Minnesota Agriculture
a publication of Minnesota Farmers Union
December 2017

Happy Holidays from all of us at Minnesota Farmers Union!

Photo taken at the Romsdahl family farm, MFU members in Watonwan County

Minnesota Farmers Union  Standing for Agriculture, Fighting for Farmers
76th Annual Minnesota Farmers Union Convention Sponsors

Minnesota Farmers Union would like to thank the following organizations for sponsoring our convention.

Platinum Sponsors

Farmers Union Industries LLC

Sponsors of Sunday’s omelet breakfast

Minnesota Corn Growers Association

Sponsors of Saturday’s lunch

Gold Sponsors

Farmers Union Insurance Agency

Silver Sponsors

Novel Energy Solutions

JBL Companies

VELDEMOORE LIMITED

Green View, Inc.

Bronze Sponsors

Minnesota Rural Electric Association

Kleven Law Firm

Dairy Sponsors

Midwest Dairy Association

AMPI

GREAT GIFT IDEA!

Farmers Choice Coffee

Surprise the special people on your gift list with Farmers Choice coffee!

Available in 4 varieties, 1 lb. each:
Guatemalan Blend ($15)
Obama Blend ($22)
Sumatran Blend ($14)
Colombian Blend ($15)

SAVE $2 on each! Just mention order code: memberdisc.

TO ORDER: Call (651) 639-1223. Order by 12/15/17 for Christmas delivery.

Minnesota Farmers Union

Executive Committee
Gary Wertish, President
Bryan Klabunde, Vice President
Anne Schwagerl, Secretary
Eunice Biel, Chair
Al Perish, Vice Chair
Larry Jacobson
Dave Johnson
Ted Winter

Minnesota Farmers Union Staff
Gary Wertish, President
Bryan Klabunde, Vice President
Laura Sherar, Executive Assistant
Glen Schmidt, Education
Thom Petersen, Government Relations
Bruce Miller, Membership and Outreach
Michelle Medina, Renewable Energy
Brita Moore, Public Relations

MFU Phone: (651) 639-1223
MFU Website: www.mfu.org

Minnesota Farmers Union Field Staff
Wayne Boettcher, (612) 802-3124
Lee Johnson, (507) 317-7537
Dori Klein, (507) 993-1658
Ken Pazdernik, (218) 206-4499
Amanda Rosendahl, (320) 815-8670

Minnesota Agriculture

Publication Number 351340 ISSN 0274-9718

Published monthly by the Minnesota Farmers Union; 305 Roselawn Ave. E, Suite 200 Saint Paul, MN 55117. Periodical rate postage is paid at St. Paul, MN.

Postmaster: Send address changes to Minnesota Agriculture; 305 Roselawn Ave E Suite 200 St. Paul, MN 55117. Phone (65) 639-1223.

Minnesota Agriculture is published exclusively for the use of Minnesota Farmers Union members. The newspaper is a benefit of membership in the statewide organization that represents family farmers and works to preserve and improve the quality of life for all who live in rural Minnesota. A portion of each member’s dues, about $5, funds a subscription.

Volume 161 No. 12 December 2017
The summary of our policy changes is on page 6, and the Special Orders passed by the delegation are on page 7.

Ten MFU members were elected to represent Minnesota’s policy as delegates in the debate on National Farmers Union policy. Delegates elected at our convention were: Carol Anderson of Foley; Paul Benson of Mahnomen; Jonathan Brase of Waseca; Erik Hatlestad of New London; Scott Hilgeman of Oklee; Deborah Mills of Lake City; John Naureth of Lakefield; Frank Turnock of McGregor; Harmon Wilts of Kerkhoven; and Ted Winter of Windom. The National Farmers Union 116th Annual Convention will be held March 3-6, 2018 in Kansas City, Missouri.

I would like to congratulate our 2017 Award Winners: Carolyn Lange, Ag Communicator of the Year; Hannah Wilts, Ag Educator of the Year; and Dale and Grace Fladeboe, Lifetime Achievement. They are not only excellent at their careers, but have contributed to the success of the Farmers Union. We recognized them at our convention banquet. Their full bios are found on page 13.

Federal Tax Bill
The U.S. House of Representatives’ newly passed Tax Cuts and Jobs Act aims to simplify the tax code and cut taxes for individuals and corporations. We are concerned that the tax cuts in this bill for individuals are scheduled to expire, while corporate tax cuts are permanent. A key provision for the middle class in the bill, the “Family Flexibility Credit” goes away in 2022. In addition, certain provisions, such as deductions of state and local taxes, accelerated depreciation (Section 179), carry back provisions and Section 199 for cooperatives could be eliminated, capped or reduced. With these changes, the lowering of individual tax rates may not be enough to offset the elimination of these deductions. This Act will also add $1.5 trillion to the federal deficit which, under statutory pay-as-you-go (PAYGO) rules, requires increases in deficit spending be offset by reduced spending in non-exempt mandatory programs. The funding of many programs will be at high risk including the upcoming Farm Bill. This is an extremely important and fluid piece of legislation that we all will need to be watching as it is addressed by the U.S. Senate and subsequent Conference Committee.

