MFU encourages feedback on groundwater protection rule proposal

In March, Gov. Mark Dayton and the Minnesota Department of Agriculture (MDA) released an outline of a groundwater protection proposal, which deals with fertilizer application in areas of vulnerable soil. The department held 17 meetings last year to gain input from farmers and landowners, including with our members. Dayton and Minnesota Commissioner of Agriculture Dave Frederickson outlined the rule as applying mostly to vulnerable areas and areas with high nitrate levels in public drinking water. It would also create a system of voluntary and mandatory mitigation practices in areas with high nitrate concentrations in the public water supplies.

The House Agriculture Policy Committee has heard H.F. 2727 authored by Rep. Steve Green that would ban the adoption of the rule and H.F. 2887 authored by Rep. Jeff Backer that would require legislative approval of the law. MDA recently released more information on the framework for the rule that will focus its efforts on protecting public drinking water systems also known as Drinking Water Supply Management Areas (DWSMAs) that have high nitrate levels. A DWSMA is the estimated area within an aquifer that contributes water to a public water supply well over a period of 10 years. Much of northwestern Minnesota has been exempted. MDA also says the earliest fall restrictions of N application would occur in fall 2020.

MDA said they received more than 820 written comments in the rule-drafting process. More public hearings and a comment period will be scheduled for this summer, and MFU members are strongly encouraged to participate in these.

The full text of the proposed rule will be released in May for public comment and would be enacted in the fall. Meanwhile, view the map below of the areas where the rule would apply. Read the full proposal at [http://mn.gov/governor/newsroom/index.jsp?id=1055-328382](http://mn.gov/governor/newsroom/index.jsp?id=1055-328382).

MFU members who have comments about this proposal can contact Government Relations Director Thom Petersen at thom@mfu.org or (651) 288-4067.

Draft Vulnerable Groundwater Area Map showing restricted areas for application of nitrogen fertilizer in the fall or on frozen soils
The plight of dairy farms

Frequently we get calls from dairy farmers telling us they don’t know if they’ll be able to continue dairying. For hardworking family farmers, that’s devastating. Presently, dairy farmers are paid 30 percent less than their cost of production. Oversupply of milk has sent prices through the floor. It’s gotten to the point that a cooperative in New York mailed out the number for a suicide hotline to farmers after it was unable to take milk from some of them.

Because of this crisis, we participated in a series of discussions held by our colleagues at Wisconsin Farmers Union, where they invited Canadian dairy farmers to talk about their supply management system. Farmers Union supports a supply management system as a possible solution for the dairy crisis and has for many years. While it’s uncertain if this will be discussed further in the United States, we continue to support supply management.

Some good news is that the federal budget deal passed in February contained some reforms for dairy producers, such as lifting the $20 million cap on livestock insurance and providing more money to work with in the Farm Bill. Additionally, U.S. Rep. Collin Peterson, D-Minn., ranking member of the House Agriculture Committee, has come up with a dairy proposal for the bill. It remains to be seen how much it would help if implemented, but we will continue to advocate for strong funding for the dairy safety net, as we stated in our special order.

Consolidation threat to family agriculture

The looming merger between Bayer and Monsanto would mark yet another consolidation of major agriculture companies. Mergers like this leave fewer options on the market for farmers and less competition. NFU recently helped circulate a survey to farmers regarding the Bayer-Monsanto merger, and about 94 percent of respondents marked that they are at least somewhat concerned about the merger’s impact on farming and farming communities. NFU President Roger Johnson said, “This survey underscores what we’ve been hearing from our farm family members for decades – that overwhelming consolidation has substantially eliminated competition in the marketplace. Four or five firms dictate the prices that farmers pay for their inputs. Family farmers deserve fair prices, choices in what they plant, and the type of market competition that incentivizes firms to compete and innovate for their business.”

We need to keep pushing back against consolidation, for the sake of allowing family farmers the freedom to choose how they run their operations. The U.S. Department of Justice is currently reviewing the Bayer-Monsanto merger. Farmers Union urges them to block it.

Trade uncertainty continues

At the NFU convention, attendees expressed grave concern about President Trump’s approach towards working with other countries on trade agreements. While we as an organization have opposed some trade agreements in the past, we acknowledge that international trade is an important part of the agriculture economy in the U.S.

Farmers Union has taken a somewhat different approach to other agricultural groups, as we do fundamentally agree with President Trump’s statements that we need to improve our trade relationships. As stated in our special order on trade, eliminating our trade deficit would add millions of new jobs and ensure domestic sovereignty for agricultural products.

Our concern lies in the way his administration has gone about negotiating with our global trade partners. The uncertainty about what’s going to come of the situation has put a damper on agricultural commodity markets. And the newly implemented tariffs on steel and aluminum have prompted fear from the whole agricultural community about retaliation. China has already announced its placing tariffs on fruit, pork and several other foods. The fear now is that this will develop into a full-blown trade war.

(continued on page 14)
**LEGISLATIVE UPDATE**

**Give farmers another affordable health care option with MinnesotaCare Buy-In**

*By Gary Wertish, Minnesota Farmers Union President*

Despite all the debate about health care policy in Washington, D.C., last summer, Congress did not come up with a solution. Rather, it ended up being another round of finger-pointing and arguments about repealing and replacing the Affordable Care Act.

That means the family farmers who had been struggling with high premiums, some up to $40,000 a year, had no reprieve. Others are forced to go uninsured. This is not acceptable for those who do one of the most dangerous jobs there is.

The Minnesota Legislature has a chance to ease that burden for the farmers in our state. In 2017, Gov. Mark Dayton proposed adding a “buy-in” option to the MinnesotaCare program, which allows eligible working families a way to get more affordable health insurance premiums. He has revised the proposal and re-introduced it earlier this month.

