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NFU Women’s Conference

Minnesota Agriculture
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Photo taken at the Petersen Family Farm, MFU members in Pine County

Minnesota Farmers Union  Standing for Agriculture, Working for Farmers
Looking for a summer job? Come work at Minnesota Farmers Union Camp!

If you love the outdoors and working with kids, Minnesota Farmers Union Leadership Camp may be the perfect place for you! Working at a summer camp is hard work, but it’s worth the effort. You’ll leave camp with unique skills, new friends and a ton of great memories. Our campers and staff become a community, and we work hard to ensure that everyone is having a fantastic summer camp experience. From leadership experience, team building exercises and more, our counselors gain important life skills from their first day of training to the last day of camp. Our counselors have FUN, but they also learn a lot about their skills and their passions. A summer at camp is truly an experience you’ll never forget.

A Minnesota Farmers Union camp counselor is responsible for planning, leading and implementing core and non-core programs and experiences for children in small and large group settings. They will also be responsible for the general safety and development, growth and skill achievement of the participants in their group. The counselor will provide high quality outdoor educational and recreational experiences for participants that focus on the MFU core values of cooperation, leadership, respect and responsibility.

Required qualifications
- Education classes or experience in camp, youth programs, recreation, working with children or a related area.
- Upon hire, completion of MFU-provided First Aid and CPR certification.
- Ability to lead, plan, organize and implement program activities.
- Ability to work as a member of a team and the ability to accomplish tasks with little direct supervision.
- Strong organizational and communication skills.

If interested, email MFU Education Director Glen Schmidt at glen@mfu.org for more information and to receive an application.

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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.

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Tag us in posts we should see and we’ll like and share them.

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Petersen named Agriculture Commissioner

With a new governor come new state agency commissioners. Our longtime Government Relations Director, Thom Petersen of Pine City, is one of them. Gov. Tim Walz announced his selection of Thom to lead the Minnesota Department of Agriculture in early January. We were extremely happy with this choice, as we know very well how Thom advocates for all farmers and fosters bipartisan cooperation on agricultural issues, and that his heart is with the family farmer.

During his more than 16 years with MFU, Thom was a well-respected face at the State Capitol and testified on behalf of our members quite frequently. One of his greatest strengths is the way he listens to people. Each day farmers would call him to let him know what was on their minds, and he made sure their stories were heard. We know he’ll continue this work in his new role as Commissioner of Agriculture. We miss Thom at our State Office, but we are thankful for his leadership at MDA and look forward to working with him as Commissioner. He plans to remain active as a member and attend his local meetings and conventions.

Thom is the Member in Focus for this month’s issue of Minnesota Agriculture – read his Farmers Union story on page 8.

We’d also like to recognize retired Agriculture Commissioner Dave Frederickson, who served for the entirety of Gov. Mark Dayton’s two terms. A former MFU state president, Dave has also remained a good friend and supporter of Farmers Union. More about him on page 6.

Lourey to lead DHS

Another great MFU friend, Tony Lourey, a former State Senator from Kerrick, was appointed to lead the Department of Human Services. This department, the biggest of all of the state agencies, oversees issues such as health care, which is of great importance to MFU members.

As a senator, Tony was the lead author on bills for a MinnesotaCare Buy-In option, which we support, so we know he’ll continue to advocate for better health care solutions in his new role. He understands the health care system well and will apply that strong knowledge in his leadership. He’s also a farmer himself, the last one in the State Senate. We look forward to working with him in this new capacity.

Legislative updates

While we work on finding our next Government Relations Director, we’re still maintaining a strong presence at the State Capitol. We recently held our annual Lobby Day Drive-In – thank you to all our members who attended and spoke up about things affecting them on the farm. The Minnesota Agriculture deadline passed before Lobby Day, so look for more details about it in the March issue.

Vice President Bryan Klabunde, Membership and Outreach Director Bruce Miller, Programming Director Michelle Medina, intern Emily Pliscott and I are covering as many meetings at the Capitol as we can and testifying as necessary. One of our top issues on our legislative agenda is health care. You passed a special order at the 77th Annual MFU Convention calling on the Legislature to pass bills establishing a MinnesotaCare Buy-In option, which could offer lower-premium health care plans to those on the individual health insurance market. This would include many family farmers. MFU has been supportive of this option since it was first proposed by Gov. Mark Dayton. Gov. Walz has indicated he supports it as well.