Health Care
MFU has invested in the 40 Square Cooperative Solutions Health Care Cooperative. 40 Square is a cooperative working to bring sustainable health plan options to Minnesota’s Family Farmers and their employees. Open enrollment is going on now till Dec. 15, 2017, with coverage effective Jan. 1, 2018. As a health plan cooperative, 40 Square will be owned by the members it serves and will be governed by an elected board of directors from the membership. Our Farmers Union Insurance Agency agents can assist you in the enrollment in this new Coop Health Care plan if it fits your needs. Please give your local Farmers Union agent a call or contact the state Farmers Union Insurance Agency and they can refer you to an agent. The Agency’s phone number is (800) 229-1064.

Another option we are working on is supporting the MinnesotaCare buy-in option, a provision in our policy that was debated in the Minnesota Senate last session. I served on a panel, touring to several Minnesota cities with Lt. Gov. Tina Smith and Human Services Commissioner Emily Piper to discuss the benefits of such a plan. We encourage the state Legislature to discuss this idea further when they are back in session in February, as it would be beneficial for our Minnesota farmers, offering them another healthcare insurance option.

What’s next?
During the winter, you’ll find MFU at many trade shows and conferences around the state. It’s part of our outreach effort to connect with as many people in agriculture as possible. We welcome members working with us at these events – you tell the Farmers Union story best. Contact us if you are interested.

In the meantime, we are busy planning a full slate of events for 2018, covering as many initiatives as we can. If you have any ideas for events or would like to host one with us, don’t hesitate to reach out. The more people we work with, the stronger we are. Whether it’s health care, farm bill, renewable energy, dairy, soil health or anything else, we’d love to have you join us in our educational efforts.

From all of us at Minnesota Farmers Union, we wish you a happy holiday season. Join us in 2018 for another year of Legislation, Cooperation and Education.
That’s why we advocate for increased use of energy like wind and solar for our members. One new piece added to our official policy at the convention was to support increasing the state Renewable Energy Standard to 50 percent by the year 2030. We also issued a Special Order for the federal Renewable Fuels Standard, to keep that at a high level. Not only do biofuels provide more markets for grain farmers, they produce less carbon dioxide. It was one of our advocacy points at the National Farmers Union Legislative Fly-in, and we will carry on that effort for as long as it takes.

Leadership
I can strongly speak to the fact that Farmers Union provides leadership opportunities like no one else. I’ve worked my way up, starting at being the Mahnomen County Farmers Union President, then participating in the Farmers Union Enterprise Leadership Couples program, and now as the Vice President of our organization. All of you can find your own leadership paths with us. In a time when rural America is struggling so much, we need you to speak up, get involved and lead your communities to success.

Maybe your county Farmers Union has an opportunity for you to serve as an officer. Maybe there’s an event you would like to see happen. Or maybe you’re interested in joining one of our member committees. Don’t be afraid to take that step. We will help you in whatever ways we can. From my travels, I’ve seen the incredible resolve of our members. You have great ideas for what we can do together. Let’s make it happen.

Surviving the economic crisis
I’ve witnessed firsthand how the farm economic crisis is driving so many people under. It’s disheartening to think the way of life your family has sustained for so many years may be in jeopardy.

We don’t want to see family farmers disappear from the landscape. You are the backbone of our state and our country. We will be sharing as many resources with you as we can. Your fellow members probably know of some too. Sometimes getting through hard times means trying something different. As is described in our Member in Focus story on page 11, Watonwan County member Brian Romsdahl’s mother got their family through the 1980’s by making lefse. Your creativity might be an answer.

In spite of the struggle, I hope the holiday season brings brightness to your family. I look forward to seeing each of you in 2018.
It has been a full year for Minnesota Farmers Union – we were busy each and every day working for you, our members. Here’s some of what we accomplished in 2017:

• Elected Gary Wertish as President, Bryan Klabunde as Vice President, Anne Schwagerl as Secretary and Ted Winter as a new Executive Committee member.

• Traveled to the State Capitol in St. Paul for Lobby Day.

• Debated policy with National Farmers Union members at the 115th Annual NFU Convention.

• Legislative session: Advocated for the Beginning Farmer Tax Credit; Rural Finance Authority funding; legislation for a 40 percent agricultural property tax credit for school levies; legislation establishing grants to help livestock producers protect their animals from wolves.

