Photo taken at the farm of the Donkers and Irrthum families, MFU members in Rice County

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Standing for Agriculture, Fighting for Farmers
Farmers Union launches #FarmBillNow campaign

The Farm Bill is the most important and comprehensive piece of food and farm legislation in the United States. It’s critical not just for family farmers and ranchers, but also for consumers, rural communities and the environment.

Join the Farmers Union family in urging Congress to pass a Farm Bill this year, and to make sure it works for the entire food system, from farmer to consumer.

Visit 2018FarmBill.org to learn more about the Farm Bill, how it helps our farmers, our environment and our hungry, and why we need one passed this year.

We’re also encouraging everyone to sign the petition on the site to let Congress know we need a good Farm Bill this year.

When you post on social media about the Farm Bill, use our hashtag #FarmBillNow.

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

Get social with Minnesota Farmers Union!

Do you like to use Facebook, Twitter or Instagram to keep up with news you care about? You’ll find us there, too. Follow Minnesota Farmers Union on social media to find out about events, policy happenings, photos and more.

Facebook: Minnesota Farmers Union

Twitter: @mnfarmersunion

Instagram: mnfarmersunion

Tag us in posts we should see and we’ll like and share them.
Executive Committee election
Also this past month, our Board of Directors met at the State Office and elected Executive Committee members for the next year. Anne Schwagerl was re-elected as State Secretary. The rest of the committee consists of Eunice Biel, Larry Jacobson, Alan Perish, Josh VanDerPol and Ted Winter, plus myself and Vice President Bryan Klabunde. Congratulations to all elected, and we look forward to serving with you.
I would like to thank Dave Johnson of Fergus Falls for his many years of service on the Executive Committee. Dave is an invaluable member of our organization, and we wish him all the best.

Visit from NFU Biofuels Advisor
MFU welcomed National Farmers Union Biofuels Advisor Anne Steckel to Minnesota at the beginning of February. We traveled with her to meet with the Minnesota Biofuels Association, Minnesota Corn Growers, Minnesota Soybean and staff at the Chippewa Valley Ethanol Company plant.
Anne has been a strong voice for ethanol, biodiesel and other renewable fuels in Washington, D.C. for more than 20 years, and joined the staff of NFU last fall, which is detailed in a profile on her in the February issue of Minnesota Agriculture. We were happy to have her and strengthen our partnerships with these groups. Together we advocate to keep renewable fuels a strong part of our economy and provide a market for farmers’ products.
Anne’s work on Capitol Hill is more important than ever with the petroleum industry pushing back against biofuels. Recently, Environmental Protection Agency Administrator Scott Pruitt cited a Pennsylvania oil refinery going out of business and said it was a result of the Renewable Fuels Standard. However, that plant shut down more because of mismanagement than anything to do with biofuels. We need to make sure the benefits of biofuels are clear to our government.

Farm Bill and federal budget
Recently, President Trump announced his proposal for the 2019 federal budget. According to Politico, the budget request slashed 16 percent from U.S. Department of Agriculture discretionary spending; and it cuts programs such as loans and grants for rural water infrastructure and housing, as well as cuts funding from crop insurance, the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program and federal medical programs. Not to mention, the plan adds $3 trillion to the national deficit, despite all of these cuts.
It makes no sense to cut funding from farm and rural programs during this economic crisis. The president’s budget would put funding for the new Farm Bill on an even tighter leash. The good news is, the chairs of the House and Senate Agriculture Committees, Mike Conaway (R-Tex.) and Pat Roberts (R-Kan.), expressed that they would not allow Trump’s budget proposal to prevent them from writing a Farm Bill that benefits Americans as a whole.
As a national organization, we have begun a campaign to get the kind of Farm Bill we need, #FarmBillNow. We will be including details on our social media and e-newsletters about how you can share that message throughout the Farm Bill process. Sign the petition and watch the video on 2018farmbill.org.

Next Rural Voices Discussions
To help you make your voice heard, we are planning another series of Rural Voices Discussions. I would like to invite each of you to attend the discussion nearest you. There are

Legislative session
First of all, I would like to thank all of our members who came to St. Paul for our Lobby Day Drive-In. I would also like to thank our elected officials who took the time to meet with us. We look forward to continuing to work with them on issues affecting farmers.
At the time you’re receiving this issue, the Minnesota Legislature has been in session for about two weeks. It’s a short session, scheduled to finish up by May 21. This session, we will continue to advocate for more affordable and accessible health care options. While higher prices are the only thing that will fix the farm economic crisis, finding ways to lower health care premiums for farmers will make things a little easier. We support the MinnesotaCare “buy-in” as one such option that could help more rural Minnesotans get quality care. Another of our priorities in the Legislature is achieving state tax conformity with the recently passed Tax Cuts and Jobs Act. Government Relations Director Thom Petersen has more on the Legislature on page 5. We encourage you to contact us about any issues you’d like us to talk to legislators about.