Health care must be affordable and accessible to everyone, no matter where they live. Rural hospitals and other health services need support, too. MFU has become one of the leading organizations advocating for better health care, and we urge you to contact your legislators about it.

For more about how the legislative session has been going, read an update from Bruce on page 5.

(continued on page 4)
The agency did open select offices for a few services in January and shortly afterwards decided to open all offices on a limited basis, as of this writing. We appreciate the USDA restoring as many services as possible for farmers, though do remember that employees working through the shutdown don’t know when they’ll be getting their next paycheck. Details about services being provided by the FSA can be found below. Additionally, information, data and reporting services provided by USDA have been discontinued, making it more difficult for producers to make informed planting and selling decisions. Important agricultural research efforts are being delayed or halted, and some have been lost. The University of Minnesota has been affected, as several research programs there are funded by federal grants, including from USDA.

Our work on implementing summertime sales of E15 gasoline is in turmoil as well. The Environmental Protection Agency is facing delays in setting up the waiver, which is desperately needed to cut into a significant oversupply of corn. That’s on top of EPA’s unjustified Renewable Fuels Standard “hardship” waivers granted to prosperous oil refining companies, which sharply decreased ethanol demand and was costly to farmers. Farmers Union supports moving to even higher blends of ethanol than E15, such as E30, and we continue to work for this. This government shutdown is another punch to the gut of family farmers whose income has declined by 50 percent since 2013. President Trump’s trade wars have knocked us even further into the red, along with the RFS “hardship” waivers. Lack of access to FSA means farmers can’t access valuable cash flow and loans. High individual market health care costs add severe financial burdens. For all these reasons, I joined the National Farmers Union Full Board of Directors in a unanimous resolution calling on President Trump and Congress to reopen the government immediately.

**Government shutdown harms FSA, renewable energy initiatives**

At the time of this writing, the federal government is still shut down and has been for more than a month. Not every agency has been affected, but unfortunately the U.S. Department of Agriculture has. Farm Service Agency offices have been closed, leaving farmers unable to complete business with them such as applying for operating loans and the Market Facilitation Program. Plus, the department has not been able to implement programs called for in the new Farm Bill.

The USDA has temporarily recalled all of the more than 9,700 FSA employees to keep offices open from 8 a.m. to 4:30 p.m., on Tuesdays, Wednesdays and Thursdays if needed, to provide the additional administrative services. President Trump has already signed legislation that guarantees employees will receive all backpay missed during the lapse in funding. Agricultural producers who have business with the agency can contact their FSA service center to make an appointment.

FSA can provide these administrative services, which are critical for farmers and ranchers, because failure to perform these services would harm funded programs. FSA staff will work on the following transactions:

- Market Facilitation Program
- Marketing Assistance Loans
- Release of collateral warehouse receipts
- Direct and Guaranteed Farm Operating Loans, and Emergency Loans
- Service existing Conservation Reserve Program contracts
- Sugar Price Support Loans
- Dairy Margin Protection Program
- Agricultural Risk Coverage and Price Loss Coverage
- Livestock Forage Disaster
- Emergency Assistance Livestock, Honey Bees and Farm-raised Fish Program
- Livestock Indemnity Program
- Noninsured Crop Disaster Assistance Program
- Tree Assistance Program

U.S. Secretary of Agriculture Sonny Perdue announced last month that all Farm Service Agency (FSA) offices nationwide are reopening to provide additional administrative services to farmers and ranchers during the government shutdown. Additionally, Perdue announced that the deadline to apply for the Market Facilitation Program, which aids farmers harmed by retaliatory tariffs, has been extended to Feb. 14. The original deadline had been Jan. 15. Other program deadlines may be modified and will be announced as they are addressed.

Updates to available services and offices will be made during the lapse in federal funding on the FSA shutdown webpage (www.fsa.usda.gov/help/shutdowninfo). Programs managed by FSA that were re-authorized by the 2018 farm bill will be available at a date yet to be determined.

**USDA to reopen FSA offices for additional services during government shutdown**
First, a hearty congratulations to Thom Petersen for his appointment as the new Commissioner of the Minnesota Department of Agriculture. For more than 16 years, serving as the MFU Government Relations Director, Thom helped develop MFU’s policy and represented us as a major voice in working with elected and appointed officials at the state and federal levels.

MFU has posted the position of Government Relations Director and will be reviewing applications soon.

For the 2019 legislative session, I am the Legislative Lead on Agriculture issues.