• Conducted 14 Rural Issues Discussions in every part of Minnesota to hear about what rural people are affected by most; attended by Minnesota Department of Agriculture Staff and gubernatorial staff; held a press conference with Lt. Gov. Tina Smith, Deputy Commissioner of Agriculture Matt Wohlman and Commissioner of Human Services Emily Piper upon release of the report.

• Participated in trade shows, panels and agricultural conferences, such as Farmfest, the Agri News Farm Show, Farm Power Show, Minnesota Beef Expo, Minnesota Dairy Expo, Food Access Summit, Minnesota FFA Convention, Minnesota Organic Conference, Minnesota Garlic Festival, AgriGrowth Conference, Ag Awareness Day.

• Broke sales records with our new Minnesota State Fair foods: Sweet Corn Blueberry Eclair, Chili Maple Bacon Donut and Maple Cream Nitro Cold Press Coffee.

• Best-attended Minnesota Cooks™ Day at the Fair of all-time; the event celebrated its 15th anniversary. We also released the 2018 Minnesota Cooks calendar.

• Launched the Young Farmers Advocacy Council, holding their first event at Mighty Axe Hops farm in July, Beginning Farmers Experience.

• Held our 76th Annual Convention, with meteorologist Paul Douglas as the keynote speaker; we also heard from a bipartisan group of gubernatorial candidates.

• Held field days on solar energy at the VanDerPol farm and soil health at the Sommerfield farm.

• Participated in listening sessions about important agricultural issues, including buffers, water quality, ditch mowing, pollinators, Food Safety Modernization Act, Nitrogen Fertilizer Rule, Minnesota Food Charter.

• Conducted two Rural Voices Discussions in Mankato and Willmar specific to farmers’ thoughts on what we need in the 2018 Farm Bill; attended by staff of MDA and staff of Rep. Collin Peterson, Rep. Tim Walz, Sen. Amy Klobuchar and Sen. Al Franken.

• Lead our second annual Renewable Energy Working Session to get your feedback on renewable energy and hear from experts from the industry and government.
The following is an example of some of the new additions that were made to current policy. If you have any questions about any of these, feel free to contact me.

- Support for the Conservation Stewardship Project (CSP) in the next Farm Bill, with specific changes asking for being able to renew a contract multiple times, and ensuring there is a lease option for a new owner or renter.
- Support for increasing the cap for the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) in the next farm bill to 45 million acres nationwide, and allowing more options for haying and grazing.
- Support for stronger enforcement of national organic standards published by the USDA.
- Support for cover crop use by eliminating risk of losing crop insurance coverage.
- Support for the Dairy Pride Act, which supports that dairy substitute products should not be labeled as a dairy product.
- Support for extending the current Farm Bill if a new Farm Bill is not passed before the current bill expires.
- Support for the “Right to Repair” legislation that allows farmers to access information to make repairs to their own farm equipment from manufactures without affecting the warranty.
- Support for farmers who sell land for wind or solar to receive a capital gains tax break on the sale of their property.
- Support for the state of Minnesota offering to the public a license plate supporting 4-H and FFA.
- Support for raising the state of Minnesota’s renewable energy standard to 50 percent by the year 2030 using sources such as wind and solar.
- Support for Minnesotans served by rural electric cooperatives to a dispute resolution process regarding net metering, interconnection procedures and other issues before the Public Utilities Commission (PUC).
- Support for MFU to work with rural electric cooperatives to actively look at business models that support their farmer members in being clean energy producers.
- Support for state liquor sales law to allow wine and hard cider produced at Minnesota licensed farm wineries and hard cideries to be sold at farmers markets.
- Support for industrial hemp being classified and allowed for sale as livestock feed.
- Require the Minnesota Department of Transportation (MnDOT) to fulfill its requirement of weed control in state highway right of ways.
- Support for a moratorium on spraying dicamba on soybeans until more research has been completed.
- Support for Clean Water Funds to be used to offset costs incurred by land owners to implement the buffer rules.
- Support for a cost share program to assist farmer with wildlife conflicts for items such as fencing, guard dogs, etc.
- Support for maintaining the current size of the Northwest Minnesota elk herd.
- Support for a cost share program to assist farmer with wildlife conflicts for items such as fencing, guard dogs, etc.
Farm Bill

Whereas, the Agricultural Act of 2014, also known as the 2014 U.S. Farm Bill, expires at the end of September 2018; and

Whereas, MFU believes that the Federal Farm Bill is of paramount importance to the diverse constituencies of farmers and rural residents that our membership represents; and

Whereas, MFU believes that the government provides programs and assistance to provide farmers and all citizens a “hand-up” when they need it; and

Whereas, Farmers Union Farm Bill priorities include maintaining permanent law, inclusion of nutritional programs, establishing fixed reference prices for commodity programs, an effective dairy support program, providing mandatory funding for renewable energy efforts, support for Country-of-Origin Labeling, support for organic and beginning farmer programs, inclusion of adequate funding levels for the Farmers Market and Local Foods Promotion Program, and support for conservation programs particularly the Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP) and support for other programs and policies that are supported by our policy statement.