(continued on page 5)
MFU joins Rural Broadband Coalition

Access to high speed broadband is important for a sustainable rural economy in Minnesota. All sectors and corners of Minnesota need robust broadband connections: education, agriculture, main street businesses, manufacturing and health care. The Minnesota’s Governor’s Task Force on Broadband consistently recommends funding the Border-to-Border Broadband Development Grant Program. The 2017 Report recommends $71.48 million per biennium, in on-going funding over the next four years. This will provide broadband internet speeds of 25 Mbps/3Mbps to the 252,000 households that currently lack such service – and be poised to help Minnesota achieve its statutory broadband speed goal of connecting all Minnesotans with broadband internet speeds of 100 Mbps/20Mbps by 2026.

Members of the Minnesota Rural Broadband Coalition are experienced in the challenges and opportunities to bring broadband to all corners of Minnesota. Minnesota Farmers Union is proud to be a member of this coalition to help bring broadband internet to rural Minnesotans who lack access to it. We’ll be working hard on this issue during the legislative session.
To learn more, go to mnbroadbandcoalition.com.

National Farmers Union, other farm groups caution against weakening RFS

Ahead of a White House meeting on the Renewable Fuel Standard (RFS), National Farmers Union (NFU) and five other prominent farm organizations are urging President Trump to avoid seeking changes that would weaken the nation's premier biofuel policy. The meeting brought together key lawmakers and Cabinet members to discuss escalating tensions over the RFS between oil industry and ethanol industry interests.

The farm groups sent the President a letter before the meeting underscoring the importance of a strong RFS for farming and rural communities that are currently coping with a severely depressed farm economy.

“The President and his administration have expressed strong support for the RFS since the early days of President Trump’s campaign,” said NFU President Roger Johnson. “We want to be sure he remembers these promises he made to farmers and rural communities as he meets with senior administration officials and lawmakers. Rural communities are under a lot of economic stress, so there is much to gain from a strong RFS, and a lot to lose by weakening it.”

The farm groups’ letter drew attention to the dire state of the farm economy. The U.S. Department of Agriculture projects 2018 net farm income will decline $4.3 billion, a 6.7 percent reduction from 2017 levels. This represents a 50-percent decline in net farm income since 2013. “The heart of America is being left behind when it comes to economic growth and opportunity,” said the groups. The letter also noted that for the past ten years, the RFS has been a strong engine driving the rural economy.

“The RFS, which sets targets for blending ethanol and biodiesel into our nation’s fuel supply, created new markets for our farmers, created new jobs in rural America, gave consumers more fuel choices, and improved our nation’s air quality,” the groups wrote. “By any measure, the RFS has been successful not only for agriculture, but for our nation.”

Yet as economic conditions in rural America continue to decline, most oil refiners are experiencing a boom and significant gains from recent tax reforms. And it is their opposition that is fueling the depressed growth of homegrown biofuel industry, according to the farm groups.
Recent claims from an East Coast refiner that the RFS caused it to file for bankruptcy initiated the most recent round of tensions and therefore the Tuesday meeting at the White House. The letter noted that these claims “are not reflective of the state of the refining industry, but rather the hallmark of poor business decisions and a willingness to put investor returns before refinery jobs.”

“Despite the claims of adverse impacts from Renewable Identification Number (RIN) costs, last November, the Environmental Protection Agency concluded that RIN values are not causing economic harm to refiners,” said the letter. “The failings of one company should not be used as an excuse for undermining a law that serves hundreds of ethanol and biodiesel plants, tens of thousands of renewable fuel plant workers, and millions of farmers who rely upon the strong market demand created by the RFS.”

“There are options to address refiners’ concerns that do not undercut the RFS. Any action that seeks to weaken the RFS for the benefit of a handful of refiners will, by extension, be borne on the backs of our farmers,” the groups concluded.

seven discussions scheduled throughout the state, starting in southern Minnesota in late March and working our way north through mid-April. We have invited National Farmers Union President Roger Johnson; state and federal elected officials and staff; and state agency commissioners to be part of our listening panels. These were a successful platform for us last year to hear what rural Minnesotans think.

Join us again – whether you want to talk about the Farm Bill, health care, ditch mowing, biofuels or anything else, we are here to listen. See page 15 for a list of dates and tentative locations.

Vocation of the Agricultural Leader conference
I encourage MFU members to consider attending the Vocation of the Agricultural Leader Conference, held March 21-23 in St. Paul. This conference examines the profession of farming through a spiritual lens. Farmers Union Enterprises is one of the sponsors of the conference, and National Farmers Union President Roger Johnson is one of the speakers.

MFU will cover half the cost of registration and half the hotel cost for members if needed. See page 14 for registration details.