Several of our members use MinnesotaCare now. Others, such as Brian and Therese Romsdahl of Watonwan County, could benefit from being able to buy into it. The Romsdales, who raise grains and beef, said at Minnesota Farmers Union (MFU) Lobby Day Drive-In, in our meeting with Gov. Dayton, that they owed $33,000 in health care costs in a year. Moved by their story, Dayton invited them as guests to his recent State of the State address and recognized them for the good work they do as family farmers, while calling on lawmakers to act on health care.

A better option is needed to help the Romsdales and countless other Minnesota farmers continue to grow our food. With so many unable to break even on their farm businesses right now, reducing costs in as many places as possible is critical. Partisan fighting isn’t going to help anyone.

Under Dayton’s 2018 proposal, the MinnesotaCare Buy-In would reimburse medical providers at the same rate as Medicare enrollees, which would strengthen the financial health of small and rural health practices.

It would expand health insurance choices for families across the state, especially those in rural Minnesota. Enrollees would pay their own premiums, so it would be of no additional cost to taxpayers. According to the proposal, it would only take a one-time startup cost.

MFU has supported the MinnesotaCare Buy-In since it was first proposed in 2017. We participated in five public meetings put on by the Dayton administration around the state to discuss the option. The feedback in favor of the buy-in option was quite positive. While it’s not perfect, we should acknowledge that MinnesotaCare, a program started with bipartisan support, has been working for 26 years.

The burdens on family farmers are increasing every day. We can help ease one of those burdens with more access to affordable health care. It’s time for the Legislature to end the partisan cycle of blame and pass a health care plan that takes the heavy costs off the backs of family farmers.

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**Ways to get compensated for implementing buffers**

Do you have to install a buffer or other water-quality practices on your farmland to comply with the Minnesota Buffer Law? There are programs you can use to get compensated for doing this. Here are a few options from the federal and state governments:

- **Continuous Conservation Reserve Program (CCRP)** – 10- to 15-year contracts with annual rental payments and restoration cost-share, for environmentally desirable land devoted to certain conservation practices
- **Conservation Reserve Program (CRP)** – 10-year contracts with annual rental payments and cost-share, for environmentally sensitive land
- **Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP)** – Financial and technical assistance for planning and implementing conservation practices on agricultural land
- **Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP)** – Earn payments for conservation performance, get advice on how to improve existing conservation systems or adopt others
- **Agricultural Conservation Easement Program (ACEP)** – Provides easement payment and restoration costs
- **Reinvest in Minnesota Reserve Program (RIM)** – Provides easement payments and restoration costs for restoring and protecting wetlands, riparian buffers and other lands
- **Minnesota Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (MN CREP)** – Combines CRP and RIM easements across 54 southern and western counties for practices that protect water
- **Conservation Cost-Share Program** – Grants and contracts through local soil and water conservation districts for soil health/water quality
- **Agriculture BMP Loan Program (AgBMP)** – Low-interest loans for agricultural Best Management Practices that reduce runoff from farm land
- **Some counties and lake associations may also offer financial assistance**

MFU encourages you to contact your local SWCD or USDA Farm Service Agency or Natural Resources Conservation Service office for financial or technical assistance, or with questions about the law.

Information courtesy of Minnesota Board of Water and Soil Resources, [www.bwrr.state.mn.us/buffers](http://www.bwrr.state.mn.us/buffers)
Governor Dayton releases budget requests

Governor Mark Dayton has released his supplemental budget requests. Of interest to MFU are $200,000 for rural mental health help for farmers, $15 million for CREP, $20 million for the Rural Finance Authority, $30 million for border to border broadband and the MinnesotaCare Buy-In for health care. Watonwan Co. Farmers Union President Brian Romsdahl and his wife Therese were guests of Gov. Dayton at his State of the State address where he introduced them while talking about the MinnesotaCare Buy-In and how it would help farmers.

Ditch mowing

Many ditch mowing bills are being considered at the Legislature this year. There are many ideas floating around after the Minnesota Department of Transportation (MNDOT) recently released its report about the subject of mowing and haying on state highways. MFU is supportive of extending the current moratorium on enforcing permits for one year as details are continuing to be ironed out. The three big issues are the Aug. 1 date, permitting and enforcement. MFU continues to meet with stakeholders, legislators and the administration on this subject. Members can see more information on MNDOT’s webpage: http://www.dot.state.mn.us/mowing/

COOL bill introduced

MFU was pleased to see introduction of Country of Origin Labeling (COOL) for certain meats by Sens. Lourey, Eken and Isaacson and Reps. Bly and Clark Johnson. The United Food and Commercial Workers (UFCW) worked on the bill introduction.

Ag Driver’s license

Recently the House Transportation Committee moved H.F. 1126 authored by Rep. Deb Kiel back to the House floor for consideration by the full body. The bill modifies some of the requirements for a restricted driver’s license (farm permit) that can be issued for farm work by allowing unaccompanied driving within 40 miles of the farmhouse, which is increased from 20 miles; and it clarifies that the license is available for work on any type of farm, regardless of how it’s legally constituted. Sen. Torrey Westrom is the Senate author. MFU supports this legislation.

Ag license plate

MFU has been working with several interested parties on H.F. 3152 authored by Rep. Rod Hamilton that creates a Minnesota agriculture special license plate. As part of obtaining the plate, a vehicle owner would need to donate $20 annually for Minnesota FFA Foundation and Minnesota 4-H activities. Unfortunately, the bill is being held up due to the MNLARS issue. MFU will keep advocating for the bill and urging for it to move forward. Sen. Gary Dahms is the Senate author.

Goggin, Dahms counseling bills

The Senate Ag Committees have heard testimony and passed legislation authored by Sen. Dahms and Sen. Mike Goggin that would appropriate dollars from the general fund to the commissioner of agriculture for transfer to the Board of Trustees of the Minnesota State Colleges and Universities for additional statewide mental health counseling support to farm families and business operators. MFU strongly supports these important bills and has testified in favor of them.