Now, therefore, be it resolved that the MFU urges Congress to pass and the President to sign a five-year farm bill before the current bill expires in 2018.

Health Care

Whereas, Minnesota Farmers Union (MFU) policy calls for the state and federal governments to develop and operate a comprehensive single-payer health plan that will enable all people access to health care; and

Whereas, MFU policy supports the right for states to establish a public health care option and further also supports the development of a farmers’ health care cooperative; and

Whereas, MinnesotaCare was created in 1992 by Republican Gov. Arne Carlson and a bipartisan group of legislators to provide health care for Minnesotans to purchase for themselves and their families; and

Whereas, this past session DFL Gov. Mark Dayton and the Legislature enacted legislation allowing farmers to purchase health care through farm cooperatives; and now

Therefore, be it resolved that while continuing to advocate for single-payer, MFU supports the efforts of Gov. Dayton, Lt. Gov. Tina Smith, Rep. Clark Johnson, Sen. Tony Lourey and others to give everyone who buys their insurance on the individual health insurance market the choice to buy into MinnesotaCare. Minnesotans who choose “MinnesotaCare Buy-In” would pay their own way – meaning the cost of their premiums would pay for their coverage, without any additional ongoing costs to Minnesota taxpayers, and

Furthermore, MFU supports our organization’s efforts to support and promote the new law allowing farmers to purchase health care through farm cooperatives.

Renewable Fuels Standard

Whereas, the Renewable Fuel Standard (RFS) is an important policy with far-reaching direct and indirect consequences, particularly for farmers, and

Whereas, Minnesota Farmers Union (MFU) policy calls for strong support for renewable fuels and expanding the use of renewable fuels, and

Whereas, Minnesota is among the top five ethanol-producing states in the nation with 20 ethanol production plants in the state, more E85 refueling stations than any other state and three biodiesel plants with a combined capacity of about 63 million gallons per year; and

Whereas, family farmers are currently facing significant economic distress, and the Trump administration should be doing what they can to support farmers and rural communities; and now

Therefore, be it resolved that MFU encourages the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) to strongly support the RFS and regulations that allow the continued expansion of renewable fuels.

Cauliflower Fritters

Chef Stewart Woodman from Kaskaid Hospitality prepared the dish, using ingredients from Redhead Creamery

Yield: 4 servings

For batter:
1 egg
1/2 c + 2 T all purpose flour
1/8 t salt
1 t butter, soft
Separate egg. In 2-qt. bowl, quickly whisk egg white to soft peaks; set aside.

In a clean 2-qt. bowl, whisk egg yolk, salt and butter until thick. Add about 1/3 of flour to yolk mixture and whisk. Add about 1/3 of water to mixture and whisk. Add brandy. Continue whisking batter and adding water and flour, alternating between them until all ingredients are fully incorporated. Fold in whipped egg whites. Refrigerate until needed.

For cheddar sauce:
2 T butter
2 T flour
1 c sharp white cheddar,
1 c skim milk
Melt butter over medium heat in 2-qt. pot. Add flour, then cook 5 minutes over medium-low heat. Stir constantly using a wooden spoon. Add milk and salt. Turn heat to high and stir constantly while bringing to a boil, then reduce heat to medium. Simmer 8-12 minutes, stirring occasionally to prevent burning on bottom of pan. Stir in cheese over low heat for 30 seconds. Cover sauce and keep warm.

For cauliflower:
Yield: 4 cups
1 head cauliflower
1 T salt
Remove core from cauliflower and break remaining head into 2-inch florets. Bring salt and water to a boil. Cook cauliflower until tender, about 5 minutes. Drain cauliflower into strainer, rinse under cold water until cool. Once cool hold in the refrigerator until ready to fry.

To finish:
3 c canola oil
3/4 t salt
3/4 t nutmeg, whole
Heat oil to 375 degrees F in a 1.5-qt. pot. Pour batter into 2-qt. bowl; add blanched cauliflower. Mix well.

Using a spoon, drop 6-8 coated florets into hot oil. Cook until golden brown – about 2 minutes. Remove crisped florets to a paper towel with a slotted spoon. Immediately sprinkle with a pinch of salt. Work in batches until all florets have been cooked.

Spoon cheddar sauce onto a plate, then place florets on top of sauce. Using a Microplane, grate nutmeg over cauliflower. Serve immediately.

minnesota cooks™
Outreach is an essential part of Minnesota Farmers Union. We do it because we want to build our organization to represent the needs of all of Minnesota’s family farms and rural areas.