President’s Message (continued from page 3)

The top issue our members raised with elected officials was the need for a better health care system. Some farmers and self-employed people are seeing yearly premiums of more than $30,000. That’s why we are advocating for the MinnesotaCare buy-in option, which is one way to help more people get lower premiums. Gov. Dayton is reviving a push for this plan, as he did in 2017.

Another big issue we talked about was RFA funding. MFU President Gary Wortish testified that morning to the House Agriculture Finance Committee in favor of a House bill that provides that funding. Representatives of both parties said they supported it, as a way to help struggling farmers. Wabasha County Farmers Union President Eddie Jostock also testified in favor of the bill, as he felt RFA funding would be helpful to his family farm as it transitions to the younger generation.

Thank you to all members who joined us at Lobby Day Drive-In. It’s important for legislators to hear directly from farmers, since only about 2 percent of Americans are farming today. We encourage you to take every opportunity you can to make your voices heard.

Minnesota Farmers Union releases legislative priorities for 2018 session
The Minnesota legislative session began about two weeks ago. Minnesota Farmers Union has many items on its agenda for legislators in what will be a short session.

The top issue for MFU this session at the Capitol is addressing a tough rural economy right now, with farmers facing several years in a row of low commodity prices. MFU will be working to ensure that the Legislature uses bonding authority to put at least $20 million into the Rural Finance Authority (RFA) in addition to looking at other possible assistance to struggling farmers.

In addition to addressing the rural economy, MFU will be advocating for federal tax conformity for farmers with Section 179, continued support for moving to a 20-percent biodiesel blend in diesel fuels, increased affordable health care access, increased broadband funding and continued improvements to buffer and road ditch mowing laws on state highways.

These are just some of the issues MFU will be working on in the 2018 legislative session. MFU members spoke to legislators about these at the Capitol on Feb. 27 during our annual Lobby Day Drive-In.

Lobby Day Drive-In
We had a great turnout for this year’s Lobby Day Drive-In. About 60 of our members from across the state drove to the State Capitol to meet with their legislators, as well as one FFA student. In addition to senators and representatives of both parties, we also got to meet with Minnesota Gov. Mark Dayton, Attorney General Lori Swanson and Secretary of State Steve Simon.
**MEMBER IN FOCUS**

**Donkers/Irrthum Family, Rice and Goodhue counties**

**What comes to mind when you think of the term “family farm?”**

The farms of the Donkers and Irrthum families probably come close. The two farm families, connected by the marriage of Jim Donkers and Gail (Irrthum) Donkers, are longtime Farmers Union members and have kept their farming operation within their families. It looks to stay that way, as Jim and Gail’s son Mitch has returned home to farm and joined MFU. “It’s not very often you see three generations on a farm,” said Paul Donkers, Jim’s father. “In the county, you can probably count them on one hand.”

**The Donkers farm: Pigs, crops and partnership**

Paul and his wife Connie live on a farm about a mile away from Jim, Gail and Mitch, in rural Faribault. He milked cows until 2008 and still has hogs and steers. Jim and Gail also keep Holstein steers and about 950 pigs at their place at a time. Paul has about 1,300 head of pig space at his farm. The family sells just short of 5,000 finishing pigs per year, raising them from feeders.

Paul grew up on a farm just north of Medford, the land of which he and his brother Marv still farm. He’s lived at his Faribault farm since 1968, where he raised his four children with his late first wife, Mary. Both became officers for Rice County Farmers Union, which Paul still is. “We worked hard on the farm,” Paul said. “My kids worked with me hand-in-hand. Mary worked as a nurse. When Jim was in kindergarten, he went half-days and spent the afternoons riding with me in the tractor.”

Mary passed away in 2009 from cancer. Connie, who worked at a nursing home with Mary, introduced herself to Paul and asked how he was doing in the wake of losing Mary. They got to talking and soon began dating.

“It’s good to find someone when you get older whom you are compatible with,” Connie said.

Though she didn’t grow up on a farm, Connie had an agricultural life as a child. Her father owned a hatchery, so she would travel with him as he went out to test flocks for disease.

“I drove many times to Iowa with a big station wagon full of chickens,” she said.

As part of his estate plan, Paul and his family created a general partnership for the farm, PGM Donkers Partnership, which manages the crop part of the operation. The livestock and machinery are owned by the family’s LLC.

“The partnership rents the machinery from the LLC, which is all within ourselves,” Paul said. “It’s all part of making it work, and it’s a way to set it all up to be an estate to pass on to Jim and Matt (Jim’s brother).”

Jim began farming full-time in 1991, two years after graduating from the University of Minnesota. He married Gail two years after that, renting farmland for awhile until they moved to their current home in 1996. They have three children: Mitch, Abigail and Riley.

“We were just selling all the bull calves and this gave us room to actually finish out steers,” Jim said. “So we have always started out the calves at the main farm (Paul’s) and get them up to about a year old, then stuff comes over here.”