MFU Programming Director Michelle Medina is the Legislative Lead on Energy and Environment issues. President Gary Wertish, Vice President Bryan Klabunde, Michelle, intern Emily Pliscott and I are covering all other legislation that impacts family farming and rural life especially including health care, taxes, broadband and farm stress, as well as other issues in our policy platform.

Meanwhile, the 2019 legislative session is in full swing. These early weeks include introductions and overview presentations on issues. The election of Gov. Tim Walz and Lt. Gov. Peggy Flanagan brings new faces leading state agencies. The committees that oversee the departments have invited the new commissioners and their staff in to meet with them and discuss their interests and priorities.

The MFU Government Relations team has been busy meeting with legislative leaders and members, talking with the new Walz administration and commissioners, and meeting with other advocacy groups who are working on issues with us. Topping the interest levels so far is health care, with our support for a MinnesotaCare Buy-In option, extending the provider tax, lowering prescription drug prices and continuing to allow farmers to form health care co-ops.

Other issues range from our work on property tax relief; the MDA budget; funding for agricultural education; farm stress and mental health issues; broadband internet for farmers and rural communities; tax conformity; expanding the Beginning Farmer Tax Credit, transportation funding for rural roads and bridges, including a gas tax increase; renewable energy standard increases; fixing the problems we are seeing in meat processing; advocating industrial hemp programs; compensation for landowners, including a tax credit, for buffers; the good food access fund to bring fresh foods to parts of Minnesota who do not have access; and support for the University of Minnesota Forever Green program initiative. For more details on all those issues, visit our policy section on our website at www.mfu.org/legislative-priorities.

We will provide legislative updates in our email newsletter to members each week and post those online as well.

By the time you’re receiving this issue, we’ve completed our annual Lobby Day Drive-In at the Capitol. Thank you to all who attended, and we will recap the day in next month’s issue.

We greatly appreciate that and hope we can continue to call on you – it makes a big impact when real family farmers tell their stories to elected officials.

If you have any questions about our legislative agenda, don’t hesitate to contact me at (651) 288-4064 or bruce@mfu.org.
MFU says farewell to Frederickson

Dave Frederickson accepts a recognition of service plaque from Deputy MDA Commissioner Andrea Vaubel

With the new administration’s inauguration, that meant the end of an era for the Minnesota Department of Agriculture. David Frederickson, who served as Commissioner of Agriculture under former Gov. Mark Dayton, has retired after decades of service to rural Minnesota and Farmers Union.

Frederickson, who grew up on a family farm in Murdock and farmed there himself for 24 years, was a State Senator for two terms in the late 1980s, authoring legislation that kickstarted renewable fuels mandates in Minnesota and the country. He was elected MFU President in 1991, then ascended to the leadership of National Farmers Union in 2002. He joined the agriculture staff of U.S. Sen. Amy Klobuchar in 2006 before being tapped by Gov. Dayton as Agriculture Commissioner in 2011.

As Commissioner, Frederickson was charged with the sometimes tenuous duty of carrying out Dayton’s agricultural water quality initiatives. He led the way toward the creation of the Minnesota Agricultural Water Quality Certification Program, which provides regulatory certainty to farmers who demonstrate that the water runoff from their land is clean, as well as suggesting practices ideal for one’s land to improve water quality. Though many farmers expressed concern about meeting the requirements of Dayton’s buffer law, Frederickson was quick to recognize the work they’ve done, pointing out that a great majority of land was already in compliance with the law. Frederickson was a frequent guest speaker at MFU’s annual conventions and board meetings. He and members of his department participated in our Rural Voices Discussions on the listening panels.

After former MFU Government Relations Director Thom Petersen was named as the next Commissioner of Agriculture, Frederickson ceremonially handed him the key to MDA and officially retired. As Dave and his wife Kay begin their new life, which is set to include a boat trip down the entire Mississippi River, we wish them all the best.

Dave Frederickson with (l to r) Thomas Liepold, Chuck Ackman and Andy Martin from Sen. Amy Klobuchar’s staff

MFU seeks input on Rural Voices Discussion locations

For two years, MFU has organized several very successful Rural Voices Discussions, allowing hundreds of members and other people across the state to voice their opinions and concerns on the issues impacting them as family farmers or others in rural Minnesota.

As we prepare for conducting additional sessions in 2019, we would like to hear from you if your county would be interested in hosting a session. We would need your help to find a venue that can hold 50-75 people, has a room that we can set up theater-style, is low/no cost and where we can serve milk, coffee and refreshments.