MFU testifies on tax conformity

MFU has testified before the House Tax Committee with concerns on tax conformity issues with the recent passage of the federal tax bill. One of MFU’s concerns is Minnesota’s current low amount for conformity with Section 179 (accelerated depreciation) of $25,000 and the federal government now being at $1 million. MFU is also concerned that under the new tax bill it looks as if the new law will require farmers to report the taxable gain on the sale of the machinery based on the “trade-in” value. With the federal law, a farmer can offset the gain by taking 100 percent bonus depreciation or Section 179 on the new piece of equipment. On the state income tax side, offsetting the whole gain may be more difficult to accomplish in Minnesota due to limits on section 179 to $25,000 and limits the amount of bonus depreciation to 20 percent. MFU will continue to work on this issue and urges farmers who have questions about the new tax bill to contact me.

## NFU on Organic Rule

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) recently withdrew the Organic Livestock and Poultry Practices (OLPP) final rule, a set of standards that organic producers would have had to meet to qualify for the voluntary organic label for livestock and poultry. NFU President Roger Johnson issued the following statement in response to USDA’s action:

“The voluntary practices that farmers need to meet to qualify for a USDA ‘organic’ label have always been governed by those that created the organic movement and who adhere to the strict standards that are agreed upon by the National Organic Standards Board. This body directed the National Organic Program to issue the OLPP standards to have some consistency in what an organic practice is.

“USDA’s action to withdraw the OLPP rule is a mistake that will cost the family producers who already adhere to strict standards to meet ‘organic’ standards. It puts them on an uneven playing field with the types of operations who skirt the rules, yet also benefit from the same USDA organic label.”

**THOM PETERSEN, GOVERNMENT RELATIONS DIRECTOR**

thom@mfu.org
Trump administration unveils trade actions against China

**NFU laments administration’s ‘bull in a china shop’ approach, urges tactful process to address trade woes**

The Trump administration recently unveiled trade actions against China that will likely spur significant retaliatory measures aimed at U.S. agricultural products.

The move is in response to a U.S. Trade Representative office investigation on China’s violations of intellectual property rights. Soon after, China introduced tariffs of its own on U.S. agricultural products, including on pork, fruits and nuts, and has threatened tariffs on soybeans and ethanol.

National Farmers Union supports aggressive efforts to fight unfair trade practices. The organization regrets the administration’s apparent lack of a plan to safeguard the interests of family farmers. NFU President Roger Johnson released the following statement:

“Our trade agenda for the past 30 years has been to promote free trade at all costs, ignoring countries cheating on intellectual property rights and currency manipulation. While we’re appreciative of the administration’s focus on creating fair trade between the U.S. and our trading partners, their ‘bull in a china shop’ approach to fixing our trade woes is dangerous.

“Family farmers and ranchers are always the first to be hit by retaliatory tariffs, and in the case of China, significant exports markets are likely to be the first casualty. NFU is very concerned about the effects that China’s proposed retaliatory efforts would have on all agricultural products, particularly given our already burdensome inventories of grains. The President must have a plan in place to protect family farmers before seeking to remedy unfair trade practices.”

Industrial Hemp Program open to farmers

Many farmers have expressed interest in growing industrial hemp after the Minnesota Industrial Hemp Development Act became law in 2015. This allowed the Minnesota Department of Agriculture to create an industrial hemp research pilot program in order to study the growth, cultivation and marketing of industrial hemp.

This law directed the commissioner of agriculture to make program rules, determine a fee structure and perform testing and other regulatory activities.

Since 2016, Minnesota has been running an industrial hemp pilot program. Applications are now open for the 2018 program. There’s no deadline – the window will remain open.

Apply at [www.mda.state.mn.us/plants/hemp/appinstructions.aspx](http://www.mda.state.mn.us/plants/hemp/appinstructions.aspx)

NFU Disappointed by Harmful Modifications of Section 199A in Omnibus Package

Congressional appropriators revealed an omnibus appropriations bill today that includes significant and harmful modifications to an important tax break for farmers and agricultural cooperatives, known as Section 199A. The tax break was included in last year’s tax overhaul, the Tax Cuts and Jobs Act, as a means to level the playing field between agricultural cooperatives and corporations who received a dramatic tax break in the legislation.

National Farmers Union (NFU) recently opposed these proposed changes to the tax provision. Its members passed a special order of business in support of Section 199A due to its value in improving the livelihood of farm families and in strengthening rural communities.

NFU President Roger Johnson issued the following statement in response to the omnibus language:

“We are deeply disappointed that Congress included harmful modifications to Section 199A that would have ensured farmers and cooperatives were not worse off and that small private elevators were not disadvantaged.

Those compromises were disregarded in favor of corporate interests. Reverting back to Section 199, in light of double-digit corporate tax relief, leaves farmers and their cooperatives worse off than prior to the passage of the Tax Reform and Jobs Act.

“There were meaningful bipartisan compromises to remedy challenges associated with 199A that would have ensured farmers and cooperatives were not worse off and that small private elevators were not disadvantaged. Those compromises were disregarded in favor of corporate interests.

“Further, the Congressional Budget Office projects that these modifications in the omnibus would raise $100 million for the federal government, which will come out of the pockets of farmers and their cooperatives. Congress can and should do better for farm families and rural communities.”
MEMBERSHIP INCENTIVE PROGRAMS

Building our grassroots membership through active counties

By Bruce Miller, Membership and Outreach Director

Active local and county Farmers Union organizations are a key puzzle piece in creating Farmers Union’s grassroots success. At both the state and national levels, Farmers Union is greatly appreciative of the efforts put forth by our locals and counties and wishes to give recognition to those groups demonstrating leadership in their communities.

It takes even more effort to keep our counties viable in today’s hectic world. We compete with so many other events and activities, and it seems as if we’re all time-challenged.

But having a local connection continues to be something our members cherish and support.

To gain state and national recognition, there is a Leadership Achievement Award with National Farmers Union for counties for building our grassroots membership.

Those selected for the award will receive recognition for their work.