**The Irrthum farm: Dairy and MFU legacy**

Gail’s late parents, Walter and Pat Irrthum, farmed in Goodhue County, near Wanamingo. Pat was a schoolteacher for 27 years. After retiring, she invested more energy into MFU.

“She got to be really good friends with Dori (Klein, MFU Field Representative);” Gail said. “I know she went to at least one national convention, she went on the NFU Legislative Fly-in, and every Women’s Conference there was.”

Walter Irrthum began dairy farming full-time in 1974 and worked construction a little bit during the summers. Gail’s brother John took over in the mid-1990s and is still dairying today.

“I graduated from high school with 17 kids on dairy farms,” John said. “I’m the last one left (milking). That’s how much it’s changed in the last 20 years.”

John and his wife Linda have two sons, Marcus and Clint, both of whom have expressed interest in agriculture. Marcus joined MFU by participating in the Next Step program at the 76th Annual MFU Convention and studies at Carleton College in Northfield. Clint is a junior at University of Wisconsin-River Falls and has an internship secured for the summer on a 600-cow Jersey dairy farm in Australia.

**The next generation**

Gail recalled that when her kids were younger, they loved attending Farmers Union conventions for a different reason than the parents did.

“They got to go swimming, and that was a big draw,” she said.

They’ve since grown up and become agriculturalists in their own right. Mitch has a degree in agriculture business from South Dakota State University. His girlfriend, Daiton Tietz, also participated in Next Step and wants to farm too.

“I loved the idea (of coming home to farm) but I didn’t think it was going to happen right away,” he said. “It’s working out pretty awesome so far, I think.”

Abigail participated in FFA and 4-H and also studies at SDSU. She served as the MFU Camp Intern in summer 2017. Riley is in school at Hutchinson Community College in Kansas and travels with the livestock judging team. He earned a $500 scholarship from Rice County Farmers Union this year.

On the Irrthum side, Marcus and Clint haven’t nailed down exactly what their careers will be. Marcus has done work with poultry farmers and gardeners. Clint is studying business and has great interest in dairy.

**MFU for the whole family**

Both the Irrthum and Donkers families have been part of MFU for many years.

“I joined in probably 1965,” Paul said. “I went to Fly-in one time in the 1990s, been a state delegate forever, been a national delegate once.” He’s thankful for the voice MFU gives to farmers who don’t have time to be at the Capitol.

“They’re there watching out for the average farmer,” Paul said. “If there’s an issue we should be working on, they’re there.”

John applauded the organization for being a good source of agriculture information.

“We go to our county meeting and get an overview of what’s coming, what’s been decided,” he said. “If there’s something you really don’t like and you’re passionate about it, you can make your voice heard.”

With the next generation embracing Farmers Union and agriculture as well, you can bet you’ll hear from the Donkers and Irrthum families well into the future. ▲
outlines some of the major challenges we face in securing greater opportunities for everyone in our state, including better healthcare, strong infrastructure and a growing economy. As we work to build a state that works better for everyone, everywhere in Minnesota, we can learn a lot outside the Capitol, and outside the cities. I hope Minnesota leaders take this report and its findings to heart, and then take action. It’s time to get it done.”

Wertish added, “Issues like health care costs are the most urgent, but we must also get answers on transportation funding for roads and bridges, create the reality of high speed broadband internet services, adopt property tax relief, solutions to rural hunger, solve agriculture and farm issues for farmers of all sizes and work on rural and farm labor issues. Above all, we heard a call for policymakers to come out to rural Minnesota to hold regular listening sessions where people can speak up.”

The seven 2018 Rural Voices Discussions will be conducted across the state in March and April. See page 15 for a full list of dates and locations.

**Upcoming MFU leadership trainings**

How do you build your county Farmers Union? What does a MFU County President Do? Or a Vice President? Or a Secretary/Treasurer? How can we use social media and the internet to build better membership engagement?

**Membership Recruitment Incentives**

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 individual member of MFU who helps renew memberships or recruit new members is eligible for the Membership Recruitment Reward Program.
- A recruiting member will receive $12 for every multiple-year membership (2 or 3 years) and $7.50 for every one-year membership. This incentive applies to both new and renewing memberships. As a bonus, each recruiting member will receive an additional $3 for new members recruited. For example: If a recruiting member signs a new member up, he/she will receive the incentive of $12 or $7.50 PLUS the $3 new member BONUS for a total of either $15 or $10.50.

**2018 Rider Program**

- Any recruiting member who accompanies an MFU staff member on recruiting visits is eligible to earn the incentive fees as outlined above. We welcome members working with staff to recruit new members and to encourage current members to renew.

**National Farmers Union Silver Star Award**

MFU members can earn the National Farmers Union’s highest membership award: the Silver Star. When you sign up new members, you can earn points toward the Silver Star. You must earn at least 50 points in a calendar year (Jan. 1 – Dec. 31). When you earn a Silver Star, you are presented with a Silver Star lapel pin and other thank-you gifts. Each one-year renewal is half a point; a one-year new membership is one point; a multi-year membership renewal is half a point per year renewed (e.g. 3-year membership is one-and-a-half points) and a new multi-year membership is one point per year (e.g. 3-year membership is 3 points).