In thinking about outreach, I reviewed MFU’s proud history. I would like to remind you of the three sides of our MFU triangle: cooperation, education and legislation. All three are equally important in Farmers Union’s mission to improve the lives of family farmers and rural residents.

We also must pay attention to the Farmers Union symbolic tools within the triangle: the plow, rake and hoe. Those three tools were found on every pioneering farm in Minnesota. They represent closeness to the land, the source of food, sustenance and stewardship.

To accomplish this, MFU will have a presence at agriculture-related conferences, conventions and meetings coming up, as we did throughout 2017. At some of these events we will have a booth, and at others, staff will attend as participants. We encourage and welcome members and MFU leaders to volunteer to assist us at these events.

See page 15 for events we may be at in the first part of 2018.

All of these events are important, and our effectiveness can be enhanced by having MFU members join staff at these events. Take the time to talk with other members and invite prospective members to join our great organization.

At the 76th Annual MFU Convention, Dave Frederickson, Minnesota Commissioner of Agriculture, discussed several topics critical to farmers including the importance of MFU membership and participation.

Farmers Union’s strength has always come from the grassroots level, and it continues to do so today. The symbols of the plow, rake and hoe are our call to action for asking people to join MFU. We encourage prospective members to join by our hard work on their behalf through cooperation, education and legislation. We nurture them through contacts at conventions, agriculture shows and conferences, and finally, we invite them to membership, to join our strong organization of family farmers and rural residents.

To build membership, each of us needs to commit to using the plow, rake and hoe to build Minnesota Farmers Union.

To volunteer with MFU at an event, please contact me at bruce@mfu.org.

The Minnesota Cooks 2018 Calendars are available now. Watch for it in your mail box. www.minnesotacooks.org.
FSA ENCOURAGES NASS SURVEY PARTICIPATION

DAN MAHONEY, CED
SIBLEY COUNTY FSA
daniel.mahoney@mn.usda.gov

NASS survey responses essential for program implementation

Many of the programs implemented through the Farm Service Agency (FSA) are dependent on statistics. One of the primary sources of this information is the National Agricultural Statistical Service (NASS), a fellow agency within the United States Department of Agriculture. NASS conducts hundreds of surveys every year and prepares reports covering virtually every aspect of U.S. agriculture. Most producers are familiar with the surveys they receive via mail from NASS or the individuals who conduct surveys like the National Census of Agriculture. However, many farmers are uncertain just how the information is used. Information provided in surveys can play a role in determining rental rates, county average yields and projected production.

The rental rate data that producers provide during NASS surveys are used to determine average rental rates for a county in a given year. In turn, these rental rates are considered when FSA County Committees determine soil rental rates for the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP). The accuracy of the rental rates reported to NASS by producers in a given county can drive the accuracy of the rental rates for CRP.

“As a farmer, this is your opportunity to make sure that current data, from your farm, are included in the farm program calculations that can affect you down the road. If you receive a copy of the County Agricultural Production Survey in the mail or are contacted by phone or in person, I urge you to respond,” said Dan Lofthus, Minnesota State Statistician, USDA, NASS.

Another way in which NASS survey data is used is in the establishment of county average yields for FSA program purposes. This information is utilized in conjunction with annual marketing information to calculate annual payments for the Agricultural Risk Coverage (ARC) and Price Loss Coverage (PLC) programs. Farmers are well aware that programs like ARC and PLC pay out on varying rates depending on both established prices and yields for a given county. The responses farmers provide to surveys can play a substantial role in the calculation of these annual payments.

This fall, NASS will survey producers for the County Agricultural Production Survey (CAPS). The responses from this project, along with the responses from the September Agricultural Survey (small grains) and the December Agricultural Survey (row crops, oilseeds and hay) will provide the farm level data needed to set county yield estimates. The NASS county yield estimates generated from these survey projects are critical numbers needed to determine accurate loan rates, disaster payments, crop insurance price elections and payment rates for the risk coverage programs.

The participation of producers by responding to NASS Surveys is essential for both accurate and statistically significant responses. Certain crops are raised by only a select number of individuals in a given county or region and a lack of participation by a farmer can potentially lead to an inability to publish data. According to Lofthus, “NASS can only publish a crop yield for your county if enough surveys are received from farmers in your county. Without this county data, agencies such as the USDA’s Risk Management Agency and the Farm Service Agency do not have a critical piece of information they need to run the programs so many farmers participate in.”

The integrity of many of the programs implemented through the USDA by FSA and our sister agencies is dependent on solid statistical information. For many of our programs the source of that information is NASS. The accuracy of the information is dependent on both farmers’ participation in surveys and the accuracy of the information provided. When a producer provides information, it is more than a snapshot of their farm. Collectively, the responses drive markets, calculate payments, implement disaster programs and set yields.

For information on past surveys, visit www.nass.usda.gov/Surveys.