**What does a county have to do to qualify?**

1. Hold at least four meetings per year
2. Have your county organization represented at a minimum of two state and/or national meetings a year
3. Participate in or conduct at least two community activities or programs during the calendar year
4. Have your county organization represented during the calendar year at one local and/or state cooperative organization function
5. Have a membership increase over the previous year

Every MFU county that achieves a NFU Leadership Achievement Award will receive a certificate from NFU and other rewards for their work.

For questions on how your county can meet these criteria, please contact me at bruce@mfu.org.

Want to help build Minnesota Farmers Union and earn a little money doing so? Take part in the Minnesota Farmers Union Membership Recruitment Reward Program.

**Individual Member Bonus Payments**

Any member of Minnesota Farmers Union (MFU) who helps renew memberships or recruit new members is eligible for the Individual Member Bonus Program.

A recruiting member will receive $7.50 for every one year membership and $12 for every two or three year membership. This applies to both new and renewing memberships.

To encourage the recruitment of new members, each recruiting member will receive an additional $3 for new members recruited.

Incentive payments are mailed to recruiting members in the spring of the following year after all memberships have been processed for the year and annual MFU membership is certified.

Do you need a membership book? MFU updated membership slips to include additional information needed to process payments. Please contact the office to receive your up-to-date membership books and track your recruitment.

**2018 Rider Program**

Any recruiting member who accompanies a MFU staff member on recruiting visits is eligible to earn the incentive fees as outlined in the Individual Member Bonus Program.

Riding with another MFU member also makes you eligible for the Individual Member Bonus Program. There is nothing better than working with friends, building membership, as well as getting recognition and some extra cash.

We welcome members to work with staff and other Minnesota Farmers Union members to recruit new members and to encourage current members to rejoin MFU.

On the bottom of the membership slip, make sure to add your name as the rider! This is how MFU staff tracks your incentive payments from the Individual Member Bonus Program.

**National Farmers Union Star Awards**

MFU members who actively recruit new members are eligible for awards from NFU: the Blue Star and Silver Star. You can earn points towards these Star awards each time you sign up a new member, plus get other gifts along the way. Here are the awards:

- **10 points** – Farmers Union logo cap
- **15 points** – Farmers Union shirt
- **20 points** – $100 credit toward any Farmers Union event registration: state or national convention, camp, Fly-in or other educational program
- **25 points** – $200 Cabela’s gift card
- **40 points** – **The Blue Star Award!** Blue Star lapel pin and a $350 Cabela’s gift card
- **50 points** – **The Silver Star Award!** The historic Silver Star lapel pin for outstanding leadership in membership recruitment, plus a $500 credit toward any Farmers Union event registration or $350 Cabela’s gift card.

Here’s how the point system works:

- **One-year renewals:** 1/2 point
- **One-year new memberships:** 1 point
- **Multi-year membership renewals:** 1/2 point per year renewed
- **New multi-year membership:** 1 point per year signed up for

All awards are based on Membership Recruitment conducted between Jan. 1 and Dec. 31 of each year. MFU staff are not eligible to participate in these programs. For more information or to participate, please contact Bruce Miller at bruce@mfu.org or Laura Sherar at laura@mfu.org. Membership forms and materials will be sent to you.
Conservation Compliance Required for USDA Benefits

Planting season is almost here, and the USDA Farm Service Agency would like to send out a friendly reminder on the importance of remaining in compliance with conservation provisions. The easiest way to remain compliant is to make sure to file an AD-1026 to determine whether or not tiling or drainage modification fits within the scope of USDA conservation provisions. As a reminder, it’s also important that farm operators do not plant agricultural commodities on ground that has been determined to be a converted wetland. If you have specific questions related to your farm or wetland compliance this planting season, don’t hesitate to contact your local FSA or Natural Resource Conservation Service Office.

The Food Security Act of 1985, as amended, requires producers participating in most programs administered by the FSA and the NRCS to abide by certain conditions on any land owned or farmed that is highly erodible or that is considered a wetland. Producers participating in these programs and any person or entity considered to be an “affiliated person” of the producer, are subject to these conditions. The regulations covering the conditions are set forth in the Federal Register at 7 CFR Part 12.

In order for farmers to receive farm program benefits from USDA, it’s required that producers stay compliant with USDA conservation compliance provisions. To be in compliance with the highly erodible land conservation and wetland conservation provisions, producers must agree, by certifying on Form AD-1026, that they will not:

- Produce an agricultural commodity on highly erodible land without a conservation system
- Plant an agricultural commodity on a converted wetland
- Convert a wetland to make possible the production of an agricultural commodity

The purpose of conservation compliance is to reduce soil loss due to erosion; protect the nation’s long-term ability to produce food and fiber; reduce sedimentation and improve water quality; and assist in preserving the values, acreage and functions of the nation’s wetlands. For farmers to be eligible for premium support on their federal crop insurance, a completed and signed AD-1026 form must be on file with the FSA. Since many FSA and NRCS programs have this requirement, most producers should already have an AD-1026 on file. If producers or new farmers have not filed an AD-1026 they must do so by their insurance premium billing date.

Since enactment of the 1985 Farm Bill, eligibility for most commodity, disaster and conservation programs has been linked to compliance with the highly erodible land conservation and wetland conservation provisions. The 2014 Farm Bill continues the requirement that producers adhere to conservation compliance guidelines to be eligible for most programs administered by FSA and NRCS. This includes the new price and revenue protection programs, the Conservation Reserve Program, the Livestock Disaster Assistance programs and Marketing Assistance Loans implemented by FSA. It also includes the Environmental Quality Incentives Program, the Conservation Stewardship Program and other conservation programs. Because so many USDA benefits are tied to conservation compliance, it’s essential that producers are aware of wetland and highly erodible land conservation requirements. For more information on regulations or for the status of wetlands and highly erodible land, please contact your local USDA service center.