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 this program. To participate in the program, please contact Bruce Miller at bruce@mfu.org. Membership forms and materials will be sent to you.
USDA Launches Website for Enhanced Customer Service

Sonny Perdue, our Secretary of Agriculture at the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA), has made very clear his aspiration to make USDA the most effective, the most efficient, most customer-focused and best managed department inside of the federal government.

Multiple initiatives have already been launched to accomplish this goal. In Grand Rapids, Mich., last month, Perdue unveiled a new website, Farmers.gov. This is a new interactive one-stop website for producers and will be maintained by USDA.

Farmers.gov has already gone live and will have multiple features added over the coming months to allow agricultural producers to make appointments, file forms and apply for USDA programs.

The website gathers together the three agencies that comprise USDA’s Farm Production and Conservation mission area, also known as FPAC. These agencies are the Farm Service Agency, the Natural Resources Conservation Service and the Risk Management Agency.

Many producers are out in their fields using equipment that is connected to satellite and GPS technology, yet when they need to interact with USDA, they have to stop what they are doing, go to their local USDA service center and fill out forms. That is a real digital divide.

FSA staff are a friendly bunch and love to see farmers in person, but they know that time is valuable. Producers are working hard to make their farms profitable, so these tools will help get the paperwork done without taking a big chunk out of the day to fill out forms.

Farmers.gov is mobile device-friendly and can identify for farmers the most convenient USDA office locations. New functions will be added shortly, including an interactive calendar, farming success stories, an online appointment feature, digital forms and a business data dashboard.

Additionally, when the 2018 Farm Bill is signed into law, there will be plain language program descriptions and a tool to determine eligibility.

Secretary Perdue said, “As I’ve traveled to 32 states in my first nine months as Secretary of Agriculture, I have consistently heard people express a desire for greater use of technology in the way we deliver programs at USDA. It’s my goal to make USDA the most effective, most efficient, most customer-focused department in the entire federal government, and Farmers.gov is a big step in that direction.”

So stay tuned for more information as this service is implemented and continues to develop for greater service to our nation’s producers.

Producers Encouraged to Subscribe to SMS Text Alerts

No doubt, we are bombarded with information from a number of different sources. Often times, there just isn’t enough time in the day to devote to reading newsletters or bulletins.

FSA is promoting a new way to get short, concise and important messages to our producers by text message. These notifications come from the local county FSA office via text messages on their cell phone.

Whether you are in the field, the barn or on the tractor, this service enables FSA customers and stakeholders to receive notifications while on the go. Producers will receive text messages regarding important program deadlines, reporting requirements, outreach events and updates.

As an example, to subscribe to this service producers simply text the word MNTODD (all one word) to FSANOW (372-669) to subscribe to text message alerts from Todd County. This service is available for every county so you would just enter the name of your county with MN in front of it in the body of the text. Then enter the FSANOW (372-669) in the “to” window.

Standard text messaging rates apply. Contact your wireless carrier for details associated with your particular data plan. Participants may unsubscribe at any time. And if you have difficulty with the setup, just bring your cell phone into the county office and we would be happy to help you subscribe to this service.
The Gymnasium program, sponsored by Bayer, brings together young farmers from around the world for training in leadership skills, organizing and networking. These capacity-building sessions, held concurrently with global summits, have exposed my cohort to global policy discussions around food and agriculture. In October, we met in Rome for two days of WFO training and then participated in the UN Committee on World Food Security annual plenary session.

This trip to Berlin was structured in a similar manner – the first two days were filled with lectures, organized by WFO and hosted by the German Farmers Association. These included sessions on the German model for organizing farmers; the development of the livestock quality management system used in Denmark; and innovations in animal health and well-being that Bayer is undertaking.

Following these lectures, we participated in the GFFA for the last three days. Together, our cohort crafted a joint statement from young farmers on the topic of the future of livestock production. A positive and constructive discussion on global challenges and opportunities, fueled by the enormous diversity in our production methods, backgrounds and expertise, informed this statement. We then had the privilege of presenting our statement to the assembled ministers of agriculture from 69 countries on the last day of the Forum. The GFFA is immediately followed by Green Week Berlin, which is an international exhibition of the food, agriculture and gardening industries. My cohort was fortunate enough to be invited to the opening kickoff for Green Week and take in the food and drinks showcased from all over the world.

It was a full week of learning, networking and taking in of the sights, sounds and food of Berlin. I look forward to the opportunity to continue to learn with and from my Gymnasium colleagues when we meet again this summer.

Anne farms crops, pastured hogs and laying hens at Prairie Point Farm in Big Stone County with her family.