If you have ideas for a location, please contact Membership & Outreach Director Bruce Miller at bruce@mfu.org or (651) 288-4064.

GLEN SCHMIDT
EDUCATION DIRECTOR
glen@mfu.org

Group. MFU counselors provide high quality outdoor educational and recreational experiences for participants that focus on the MFU core values of cooperation, leadership, respect and responsibility. If anyone you know is interested in the opportunity to be a MFU camp counselor, please have them contact me at glen@mfu.org.

Camp
Mark your calendars, registration for Minnesota Farmers Union summer camp opens March 1 at www.mfu.org/camp. Register before May 1 for early bird pricing.

Camp is where kids can hang out, be kids and have fun. MFU prides itself on keeping camp affordable and open to everyone. During a week at camp children can sing at campfires, dress up in crazy costumes for theme nights, swim, play games, go on nature hikes and much more! Reasonable rates are made possible through grants and financial support from the MFU and CHS foundations.

To register for camp, go to:
Registration/Information: www.mfu.org/camp.

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

MFU 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.

The Kandiyohi County Farmers Union Scholarship is available to any Minnesota Farmers Union member or their child who resides in Kandiyohi County.

Rice County Farmers Union has a long history of sponsoring scholarships within Rice County and to students across the state. Scholarships from Rice County Farmers Union are available to MFU family members planning to attend or currently enrolled in a post-secondary institution, which can be a technical or trade school, community college, state university or private institution.

The Don Tentis Memorial/Wabasha County Scholarship is available to MFU family members who reside in Wabasha County and plan to attend or are currently enrolled in a post-secondary institution.

The Howard Warmbold Memorial Scholarship is available to any Minnesota Farmers Union member or their child who is planning on pursuing an agricultural education and lives in Hubbard, Beltrami or Wadena counties. Scholarship awarded by Hubbard County Farmers Union.

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/scholarships for more information on these scholarships.

Once again, it’s that time of year, time to start thinking about summer! MFU summer camp season is just around the corner. Minnesota Farmers Union is looking for exception young people, 18 years of age or older, to lead camp and make it a great experience for all those involved.

Camp staff
A Minnesota Farmers Union camp counselor is responsible for planning, leading and implementing core and non-core programs and experiences for children in small and large group settings. They are also responsible for the general safety and development, growth and skill achievement of the participants in their grouping.

2019 camp dates & locations are:
June 17-21 (Mon-Fri): Northern Elementary Camp at Lake Sarah Campground
June 24-28 (Mon-Fri): Northern Junior High Camp at Lake Sarah Campground
July 16-20 (Tues-Sat): Southern Elementary Camp at Sibley State Park
July 22-26 (Mon-Fri): Southern Junior High Camp at Sibley State Park
July 28-Aug 2 (Sun-Fri): Statewide Senior High Camp at Sibley State Park

Camp talent show
Thom Petersen, Pine County

In the tough days of owning his first farm, Thom Petersen always had a dream: to combine his love for politics and agriculture. He lived out that dream for 16 years as Minnesota Farmers Union Government Relations Director, and now as the Commissioner of the Minnesota Department of Agriculture.

“I lived with almost nothing for many years, but I always had a dream about what I wanted to do, and that kept me going,” he said. “It’s in my heart to help farmers so they can do better. That’s our mission at MFU and at MDA.”

And that’s why he styles himself as a servant leader, taking phone call after phone call from farmers all over the state, listening to them empathetically as they share their stories. From that and from his own experience, he knows what they’re going through on a deeper level than just what you can see on paper.

**Paying it forward**

Before he was MFU’s main face at the State Capitol, Thom was an active Farmers Union member. That was thanks to former Field Services Director Ron Hauglie. When Thom bought his first farm in the early 1990s, Ron, who lived nearby, visited him to make him an MFU member.

“I was politically active growing up,” Thom said. “I knew a little bit about MFU and it sounded good to me. Back then, dues were $30 a year. I did not have $30. Ron said he’d pay my dues for the first year but made me promise that if I put away $3 a month, next year I’d be able to pay. I did that and have been a member ever since.”

Ron made sure to invite Thom to the Chisago/Isanti County meeting, where Thom was elected a delegate to the state convention. The organization made sure he could get there, too. Moved by the way Ron and others at MFU invested in him, he’s paid Ron’s deed forward since, paying the first year of membership dues for those in whom he saw potential to become excellent members.