To find the contact information for the closest FSA office, you can visit offices.sc.egov.usda.gov/locator/app.

Example of NASS 2016 survey data for planted soybeans acreage by county

USDA is an equal opportunity provider, employer and lender. To file a complaint of discrimination, write: USDA, Office of the Assistant Secretary for Civil Rights, Office of Adjudication, 1400 Independence Ave., SW, Washington, DC 20250-9410 or call (866) 632-9992 (Toll-free Customer Service), (800) 877-8339 (Local or Federal relay), (866) 377-8642 (Relay voice users).
The end of October was extremely busy for many FFA members and alumni across the country. The 90th National FFA Convention was held Oct. 25-28. This year, more than 60,000 FFA members, guests and supporters attended the convention held in Indianapolis, Ind.

Throughout the convention, attendees faced many opportunities in career development, experiential learning and personal growth. They explored the career and college expo and attended workshops and area tours. There were nine general sessions, where convention attendees celebrated the successes of the many people involved with FFA. One keynote speaker, Mick Ebeling, founded the company Not Impossible Labs. This company seeks to help people throughout the world, no matter how impossible the task. During his address, Ebeling challenged FFA members to ask themselves, “What will you make possible in the future that is impossible today?”

Various Minnesota Farmers Union members and family members attended this national convention; including Christa Williamson and her sons Darrin and Daniel, and my sisters, Hannah and Elizabeth, and me, daughters of Harmon and Gina Wilts. Both Christa and Hannah are high school agriculture teachers; they attended to bring their students to the convention. Additionally, Williamson received an Honorary American Degree, an award that is given to agriculture teachers who have created high-quality education programs that inspire and motivate students. Williamson was the agriculture teacher of all three Wilts sisters, each of whom are still highly involved in the agriculture industry and agriculture education.

Minnesota Farmers Union was represented by FFA student members as well. In fact, as a college senior I competed in the collegiate parliamentary procedure contest, representing the University of Minnesota. My sister Elizabeth, a junior at the U of M, received her American FFA Degree, an honor that is given to less than one percent of FFA members, recognizing individuals who have demonstrated high levels of success in their supervised agriculture experiences and strong dedication to FFA. A junior at Atwater-Cosmos-Grove City High School, Daniel Williamson, attended the convention as a national finalist in the Environmental Proficiency Award area. He also received 5th place in the National Agri-Science Fair with his environmental science fair entry, which highlighted his past three years of water testing in a watershed near his home. Daniel’s brother Darrin Williamson, a freshman, received 7th place with his science fair entry in the Power Systems category, which tested insulation for barns.

40 Square Cooperative Solutions is working to bring sustainable health plan options to Minnesota’s farm families and their employees. Open enrollment will take place November 1 – December 15, 2017, with coverage effective January 1, 2018.

As a health plan cooperative, 40 Square will be owned by the members it serves. To learn more, including dates and locations of informational meetings:

Visit: 40Square.coop
Email: info@40Square.coop
Call: 1-800-229-1064

Find Us On:
At the ripe age of 18, Watonwan County farm boy Harold Romsdahl joined Minnesota Farmers Union. Soon after, in 1954, he got married and bought a farm five miles east of the farm he grew up on. He served as the Watonwan County Farmers Union President while running a diverse farm operation. He kept working until he was 85.

Now at 90, Harold can take pride in the Farmers Union legacy his descendants share. His son, Brian Romsdahl, is in charge of the family farm now, farming 500 acres of corn, soybeans and alfalfa, and 80 acres of pasture for 24 cow-calf pairs. Brian is now the Watonwan County Farmers Union President, with his wife of six years, Therese, as Secretary.

“As far as I know, I’ve been a member of Farmers Union my whole life,” Brian said. “I’ve been county president for I don’t even remember how long.”

“It sure wasn’t anything like Brian’s”
The family, descended from Scandinavian immigrants, has been hard at work on the land ever since they set down roots. They’ve passed that work ethic down to Brian’s two daughters, Jennie and Laura, whom he had with his late first wife, Deb. She passed away from cancer.

“Brian and (Deb) started their part of the farming,” Therese said. “She was really instrumental in working on the farm with him and developing the cattle herd. She was very good at genetics. Their daughters took right after her.”

Both young women have stayed close to the family farm near Butterfield. Jennie is a registered nurse at Mayo Clinic Health System in Mankato. Laura lives on the farm in one of the two houses the Romsdahls own.

Laura’s house had belonged to Brian and Therese, until Harold moved into assisted living, at which point the couple moved into his former house and Laura into the other one. Laura farms part-time with her dad, when she isn’t working at a bank in town. She is an agriculture graduate of South Dakota State University. “Her goal is to have her own beef herd,” Therese said.

“There is no way we are complaining about Brian’s,” Therese said. “Part of working in town for her is to be able to get into farming,” Brian added. “Farming is a very capital-intensive business.”