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, or 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, and the Stanley Moore FUI Foundation Regional Scholarships. Please visit nfu.org for more information on these National scholarships.
Farm & Rural Help Line

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

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.

The Farm Advocate Program has been supported by the Minnesota Department of Agriculture since 1984. There is no charge or fee for Farm Advocate assistance.

Farm Advocates:

- Jan Boll  Trail (218) 268-4472
- Bruce Lubitz  Perham (218) 346-4866
- Connie Dykes  Lake City (651) 345-5149
- David Elliason  Isle (320) 676-3559
- David Hesse  Comfrey (507) 877-3012
- Dean Hetland  Eagle Bend (218) 639-9302
- Dan Hunz  Monticello (320) 743-5660
- Ruth Ann Karty  Clarkfield (320) 669-7135
- George Bosselman  Fosston (218) 200-9432
- Steve Zenk  Danube (320) 894-2517

www.mda.state.mn.us/about/commissionersoffice/farmadvocates

FUIA Agent Highlight: Rod Mathsen  (218) 784-4813
402 E 3rd Street, Ste 7, Ada MN
rmathsen@loretel.net

Why is working with Farmers Union Insurance Agency and MFU important to you? Working with the professional people of FUIA, MFU and my fellow Agents is a valuable asset to me. I have seen so much change and improvement since I began in 1990. With the support of the farm organization, I am able to serve our farm customers, as well as local businesses, with many strong and competitive insurance carriers, that provide many options to their ever-changing needs.

What community organizations are you passionate about? Our family is currently active members of The Resurrection Free Lutheran Church in Beltrami and previous members of Jevnaker Lutheran Church in Borup. We feel fellowship with believers and our faith in God is most important. We also support local activities and causes with time and treasure whenever possible.

Please tell us a little bit about your family life. My wife, Grace, and I have been married for 33 years and have six children and eight grandchildren...with three on the way! We stay busy with family – this year includes a graduation, three new grandbabies and a wedding. Grace homeschooled all our children and we were foster parents for many years. I enjoy fishing year-round, am an avid MN sports fan and grow hydroponic vegetables to sell locally.

What is your number one concern when reviewing and selling farm insurance? Keeping up with the many changes occurring on the farm is my main concern when reviewing and selling farm insurance. I feel it is vital to get to know the farm family and their operation during the farm visit when insurance renews. My relationship with my client allows me to get to know their unique needs.

Rod is one of the most consistently successful FUIA Agents. He continues to grow his business with one of his best years in 2017, all while providing the kind of service we all appreciate.

Visit our website at www.mnfua.com and click on “Find an Agent” to find a local FUIA agent in your area.
What is Mandatory Farmer-Lender Mediation?
Mediation is the use of a trained neutral facilitator—a mediator—to assist in the negotiations of parties in a dispute. Mediation is an informal and confidential process that generally requires less cost and time than adversarial court litigation.

A farmer in debt has the opportunity to renegotiate, restructure or resolve farm debt through Mandatory Farmer-Lender Mediation. During a 90-day period, creditors in mediation may or may not collect on the debt. The use of the term mandatory does not mean that the farmer must use mediation. It means that no creditor can start a proceeding to collect debt against a property until the offer of mediation has been extended and, if the farmer so chooses, completed.

The goals of Farmer-Lender Mediation are to:
• achieve open communications between the parties in order to resolve differences
• create a non-hostile environment
• define the rights and responsibilities of the debtor and creditor
• treat all parties with dignity and respect
• produce agreements that are acceptable to all the parties involved

How does mediation work?
A creditor with a secured debt of more than $15,000 against an agricultural property must offer Farmer-Lender Mediation before proceeding with foreclosure, repossession, cancellation of contract or collection of a judgment.

The first step is an orientation meeting if the farmer chooses to take advantage of the mediation offer. The farmer, creditor, financial analyst and the mediator meet to explain the process and to determine if financial information needs to be prepared.

What is the role of the mediator?
The mediator leads and manages discussion as a neutral party without making decisions or judgments. Mediators are trained to use conflict resolution skills to facilitate effective negotiation.

The mediator ensures that all participants in mediation get to speak and be heard, helps to define issues, emphasizes common goals, keeps discussion focused and moving forward, looks at all options and reduces fault-finding.

The mediator may advise, counsel and assist the parties on ways to come to agreement, but does not tell the parties how they should conduct their business or personal affairs. The mediator does not take sides or decide how the dispute should be resolved.

Successful mediation requires compromise on the part of both debtor and creditor.

Farmers may have to:
• change operation to make it profitable
• liquidate assets

Creditors may need to:
• restructure debt and security
• reschedule loan payments

The parties involved retain control over the outcome of the negotiations in a joint decision-making process, regardless of the specific outcomes of the mediation.

Trust is built and solutions are uncovered when parties meet face-to-face to exchange information in an orderly way. The parties have strong incentives to make their agreements work, because they created the agreements themselves.