**DAN MAHONEY, CED**
**SIBLEY COUNTY FSA**
daniel.mahoney@mn.usda.gov
Continuing Education Scholarships

Every year, Minnesota Farmers Union and National Farmers Union offer numerous scholarship opportunities to members and their children. In 2018, there are more opportunities than ever. There is more than $14,000 worth of scholarship money available. Please encourage any student currently attending, or just starting college this fall, to visit www.mfu.org/scholarships for more information and to download the applications.

New in 2018, Minnesota Farmers Union will be offering five $1,000 scholarships to be awarded to MFU members or their children. “With the high cost of college education, it’s important to provide support for students that seek higher education and will bring that knowledge back to farms and rural communities in Minnesota,” said MFU President Gary Wertish.

Rice County Farmers Union has a long history of sponsoring scholarships not only within Rice County, but also to students across the state. Scholarships from Rice County Farmers Union are available to Minnesota Farmers Union family members planning to attend or currently enrolled in a post-secondary institution (technical or trade schools, community colleges, state universities or private institutions).

The Kandiyohi County Farmers Union Scholarship is available to any Minnesota Farmers Union member or their child who resides in Kandiyohi County. Please contact Donnel Williamson for more information at WilliamsonOrganicFarm@gmail.com.

The Don Tentis Memorial/Wabasha County Scholarship is available to Minnesota Farmers Union family members who reside in Wabasha County and plan to attend or are currently enrolled in a post-secondary institution (technical or trade schools, community colleges, state universities or private institutions).

National Farmers Union also offers many scholarships, such as the Stanley Moore National Scholarships, the Hubert K. & JoAnn Seymour Scholarship and the Stanley Moore FUI Foundation Regional Scholarships. Please visit nfu.org for more information on these National scholarships.

Minnesota Farmers Union Leadership Camp is affordable and open to everyone, regardless of your connection to farming.

It’s all about helping young people become good citizens by planting the seeds of responsibility, leadership and cooperation in an environment where those qualities can grow and flourish. While at camp, participants have many opportunities to develop positive qualities through some of the simple, day-to-day tasks. These activities provide a foundation for all campers to share the responsibility of making camp a fun, safe place to be, and develop cooperation skills that can last a lifetime.

Leadership and cooperation happen at all levels of Farmers Union Leadership Camp, and sometimes these skills are demonstrated in an act as simple as helping a younger camper with a craft project or assembling a costume to wear at a theme night. Campers develop strong leadership roles by participating in groups where campers are taught the importance of legislation and how it can affect their community, and how to become an effective leader. Farmers Union Leadership Campers can make a difference in their community.

Farmers Union strives to provide an environment that continually fosters young people. One of the many ways the organization achieves this is by allowing campers to take an active role in shaping the educational component of camp. During the year, the Youth Advisory Council, elected by their peers at Senior Camp, discuss, select and build the base for the annual educational theme.

But camp isn’t only about education. It’s also about providing a safe environment where campers can hang out, be kids and have fun. Campers get to sing at campfires and dress up in crazy costumes for theme night. They can swim, play games, go on nature hikes and much more.

Most of all, campers can meet young people from throughout the state, both urban and rural, with whom they can build lifelong friendships.

Camp Dates and Locations
June 18-22 (Mon-Fri): Northern Elementary Camp at Lake Sarah Campground
June 25-29 (Mon-Fri): Northern Junior High Camp at Lake Sarah Campground
July 17-21 (Tues-Sat): Southern Elementary Camp at Sibley State Park
July 23-27 (Mon-Fri): Southern Junior High Camp at Sibley State Park
July 29- Aug 3 (Sun-Fri): Statewide Senior High Camp at Sibley State Park

Early bird rates (available through May 1):
$90 Elementary
$115 Junior/Senior High

Registration/Information:
www.mfu.org/camp

Glen Schmidt
Education Director
glen@mfu.org
The Minnesota Department of Agriculture (MDA) has extended its “Crisis Connection” telephone hotline service for another year.

The program has renamed the service Farm & Rural Help Line, with the toll-free number (833) 600-2670. You are encouraged to call this line if you need any kind of assistance. It’s available 24 hours a day, 365 days a year.

If you or any farmers you know would like to speak with Ted Matthews, the state rural mental health specialist based out of MnSCU, his number is (320) 266-2390. He meets with farmers one-on-one and free of charge. No insurance card, paperwork or referral is necessary.

Farm Advocates provide one-on-one assistance for Minnesota farmers who face crisis caused by either a natural disaster or financial problems. They understand the needs of agricultural families and communities. They are trained and experienced in agricultural lending practices, mediation, lender negotiation, farm programs, crisis counseling, disaster programs and recognize the need for legal and/or social services. Plus, most of the Farm Advocates are MFU members.

Farm & Rural Help Line

Farm and Ranch Stress Assistance Network

Farm Advocates

If you or any farmers you know would like to speak with Ted Matthews, the state rural mental health specialist based out of MnSCU, his number is (320) 266-2390. He meets with farmers one-on-one and free of charge. No insurance card, paperwork or referral is necessary.

MFU thanks Emmer, Nolan for introducing STRESS Act

The Stemming the Tide of Rural Economic Stress and Suicide (STRESS) Act, introduced by U.S. Reps. Tom Emmer (R-Minn.), Tom O’Halleran (R-Ariz.), Rick Nolan (D-Minn.), David Young (R-Iowa), Mark Pocan (D-Wis.), Rodney Davis (R-III.), Michelle Lujan Grisham (D-N.M.), John Katko (R-N.Y.) and Chellie Pingree (D-Maine), would provide vital assistance to family farmers and ranchers who are struggling amidst a 52 percent decline in net farm income over the last five years.

The bill would reauthorize the Farm and Ranch Stress Assistance Network (FRSAN), a program authorized in the 2008 Farm Bill to provide farmers with stress assistance programs. FRSAN has not been funded since being authorized.