Growing up, the family had dairy cattle, sows, feeder pigs and feeder cattle, before moving into the cow-calf operation in the 1980s. Brian’s brother Randy raised hogs nearby until 1986, during the farm crisis. He quit farming, went to law school and served as a lawyer for Cargill until 2006, when he went to seminary to become a Lutheran pastor. He now serves a congregation in Crystal, near Minneapolis.

The beef raised by the family mostly goes to direct marketing. The herd consists of black and red Angus and shorthorn crossbreds. “I want something that’s going to be tender and good,” Brian said. “So far I haven’t had anyone complain.”

Harold added, “People will say they had a hamburger in town, but it sure wasn’t anything like Brian’s.”

Why Farmers Union?
The Romsdahls’ dedication to MFU is based on the work they see the organization doing. “It’s our voice at the Capitol, and I feel they have the best interests of family farmers at heart,” Brian said. “I believe in the whole family farm system and rural communities. Without family farmers, our rural communities wouldn’t survive.”

Brian has been on a few National Farmers Union Legislative Fly-ins, the last being on Sept. 11, 2001. When the plane flew into the Pentagon, he recalled seeing a huge plume of smoke coming up from behind the hotel.

“People were running up and down the streets. It was chaotic,” he said. “They had people with rifles sitting on the roofs of the hotel.”

The Romsdahls faced a steep challenge to their own farm’s survival in the 1980s. Thanks to the help of Brian’s mother’s lefse-making, they made it through. Brian said she made about 800 pounds of lefse one winter. But he, Harold and Randy have never forgotten the experience.

Having been county president for so many years, Brian said he hopes to see young people step into leadership positions over time. But he’s willing to do the work while he can.
School Building Bond Agricultural Credit

The School Building Bond Agricultural Credit, worth between $35 million to $52 million each year for owners of agricultural property, will support good quality schools in our communities by helping to relieve rising property taxes on Minnesota farmers.

The credit applies to all property classified as agricultural land, rural vacant land, and managed forest land, excluding the house, garage, and surrounding 1 acre of land of an agricultural homestead.

The credit is 40% of the tax on the property attributable to school district-bonded debt levies.

The credit applies to all school debt levies, whether or not they are voter-approved. It also applies to future levies.

The credit is first available for your 2018 property taxes, and is in place for future years.

If you qualify, you will see a line on your Notice of Proposed Taxes issued this year. Notices were sent in November.

If you have questions, please contact your County Auditor.
MFU 2017 Award Winners

These individuals were honored at the 76th Annual Minnesota Farmers Union Convention for their accomplishments.

Carolyn Lange, Ag Communicator of the Year

Carolyn Lange grew up on a farm in North Dakota and currently lives on a farm near New London with her husband Phil Hatlestad. She began her career in journalism 35 years ago working in broadcast news before transitioning to print journalism. Carolyn has been a full-time reporter at the West Central Tribune in Willmar for 19 years.

Hannah Wilts, Ag Educator of the Year

Hannah is in her third year teaching Agriculture at Cedar Mountain and advising the FFA chapter. She is working on increasing the number of students participating in ag classes, as well as participating in the FFA. The Cedar Mountain FFA has grown from 50 students to 68 students in the time that she has been at Cedar Mountain.

Outside the classroom, Hannah enjoys farming with her family. As a Farmers Union member, Hannah has been an active leader in Swift County, previously holding a county office and planning the annual “Farmer for a Day” day camp held in July at the Wiltz family farm. Currently, she is serving on the Young Farmers Advocacy Council (YFAC).

Dale & Grace Fladeboe, Lifetime Achievement

Dale and Grace Fladeboe grew up on crop and livestock family farms in Kandiyohi County. Together, they continued crop and livestock farming, along with running Fladeboe Auction and Land Sales. Grace also taught Family and Consumer Life Science. Dale and Grace feel that Farmers Union has helped them educate the public by being a positive role model and sharing positive experiences and advantages of family farm life. Dale and Grace have been vocal cheerleaders to gain respect for the occupation of farming. They have helped find viable solutions and directed people to resources for farming. Their children – Kimberly, Kristine and Glen – feel their farm roots have been instrumental in shaping their lives.

Young Farmers Advocacy Council Interactive Survey

The Young Farmers Advocacy Council (YFAC) is a group formed from a policy discussion at the 75th Annual Minnesota Farmers Union Convention, designed to bring together young farmers in MFU for leadership and social opportunities. Over the past year, the group has been meeting and held its first event, the Beginning Farmers Experience, at Mighty Axe Hops farm.

At the 76th Annual Convention, YFAC put together a unique presentation: an interactive survey, where respondents answer questions via their cell phones, and the answers are aggregated on the screen in forms such as a bar graph or a word cloud. It tracked questions such as what types of commodities our members raise most, where their farms are located, their age range and what word describes Farmers Union for them.