It makes sense, then, that when Thom was applying to become Government Relations Director, he talked about his ideas for helping our members get more engaged.

Thom, his sons Waylon and Dylan and his wife Alana with Mr. Good Guy. Sadly, Mr. Good Guy passed away late last fall. He was part of their family for 30 years.

“I really appreciate the opportunity that (then-MFU President) Doug Peterson gave me,” Thom said. “I went up and talked to Doug at the State Fair booth for an hour. It was his first year as state president. He looked at the booth and said, ‘I’m thinking about putting in a coffee shop.’ (He did so a year later.)”

Doug had a lot of ideas, and he thought I did too. One of his priorities was showing members how much impact they could have on policy.

“I was always so proud that our members could change the story,” he said. “When they’d come and testify, our members made impact on bills.”

Even if farmers can’t make it to the Capitol, the phone calls he gets from them serve as good talking points at the Capitol and elsewhere.

“When someone calls me and says the bank told them to sell half their herd, I can let them know to call a Farm Advocate,” Thom said. “I can also tell reporters or legislators that I just took a call from a farmer and am seeing directly how tough it is… One of our dairy farmers called me a couple weeks ago, and he cried the whole time he was talking to me. I’ve always thought of him as one of the best farmers. I was choked up.”

**Prepared to lead**

Of course being a Commissioner is no easy task, but Thom feels he has the right background for it.

“Coming from a general farm organization really prepared me for this role,” he said. “MFU has members in all 87 Minnesota counties and represents all different types of agriculture. It’s a different type of role in that I’m managing employees, but I’m still an advocate for all types of farmers.”

A big change is that he has a direct line to Gov. Tim Walz, whom he’s met with several times now to discuss issues and budgets. He’s told the governor about the overwhelming turnout at the recent MDA Hemp Forum, for one thing.

“We expected 150 people and got 400,” Thom said. “My message to them was to tell their legislators about it. They need to know this is exploding.”

Hemp was one of the many issues Thom dealt with as Government Relations Director and will continue to encounter as Commissioner. One that grew in significance during his MFU tenure was water quality.

“When I started (at MFU), we didn’t have the Clean Water Council or the Ag Water Quality Certification program,” he said. “Also farm labor issues, when farmers don’t have family members working for them and have to look elsewhere.

“My biggest disappointment was not being able to do more for our dairy farmers. I kept a chart on my wall where I wrote the number of dairy farms. It started at 10,600. We’re down to 2,700 now. I could see it out of the corner of my eye every day.”

When Thom goes home to his farm in Pine City, he interacts with real farmers there too. He makes a point to get to know them and care about them.

“Mr. Good Guy and Sir Lance-a-Little

My neighbors are farmers. When I go to my kids’ basketball games, everyone there is a farmer,” he said.
Now on Tap: Saving the Bees and the Planet

by Rob Davis, Fresh Energy

Minnesota leads the nation in solar farms that utilize deep-rooted and pollinator-friendly ground cover throughout the sites – and a new innovation is sweet nectar for people as well as the bees. Honey from pollinator-friendly solar farms is being used to balance the tartness of St. Joseph-based Milk and Honey Ciders’ “Solar Sweet Farm Cider” (8 percent ABV) and also being used by 56 Brewing to complement the Minnesota-grown Mighty Axe Hops used in “Solarama Crush” (8.5 percent ABV). While Milk and Honey is nearing the end of the batch on their seasonal offering, 56 Brewing is planning a taproom event for the first day of spring on March 20, followed by a weekend of activities.

Solar farms inspiring agricultural innovation

Beekeepers and honey producers Dustin and Grace Vanasse of Bare Honey, who are MFU members, look at the forage potential on the solar farms, as well as the surrounding area, and then co-locate apiaries on the solar farms. The Vanasse family are two of more than two dozen beekeepers worldwide that see solar farms as a beneficial sanctuary area where their bees will face less risk of being directly sprayed with pesticides. Bare Honey is providing the honey from their apiaries on pollinator-friendly solar farms to 56 Brewing and Milk and Honey Ciders.

Beekeeping on solar farms is just the start though. Minnesota Native Landscapes is managing the vegetation on several solar farms with high-intensity rotational grazing (aka “conservation” or “AMP” grazing) of sheep – a practice that benefits the pollinator habitat and enriches the soil. And a growing body of research is highlighting the opportunity for organic, vegetable, and specialty crop growers to significantly benefit by planting their crops adjacent to pollinator-friendly solar sites.