“Farmers in Minnesota and across America are in the midst of a suicide crisis,” said Rep. Emmer, whose district encompasses areas of rural Minnesota including parts of Stearns, Benton, Wright and Sherburne Counties. “Those who work in agriculture face uniquely high-stress challenges ranging from social isolation to strong dependence on factors outside of their control. Combined with the incredible lack of mental health treatment available, our farmers have been left to suffer alone in the shadows without the help and care they need and deserve. Addressing the shortage of services available with the STRESS Act is a good first step to turn the tide on this crisis.”

MFU thanks Rep. Emmer and Rep. Nolan for introducing the STRESS Act on behalf of Minnesota’s family farmers. We will continue to work with them to see that this important and needed legislation is passed by Congress in a timely manner.
Many farmers in Minnesota have gone out of business due to the farm economic crisis. While we don’t want to see this continue, we also want to share resources with you that can help you get back on your feet if you find yourself in this situation.

One of these resources is the Dislocated Worker Program, whose services are designed to help workers and self-employed individuals, including farmers, get back to work as quickly as possible and overcome such difficult barriers to employment as:

• Difficulty transferring specialized skills to other occupations or industries
• A decline in the market demand for certain skills

Services are custom tailored to meet an individual worker’s specific needs. Working one-on-one with a counselor, you’ll develop a plan for employment that may include:

• Career planning and counseling
  - Advice on making career decisions and developing job goals
  - Personal planning
  - Assessment tools
• Job search assistance
  - Workshops on preparing cover letters and resumes, interviewing and networking
  - Finding “hidden” jobs
  - Job clubs
• Counselor-approved training
  - GED
  - Workplace effectiveness skills
  - Short-term training to brush-up skills or get a new certification
  - Long-term training for new skills in a new field
• Support services
  - Limited funds are available for expenses such as transportation or family care to help you achieve employment or training goals

How to Apply:
You may inquire about Dislocated Worker Programs at a local WorkForce Center. Staff will help determine if you are eligible and get you started.

Find your local WorkForce Center at https://mn.gov/deed/jobseekers/workforce-centers/workforce-center-locations

Congrats to Paul Johannes, Farmers Union Insurance Agency’s 2017 Agent of the Year!

Paul Johannes, Johannes Agency of Willmar and Olivia, MN, was recently named “2017 Agent of the Year” by Farmers Union Insurance Agency at the annual Statewide meeting in St. Cloud, Minnesota on March 7, 2018.

Paul was selected for this honor from 37 agents throughout the State of Minnesota who represent Farmers Union Insurance Agency. This recognition is the result of outstanding Agency performance and the consistently high level of exceptional service Paul and his staff provide to his customers.

“Paul’s commitment to his Agency, community and the consistent focus of giving the best service to his policyholders is a great example to the rest of us at Farmers Union Insurance Agency,” said Rodney Allebach, FUIA President and General Manager. Paul is pictured at left with MFU President Gary Wertlieb and Agency President Rodney Allebach. Congratulations, Paul!

The Johannes Agency has offices in Willmar and Olivia. In Willmar, call Alex, Joyce or Nicole at (320) 235-2540. In Olivia, call Paul or Brittany at (320) 523-1150. Visit Paul’s website at www.johannesagency.com, and be sure to follow Johannes Agency on Facebook.

Farmers Union Insurance Agency is a full-service Agency writing auto, home, farm, crop, commercial, agribusiness, life and health coverage in MN.

www.mnfuia.com & MNFUIA on social media
MEMBER IN FOCUS: DAVE JOHNSON

For Dave Johnson of Fergus Falls, his first memory of Minnesota Farmers Union was a picnic on Long Lake when he was 8 years old. “The only reason I went is because we could play softball,” he said with a chuckle.

Some years later, our organization’s meaning to him would go far beyond sports. The longtime president of West Otter Tail County Farmers Union and 30-year Executive Committee member has devoted many years of his life to MFU’s success. He concluded his tenure on the Executive Committee this past February.

**Farming and teaching**

Dave grew up on a family farm in Fergus Falls, with grains and a small livestock operation. Attending Concordia College in Moorhead, he graduated with an education degree and went into teaching in 1960. But he and his wife Donna, whom he married in 1961, couldn’t stay away from the farm.

“Dave used to do some custom work for one of the neighbors, who said, ‘I’m going to sell you my farm someday,’” Donna said. “Eventually he did, and it was 100 acres.” That was the start of the Johnsons’ grain operation. The house at their farm place was built in 1904 by immigrants, whose family became good friends of Dave’s parents. It’s in the same neighborhood that Dave grew up in; his brother took over their home farm.

Meanwhile, Dave taught several subjects, from physical education to business, and coached basketball, in the small town of Herman, 36 miles south of their farm. Donna worked in town until the birth of their first of three sons, Doug.

“My wife has been very instrumental,” Dave said. “Some days she’d put the bassinet in the truck and haul grain to town while I was at school. I’d come home and fill up the truck or combine at night, then she’d do the same thing the next day.”

Dave taught in Herman for six years, then went to Campbell, which was closer to home, until 1975. At one point, he applied for a teaching job in Fergus Falls.

“I would have rented out my farm because I really enjoyed teaching,” he said. “A few days after my interview, the principal called and said that the superintendent wanted to hire someone right out of college so they could pay them less than they’d have to pay me. I think I made up my mind after that that I was going to go farm.”

It was around that time that they bought more farmland next to the acres they already had. “In 1973, the U.S. sold a bunch of grain and wheat to Russia. They had a famine there,” Dave recalled. “Wheat that was normally $3.50-$4 was $6.50/bushel. I could have paid for (the land) in one year. You never do that though. I got very fortunate.”

By the time they were done buying land, the Johnsons owned nearly 1,000 acres (which Donna’s boss once joked to her that was the number needed to farm). They made the farm a corporation, which made it easier for Dave to transfer the operation to his second son, Darren, who took over in 1996 and farms the land today.