Of the respondents, most of them had farms in the southern part of Minnesota. Corn and soybeans were the most commonly raised crops, with beef and milk not far behind. About 32 percent of respondents were ages 50-65, with 26 percent between 23 and 35 years old.

One of the goals of the survey is to help YFAC plan future events. The most popular month members suggested to hold leadership events was February, and more than half of respondents said they’d be willing to travel more than 50 miles to MFU social events.

About 31 percent of respondents have been members of MFU for five years or less, while 30 percent have been members for 21 years or more.

Look for more events from YFAC in 2018!
The National Farmers Union (NFU) Women’s Conference will be held Jan. 14-18, 2018 in San Diego, Calif.

The theme will be “Women in Leadership.” Women have been leading in agriculture for many years, and NFU hopes to build on this idea throughout the conference.

The conference will prepare attendees and their operations for their own future in many areas, including: business planning, succession planning, running for local office, networking, telling their own stories, innovative marketing and much, much more. NFU hopes to provide attendees with a network of female producers that they can reach out to throughout the year, as well as provide attendees with important tools that will help set their operations up for a future of success.

Speakers will include:
- Lisa Kivirist of the Minnesota Institute for Sustainable Agriculture
- Kriss Marion of Wisconsin Farmers Union
- Liz Johnson, co-founder and board member at VoteRunLead
- Madeline Schultz of Iowa State University
- Poppy Davis, agriculture policy advisor
- Sarah Lloyd of Wisconsin Farmers Union

Check out last year’s agenda at https://nfu.org/wc-agenda/.

Register at https://nfu.org/education/womensconference/.

Speaker Lisa Kivirist, author of Soil Sisters: A Tool Kit for Women Farmers

Speaker Madeline Schultz, Women in Agriculture program manager at Iowa State University Extension

Please tell us a little bit about your family life. I have lived in Menahga, MN since 1984 and raised my three sons (Darby, Derek and Drew) here. I have two granddaughters, Hailey and Aubrey, with whom I am looking forward to spending more time upon my retirement. I have also been with a special man, Jerry Wisuri, for 20+ years and we are looking forward to splitting our time between our home in Menahga and our home in Arizona during the winter months.

What is your number one concern when reviewing and selling farm insurance? My number one concern when reviewing and selling farm insurance has been to make sure that our customers were properly covered in the event of a claim. Insurance can be very difficult to totally understand for many insureds, and I took it as my responsibility as their agent to do my best to make sure they were properly covered. By developing relationships and being confident in product knowledge, insureds develop trust in you as their agent to help them make the right insurance decisions.

Visit our website at www.mnfuiia.com and “Find an Agent” to find a local FUIA agent in your area. Follow us at MNFUIA on Twitter and Facebook.
The Food Safety Modernization Act (FSMA) Produce Safety Rule is a new piece of federal food safety legislation for fruit and vegetable farms.

Farms covered by the rule are required to send at least one farm supervisor to a standardized and approved training about produce safety.

The Produce Safety Alliance (PSA) has developed a course to fulfill that requirement of the Rule. It is the only course recognized by the Food and Drug Administration to fulfill the Rule’s training requirement.

Minnesota will host its first PSA FSMA Grower Trainings in 2018. Courses will be led by PSA staff, Minnesota Department of Agriculture Produce Safety Program staff, University of Minnesota Extension staff and trained fruit and vegetable farmers. MFU is a co-sponsor of these trainings, along with MDA, U of M Extension, Minnesota Fruit and Vegetable Growers Association and Minnesota Farmers Market Association.

After the day-long course, participants will be eligible to receive a certificate from the Association of Food and Drug Officials (AFDO) that verifies they have completed the entire training course.

**Dates and locations**

Jan. 17 • 8:30 a.m. – 5 p.m.
River’s Edge Convention Center, St. Cloud, MN
Registration deadline: Jan. 10 or when full

March 20 • 8:30 a.m. – 5 p.m.
Monticello Community Center, Monticello, MN
Registration deadline: March 10 or when full

Registration
To register: www.psp.tix.com. Cost is $25. (This is a subsidized cost and will likely rise in following years.) Preregistration required. Participation limited to 30 on a first-come, first-served basis.

More trainings will be scheduled in the future.

Questions? Contact the Minnesota Department of Agriculture Produce Safety Program at (651) 539-3648 or email producesafety.mda@state.mn.us.
...There’s still time to sign up for health insurance!

Open Enrollment runs through various dates in December (depending on company and plan), but will definitely end soon... so don’t delay! Contact your friendly neighborhood FUIA Agent for assistance navigating through the health plan options we have available for you and your family. Now FUIA Agents can also offer 40 Square Cooperative Solutions health plans!