Those who have participated in mediation commonly report that the process resulted in:
• the farmer becoming more prepared to make decisions about the future
• communication between lenders and borrowers being improved
• frustration and tension between parties being minimized

If mediation does not result in an agreement, the parties are free to pursue whatever course of action is available to them—most often with a clearer understanding of the facts, the issues and the positions of the other parties.

How do I begin the mediation process?
Complete a Request for Mandatory Mediation form. Make sure to identify all the creditors necessary for your farming operation.

Send the form to:
Statewide Mediation Coordinator
Mary Nell Preisler
1526 170th Avenue
Bejou, MN 56516

If you don’t return the request form within 14 days, you will waive your mediation rights.

Be as prepared as possible. Review your position carefully and the reasons you hold that position.

If you have questions about Mandatory Farmer-Lender Mediation, you’re encouraged to contact the Statewide Mediation Coordinator, Mary Nell Preisler, at (218) 935-5785.

University of Minnesota Extension administers the Mandatory Farmer-Lender Mediation Program and has provided mediation services to more than 14,000 cases since 1986.

Remember, to take advantage of the mediation opportunity, the debtor must request services within 14 days of a creditor’s notice.

Other choices
Mandatory Farmer-Lender Mediation is one of four types of mediation services provided for under the Farm Bill. Under certain circumstances, farmers/debtors may also choose to participate in:
• Voluntary Mediation
• Rural Dispute Resolution
• USDA National Appeals Division (NADS)

For further information on Farmer-Lender Mediation, contact (218) 935-5785.
Minnesota Farmers Union has deep roots in the cooperative movement. Its 1918 start in Jackson County, where men and women of Farmers Union bent their shoulders into the tasks at hand, relied on cooperation to achieve their aims. For the past hundred years, cooperatives have continued to grow and strengthen their member-owners and the communities they operate in. But today, corporate interests in agriculture, who are marching towards consolidation, are attacking cooperatives in Washington.

The Tax Cut and Jobs Act significantly altered the tax landscape. Public sentiment, non-partisan analysis and our own assessment underline the favorable outcome to corporations over the rest of the economy. Corporations received a historic tax cut that not only goes beyond anything received by individuals, small businesses and cooperatives received, but is permanent. If you are not a corporation, tax changes are temporary. In agriculture, like in other sectors, the tax deductions simply got larger. This will ensure that larger and more well-off operations derive any additional benefit from reform.

There are a couple of exceptions to additional benefits reaching the average farm. One is a deduction for qualified business income or Section 199a. The deduction counts for 20 percent of qualified business income and 20 percent of qualified cooperative dividends. Members selling to co-ops and receiving patronage would be beneficiaries of 199a.

Unfortunately, for all the tax benefits corporations captured, they are unhappy that cooperatives received any positive tax treatment. In Washington, they are working to repeal Section 199a, claiming that it was a drafting error. 199a was no error. The Congressional Record clearly explains the dual nature of the provision. A more generous cooperative provision was critical in the face of such strong corporate dominance of tax reform.

If corporations deserve a break, so do cooperatives. The value of cooperatives in our state and the broader U.S. economy is significant. There are 30,000 cooperatives that operate 73,000 places of business across the country. They contribute 2 million jobs to the economy. For the billions of revenue and wages they provide, cooperative impact goes beyond economic considerations.

Cooperatives’ local and regional leadership are immersed in the communities they operate. Board members and managers are our neighbors. Cooperatives are beholden to their member-owners rather than distant investors.

The Tax Cut and Jobs Act should be enough for corporations. They stand to make hundreds of millions of dollars off this reform. Cooperative tax treatment must be protected. We call on the Minnesota Congressional delegation to protect our cooperatives and 199a. We also urge them to bring us one step closer to equity by making these changes permanent. As consolidation continues, it’s essential we preserve cooperatives so that families and businesses have choices across Minnesota.
Minnesota Soybean Research and Promotion Council holding “Be Ready for B20”

The Be Ready for B20 Workshop Series is underway, hosted by the Minnesota Soybean Research and Promotion Council. The workshops are for diesel retailers, fleets, distributors, farmers and other interested parties. The goal of the workshops is to prepare for the change, to understand the benefits of the fuel and how it will impact fuel providers and end-users.

Speakers at the workshop include representatives from the Minnesota Department of Agriculture (MDA), the Minnesota Department of Commerce (MDC), Weights & Measures Division and MEG Corp Fuel Consulting.

Topics at the workshop include a history and overview of Minnesota’s law, compliance with the law, diesel/biodiesel basics, best practices for storage handling and use, blending in the spring and fall and identifying, treating and preventing common diesel issues.