“(Darren) is doing a very good job on keeping machinery updated,” Dave said. “We don’t buy too many new pieces of equipment, but we have good used equipment. That’s one of the secrets to keeping on with farming in these tough times.”

**One of the most efficient**

The Johnsons have seen their farm through the hard times of the 1980s and into today. What’s Dave’s advice?

“Just tighten things down,” he said. “Instead of buying new machinery, we just got by with what we had. I think just about every year, we had a bottom line in the black. My nephew works for Farm Credit Services, and he says we’ve got one of the most efficient operations he’s come into contact with.

“You don’t have to buy machinery every year just because the neighbors did.”

Dave also admitted that they’ve gotten a lot of good luck.

“We’ve gotten good crops when we needed them,” he said. “1976 was an extremely dry year. We made it through, put up an irrigation system that year. Now we have three irrigation systems. That’s one more variable you have control over.”

**Rejuvenating MFU**

Dave recalled that after his early encounters with Farmers Union, the organization’s presence in his community diminished. Things changed when then-MFU President Cy Carpenter approached him in 1977 about running to become the next county president. Dave was elected and planned a free dinner in the nearby town of Elizabeth, then held monthly county meetings. Dave became a consistent attendee of the state convention, National Farmers Union Convention and the NFU Legislative Fly-in.

To revive Farmers Union in his area, he had help from Clyde Allebach, the late father of Farmers Union Insurance Agency President Rodney Allebach.

“Clyde was really the first person who kept it going and got people enthused about Farmers Union in this part of the state,” Dave said. “He had a pickup that was fueled by burning wood chips. It was quite a conversation piece.”

He also cited the leadership and staff of MFU over the years, each adding something to the organization that made it more viable.

“And (MFU Legal Counsel) Dave Velde,” he said. “He’s done tremendous by us.”

Ten years into his being a county president, a spot on the Executive Committee opened up in the middle of the year. Then-Field Services Director Ron Hauglie approached Dave about running for that spot. Dave did that, too.

“I really enjoyed it,” he said. “I found out what business organizations have to go through to survive. Farmers Union has really come along. I look forward to many good things for MFU in the coming years.”

**A good life**

Now Dave and Donna enjoy living by Lake Jewett, a house they built in 1996 when Darren began farming their land. They have seven grandchildren and one great-grandchild. Son Doug lives in Jordan, Minn., while Darren and youngest son Davy live nearby.

Looking back on his life, Dave is glad he’s taken the path he did: farming.

“I’m going to be 80 years old in a couple months, and I still get to drive tractor and combine, which I love to do,” he said. “What more could you ask for?”

Minnesota Farmers Union  Standing for Agriculture, Fighting for Farmers
Integrating Faith, Food and the Environment

As farmers, you hear advice almost constantly, from how much fertilizer to apply to how to save money in a tightly squeezed farm economy. How often do you consider the meaning of farming to our world? The meaning seems obvious – farmers feed the world. But Catholic Rural Life’s conference, “A Noble Vocation: Integrating Faith, Food & the Environment,” took a fresh look. The conference, sponsored in large part by Farmers Union Enterprises, encouraged participants to look at farming as a mutual relationship between the farmer and the land, and to consider farming as a noble vocation, more than just a job.

The conference was based on principles set forth by the document “Vocation of the Agricultural Leader: Integrating Faith with Agriculture and the Environment,” published by Catholic Rural Life and the International Catholic Rural Association. Several MFU members came to the University of St. Thomas for the conference. It was attended by farmers, clergy, scientists, professors and other agricultural leaders. Speakers explored topics such as the environmental challenges for agriculture, indigenous perspectives and the role of pastoral leaders in faith, food and the environment.

An overarching message of the conference was that the heavy industrialization of agriculture, while making farmers able to produce more, has cost our society its interconnectedness with the environment and the food itself. As Dr. John Ikerd, emeritus professor of agriculture economics at the University of Missouri, put it, agriculture has become driven by profits, rather than a sense of meeting the needs of society.

The challenge of agricultural leaders is to address the crisis in agriculture as one crisis of the whole world – not just a certain group of people. Pope Francis has alluded to this truth in his work.

Meg Moynihan, MFU member and Minnesota Department of Agriculture State Programs Administrator Principal, discussed how the tough economic climate for farmers has become a crisis of spirit. “Farmers are caretakers, but now they need some caretaking,” she said.

Other speakers prompted attendees to consider international challenges in agriculture. Representatives from Lutheran World Relief spoke about how in parts of the world that grow coffee, it has become such a commodity that farmers’ livelihoods often depend on the market prices for coffee – not unlike what corn growers in the U.S. face. Not to mention how climate change forces many farmers to drastically change their practices to be able to keep up.

It’s the spiritual meaning of farming that is perhaps most important to remember. From the perspective of the native American speakers, the land has meaning to them beyond something that produces food constantly – it’s Mother Earth, deserving of reverence. For the indigenous people of the White Earth Nation, the wild rice, or manoomin, is sacred.

Food is something every human needs to live. We need a healthy environment to produce it. Faith is what drives many of us to do what we do. Participants left encouraged to share what they learned with their communities: that agriculture is a noble vocation and that we all must work together to care for our world.

Apply for the 2018-19 NFU Beginning Farmer Institute

The application period for National Farmers Union’s Beginning Farmer Institute is now open!

This program develops leadership and farm management skills in beginning farmers and encourages them to apply those abilities in their community organizations. Farmers Union employs educational sessions, business tools and professional speakers in a structured setting that includes on-farm experiences and tours of cooperatives.

Applications must be postmarked by April 30, 2018. If you’d like to learn more and apply, go to nfu.org/education/beginning-farmer-institute/▲

Peter Schwagerl of Browns Valley, Minn., was MFU’s representative in the 2017-18 BFI (pictured to the right). Pictured below is the 2017-18 class.
The Trump administration needs to come up with a clear plan to strengthen family farmers in trade agreements, rather than the “bull in a china shop” approach it has taken so far. We will continue to advocate for family farmers in trade negotiations and remind the administration that there are no winners in trade wars.

