr. Dan Spencer, an ordained United Church of Christ (UCC) minister and professor of Environmental Studies at the University of Montana, explained “action on climate change is very consistent with Christian values,” especially considering that climate change will disproportionately affect the most vulnerable populations.

He is puzzled by the widely held assumption that religious belief and action on climate change are at odds. “It’s right there in the biblical book of Genesis – all of creation is beloved by God, and we are to protect it and be good stewards of the land.”

Stewardship was also emphasized at the panel in Ames, Iowa. Panelist Arlyn Schipper, a Grundy County grain farmer, stated “my theory is, to be a Christian farmer, we need to do good stewardship no matter what.” He thinks we have a moral obligation to care for the land and build awareness about climate change.

Lisa Coons, who co-directs the Center for Earth Spirituality and Rural Ministry in Mankato, Minnesota, joined the panel in St. Peter, Minnesota. She echoes the call to educate our neighbors and leaders about what drives climate change, and what we can do to address it. Working together as a community, she says, is one of biggest things we can do to have an impact.

The Earth is our home. It is ours to cherish, protect, and preserve. Communities of faith are among the first to remind us of our responsibility to it, and to each other.

Visit cfra.org/climate to read more about what the faith community is saying and doing to encourage climate change action.
You have questions, we have (some) answers! There’s been a lot of confusion and misinformation about the Waters of the U.S. proposed rule. If you have other questions, we’d love to hear them too!

Why is the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) doing this rulemaking?

EPA’s job is to protect our nation’s water for everyone. The Clean Water Act, in place since the 1970’s, prohibits the discharge of pollution or dredge/fill material into “waters of the United States” without a permit. EPA is proposing changes to provide clarity to regulators and the regulated community regarding which bodies of water are subject to EPA’s jurisdiction, and which activities require a permit.

What do the rule changes look like?

Here’s where it gets a little wonky. Right now, the Clean Water Act regulates:
1. Traditional navigable waters;
2. Interstate waters, including interstate wetlands;
3. The territorial seas;
4. All impoundments of water identified in 1 – 3 and 5;
5. All tributaries of waters identified in 1 – 4;
6. All waters, including wetlands, adjacent to a water identified in 1 – 5; and
7. On a case-specific basis, other waters, including wetlands, provided that those waters alone, or in combination with other similarly situated waters, including wetlands, located in the same region, significantly affect the chemical, physical, or biological integrity of a jurisdictional water identified in 1 – 3.

Point #7 is meant to cover bodies of water such as the Prairie Pothole region in the Dakotas, which are important to the ecosystem of the area and don’t necessarily connect to other water due to the nature of this unique landscape. The EPA wants to make sure that someone doesn’t fill or pollute them.

Does the proposed rule regulate ditches?

Well, is the ditch a tributary? Tributaries are defined as a body of water with a bed, banks, and an ordinary high water mark, and which contributes flow, either directly or through another water, to a jurisdictional water. Tributaries are covered under the proposed rule, but if a ditch does not match the definition of a tributary, it’s not covered.

The proposed rule expressly excludes two types of ditches:
1. Ditches that are excavated wholly in uplands, drain only uplands, and have less than perennial flow; and
2. Ditches that do not contribute flow, either directly or through another water, to jurisdictional water.

What happens if I have jurisdictional water on my farm or ranch?

If you have a jurisdictional water on your farm, then you might need a permit before engaging in certain activities.

Does the Center have concerns about the rule?

Sure. No rule is perfect, and it’s our duty as citizens to engage with our government, let them know the mistakes they made, and work with decision makers to find a solution.
President Obama declared in January that despite Congressional logjams, “America does not stand still – and neither will I. So wherever and whenever I can take steps without legislation to expand opportunity for American families, that’s what I’m going to do.”

The Center for Rural Affairs has stood firmly in favor of the Environmental Protection Agency’s proposed Clean Power Plan as a vital first step in reducing carbon emissions from existing coal-fired power plants, addressing climate change, and creating opportunities for renewable energy development in rural America. And we have stood up for EPA’s Waters of the U.S. proposal to clear the regulatory waters surrounding the Clean Water Act and better protect rural America’s most precious resource – water.

President Obama must also understand, however, that America’s family farms, ranches, and small towns do not stand still either. Nor do we intend to be left behind. The time has come for President Obama to fulfill his 2007 campaign pledge and close the loopholes mega-farms use to get around farm program payment limits, providing them the unlimited subsidies they use to drive up land costs and drive family farmers out of business.

The president made that promise on an Iowa farm in 2007 as part of his rural policy platform while campaigning for votes from farmers and other rural Iowans. Every president since Ronald Reagan had the authority to close those loopholes, but failed to act.

We have applauded President Obama’s administration for moving the new carbon rule and Waters of the U.S. rule forward. If they can do these things, then they can by God write a meaningful “actively engaged” rule for federal farm programs that protects family farmers and reins in unlimited farm subsidies.

The U.S. Department of Agriculture will draft a rule on this issue by the end of the year. You can help us ensure it is meaningful by signing our petition. Email Traci at tracib@cfra.org to get signed on.
From the Desk of the Executive Director

Go Beyond Buy Local. Invest Local!

By Brian Depew, briand@cfra.org

Buy local. It's a well known strategy for small towns. Keeping your grocery money close to home keeps the grocery store close to home.

Economists tell us that every dollar spent at a locally owned business generates two to four times the economic benefit.

But what if we take it to the next level? What if we “invest local” too?

The concept is an extension of “buy local” campaigns that urge us to capture the multiplier effect of commerce by keeping our money close to home. “Buy local” campaigns that urge us to capture the multiplier effect of commerce by keeping our money close to home.

The concept is an extension of the economic benefit that locally owned businesses provide to your local economy. When you shop locally, a larger proportion of your money stays in your community, benefitting the local economy.

Go Beyond Buy Local. Invest Local!

Brian Depew, Executive Director

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