Dates and locations:
- **Tuesday, March 13**
  - Alexandria
  - Holiday Inn: 5637 Highway 29 S
  - 11:30 a.m. to 2 p.m.; lunch included
- **Wednesday, March 14**
  - Moorhead
  - Courtyard by Marriott: 1080 28th Ave. S
  - 8:30 to 11 a.m.; breakfast included
- **Tuesday, March 20**
  - Winona
  - The Plaza Hotel & Suites: 1025 Highway 61 E
  - 11:30 a.m. to 2 p.m.; lunch included
- **Wednesday, March 21**
  - Rochester
  - Hampton Inn & Suites: 2870 59th St. NW
  - 11:30 a.m. to 2 p.m.; lunch included
- **Albert Lea**
  - Leo Carey American Legion Post 65: 142 N Broadway Ave.
  - 2:30 to 4:30 p.m.
- **Thursday, March 22**
  - St. Cloud
  - Courtyard by Marriott: 404 W St. Germain St.
  - 11:30 a.m. to 2 p.m.; lunch included

**Herb Roasted Chicken with Farro Risotto**

*From Chefs Mike Rahun and Jourdan Morris of Mill Valley Kitchen*

Yields: 4 servings

- 2 cups farro (or barley)
- 4 6-oz. airline chicken breasts, skin on
- 1 t salt
- 1/2 t freshly ground black pepper
- 4 T olive oil
- 6 sprigs fresh thyme
- 4 oz. dry white wine
- 32 oz. chicken stock (homemade or low sodium store-bought), divided
- 2 t garlic, minced
- 1 T shallot, minced
- 3 oz.-weight mushrooms, small dice (shiitake, button, portabella)
- 1/4 cup heavy cream
- 1/4 cup parmesan, grated
- 2 oz.-weight watercress

**Directions:**

1. Preheat oven to 450°F.
2. Cook farro (or barley) in 2 parts water to 1 part farro. Bring to low simmer, then cover and cook until all water is absorbed (15-30 minutes).
3. Season chicken breasts with salt and pepper. Heat olive oil in large sauté pan over high heat. Add chicken breasts skin side up and cook 3 minutes. Add thyme and flip chicken skin side down. Place pan in the oven and roast for 10 minutes, or until chicken reaches an internal temperature of 165°F. Set chicken aside to rest; pour off excess cooking oil.
4. Add wine to skillet and bring to a boil over high heat. Reduce wine by half, add 16 oz. of stock, and reduce to 1 cup. Add salt to taste.
5. Heat 2 T olive oil in a pan over medium heat. Sweat garlic and shallots until translucent. Add mushrooms and sauté until lightly browned. Add cooked farro, remaining stock, cream, 1 t salt, and 1/2 t pepper. Stirring constantly, continue to cook farro until most of the liquid has been absorbed. Fold in parmesan.

**To Serve:**

Place farro risotto in the center of shallow bowls. Slice chicken and place on top of risotto. Pour 2 oz. of reduced stock over chicken. Garnish plates with watercress sprigs.
Join the Conversation!
Catholic Rural Life is excited to host a national conference, bringing together agricultural leaders, faith leaders, environmentalists, scientists and food advocates to revisit the acclaimed document: *Vocation of the Agricultural Leader*.

Speakers Include
Most Rev. Bernard Hebda, Archbishop of Minneapolis/St. Paul; Dr. Fred Kirschenmann, Distinguished Fellow at the Leopold Center for Sustainable Agriculture; Dr. John Ikerd, Professor Emeritus, University of Missouri; Meg Moynihan, MN Dept. of Agriculture; Dr. Tom Ackermann, Climatologist, Univ. of Washington; Dr. Christopher Thompson, Moral Theologian, Saint Paul Seminary; Loretta Ishida, Deputy Regional Director for Operations, Africa; Roger Johnson, President of National Farmers Union; and a representative from the Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development.

Register Today!
This event is open to the public, but space is limited. To reserve your seat, register at: CatholicRuralLife.org/faith-food-environment/ffe-national-conference/
For questions contact: Annie@CatholicRuralLife.org

Minnesota Farmers Union will cover half of registration and half of hotel costs if needed. Contact us at (651) 639-1223 to let us know if you would like to use this option.

For more information visit: CatholicRuralLife.org
Camp registration now open!

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: $90 Elementary
$115 Junior/Senior school

Registration/Information: www.mfu.org/camp

Leadership and cooperation happen at all levels of Farmers Union Leadership Camp.
Farmers Union Insurance Agents work to establish long-term relationships and are committed to providing quality, comprehensive insurance products and service to fit the needs of you and your family, protecting your most important assets at home and in your business.

Our Agents live and work in your community, so they better understand your needs. They work for you, not the insurance companies.

That’s the advantage of working with an Independent Agent.

Come see what sets our Agents apart.

(651) 639-1064 locally or (800) 229-1064 toll-free
www.mnfuia.com or mnfuia on social:

State Office: 305 Roselawn Avenue E, Suite 100 St. Paul, MN 55117