**MinnesotaCare Buy-In**

On the state level, we’re pleased that Gov. Mark Dayton has re-introduced a plan for a MinnesotaCare Buy-In option, with the goal of allowing more people to get affordable health care. The Dayton administration revised the plan it introduced last year. Several of our members benefit from MinnesotaCare already. This option, at no additional cost to taxpayers, would allow more people, especially in rural Minnesota, to access the program. As part of advocating for the plan, Gov. Dayton invited Watonwan County Farmers Union members Brian and Therese Romsdahl to his State of the State address and mentioned them as people who could benefit from the MinnesotaCare Buy-In. Brian mentioned at February’s MFU Lobby Day Drive-In that his insurance premiums are more than $30,000 per year. In a time when many family farmers are struggling to stay in business, any reprieve they can get on essential costs is necessary. The MinnesotaCare Buy-In option isn’t perfect, but we believe it can do some good. We urge the Legislature to discuss this proposal again. We published an op-ed article on the subject, which is included in this issue on page 6.

**Rural Voices Discussions**

We have five more Rural Voices Discussions in April – in Cloquet, Willmar, Detroit Lakes, Crookston and Ada. We encourage all members to attend the discussion nearest them, and to bring family and friends. The Rural Voices Discussions are free and open to the public. You are welcome to discuss any topic you feel is important to family farmers and rural Minnesotans. These are important for us to get more ideas about how we can help advocate for you. Some of the panelists who will be participating with us are NFU President Roger Johnson, NFU Vice President Patty Edelburg, Minnesota Commissioner of Agriculture Dave Frederickson, Deputy Commissioner of Agriculture Matt Wohlman, Acting Commissioner of Human Services Chuck Johnson, Assistant Commissioner of the Department of Transportation Nancy Daubenberger and Assistant Commissioner of Human Services for Health Care Nathan Moracco. A calendar of the discussions is at the top of the next page.
UPCOMING EVENTS

April 10 • Becker County Farmers Union meeting • 6:30 p.m. • Country Kitchen, Detroit Lakes
April 10 • Ag Awareness Day • University of Minnesota – Minneapolis campus
April 11 • Minnesota Women’s Ag Leadership Conference • Minnesota Landscape Arboretum, Chaska
April 22-24 • Minnesota FFA Convention • University of Minnesota – St. Paul campus
April 26 • Farm Bill Energy Title Listening Session with staff of Sen. Tina Smith • 10 a.m. • MFU State Office

Rural Voices Discussions
April 5 • Cloquet • 2 – 4 p.m. • Cloquet Forestry Center, 175 University Rd.
April 9 • Willmar • 1 – 3 p.m. • American Legion Post 167, 220 19th Ave. SW
April 10 • Detroit Lakes • 2 – 4 p.m. • Detroit Lakes Public Library, 1000 Washington Ave.
April 11 • Ada • 1:30 – 3:30 p.m. • Ag Country, 901 West 1st Ave. S
April 11 • Crookston • 1:30 – 3:30 p.m. • Crookston Public Library, 110 N Ash St.

Call us at (651) 639-1223 if you have any questions or are interested in volunteering with us at a trade show.

SAVE THE DATE
MFU Women’s Conference
June 30 • 9 a.m.–3 p.m.

Minnesota Farmers Union will host a Women’s Conference on June 30 at the New Ulm Country Club!
Join us for a day of connecting with women agriculturalists from around the state, empowering one another. You will not only learn technical skills, but build relationships too.
The New Ulm Country Club is located at 2-36 Golf Drive in New Ulm.

Duck Fat Roasted Beets and Fresh Cheese
From The Bachelor Farmer

Yields: 4 servings
4 medium sized beets, different colors, if possible
1/4 cup rendered duck fat (check with your butcher or specialty food store)
1 T kosher salt, divided
1/4 cup almonds, raw
1 t + 1 T grape seed oil
1 pinch sugar
4 sprigs parsley, finely chopped
1 sprig tarragon, finely chopped
1/2 cup fresh cow’s milk cheese

Directions:
Heat oven to 350º F. Melt the duck fat.
Peel the beets and thinly slice them to 1/8-inch thick. This is easiest with a mandolin. If you don’t have one, cut the beets in half lengthwise so that you can work safely with a beet that is resting flat on the cutting board.

Place the beets on a cookie tray with parchment or wax paper. Brush with duck fat and sprinkle with 1 teaspoon kosher salt. Flip the beets over, brush the other side with duck fat, and sprinkle with another 1 teaspoon salt. Roast the beets in the oven for approximately 20 minutes, flipping them over halfway through.
Try a beet. When done, it will still have a bit of a bite, just a bit of a roasted taste, but will not be crispy like a chip. Remove the beets from the oven and cool. Sometimes, white, gold or Chioggia beets will have brown or black flecks in them after roasting. This is perfectly normal and adds to the color palate of the plate, in my opinion. It’s a lot like a tie-died beet.
Meanwhile, place the almonds on a baking sheet and roast at 350º F for 10 minutes, or until the almonds are lightly browned on the inside. Place in a bowl; toss with 1 teaspoon of grape seed oil and 1/2 teaspoon salt. Transfer back to the baking sheet and allow to cool. Roughly chop them and then set aside.

Place the shallot in a small bowl and add the cider vinegar, 1/2 teaspoon salt and the pinch of sugar to it. Let this to rest for 15 minutes. This helps mellow out the raw heat of the shallot. Mix the chopped parsley and tarragon together with 1 tablespoon of grape seed oil. This can all be done up to several hours ahead of serving.

To Assemble:
Place the roasted beets on 4 plates, making a mosaic of beautifully colored beets. Mix the shallot and cider vinegar with the herbs. Sprinkle this mixture over the beets. Scatter the almonds on the beets. One nice dollop of fresh cheese per plate and you’re ready to serve the dish.