Minnesota Farmers Union partnered with Fresh Energy, Audubon and the Minnesota Corn Growers to help pass the Pollinator-Friendly Solar Act of 2016. When a solar farm is proposed for your community, Farmers Union members can ask for one of the building permit conditions to be “vegetation shall be beneficial to pollinators.” With this condition the solar company will pay for the seed and hire local experts to manage the flowering meadows for the life of the project. Whether your crops need reduced risk of pesticide drift, conservation bio-control (e.g. ladybugs eating aphids) or free pollination services, pollinator-friendly solar sites present opportunities for benefits. Learn more at BeesLoveSolar.org.

Member in Focus (cont.)

The horses

You may have seen Thom and his sons Dylan and Waylon showing miniature horses at the Minnesota State Fair. It’s Thom’s hobby through which he decompresses from long days at the Capitol.

“I believe in having something outside of work to keep you busy,” he said. “It’s nice to be able to go and have something else to think about when you’re having a bad day. Being able to go out to the barn, that takes off some pressure.” Thom developed a passion for horses as a child. He participated in 4-H showing, and later on he had a business in horses while he was farming.

“I want to thank my parents for being so supportive and helpful,” he said.

The future of Farmers Union

Thom assures that he’s not going anywhere – he plans to remain an active Farmers Union member, as he has for his whole career in agriculture.

“My wife Alana is our county treasurer, and I plan on going to my county meetings and going to the state convention,” he said. “Our organization celebrated 100 years in Minnesota this year, and I am proud to have worked for the organization for more than 16 years. I’m confident we’ll have another great 100 years. We have a great staff at MFU.

“I thank President Gary Wertish and our Full Board of Directors, too, for all their good decisions. I look forward to staying active and seeing everybody again.”
Trump's tone-deaf appeal to farmers hurting from trade war: ‘Greatest harvest is yet to come’

by Roger Johnson, National Farmers Union president

President Trump recently appealed to America’s family farmers and ranchers, promising great things to come for the men and women who provide food, fuel and fiber for our nation. “The greatest harvest is yet to come,” he said. Yet, the sentiment could not have come off more tone deaf from a man whose trade tactics have depressed an already troubled farm economy, pushing many family farmers into significant financial stress and even more out of business.

“Before I got here, it was heading south,” Trump said, referring to America’s ability to export agricultural products. He said those exports had seen a continuous decline over the past 15 years, despite USDA data showing agricultural exports nearly tripling.

The truth is, for the past two years, American family farmers have taken the brunt of the administration’s trade wars. Retaliatory tariffs, lost trade relationships and unstable markets have pushed the American farm economy to its brink. In fact, the majority of farms have earned negative farm income in recent years, and many are being forced to sell the farm. The president must right the ship immediately, as farmers can no longer afford to hold out hope for “the greatest harvest.”

When Trump first took office, farmers and ranchers stood firmly behind his intent to fix America’s trade issues, namely our massive trade deficit with the rest of the world and a host of unfair trade tactics regularly employed by the Chinese government. To fix these issues would be to level the playing field for the American family farmer. Instead, our farmers and ranchers now find themselves playing from behind – see Brazilian farmers last year earning a $2 premium on their soybeans compared to U.S. producers – a direct result of Trump’s trade actions.

Trump’s trade tactics have alienated the United States. They have taken us from being a world leader to being a world agitator. From being a premier supplier to being a residual supplier. You see this embodied in the president’s go-it-alone approach with respect to encouraging fair trade with China. Rather than work with our top trading partners like Canada, Mexico, Japan and the European Union to address common grievances with China, we’ve offended all of our allies. Not only has this ruined positive trading relationships with trade allies, it has weakened our leverage to deal with the world’s shared trade aggressor, China.

The impacts of this approach have been disastrous for an already troubled farm economy. Markets that took decades to build were lost overnight. Our reputation as a reliable trading partner has been ruined, throwing into question our ability to build new markets for our products. More immediately, the volatility and loss of export markets for American farm goods continues to depress commodity prices across the board.

The markets that Trump’s trade wars have ruined will likely take decades to repair. It will take an alternative course of action to fix them, and that needs to start with information grounded in reality.

Farm exports are not increasing under this president’s administration, they are decreasing. Farm income is unsustainably low right now, and hardworking American men and women are losing their farms, their livelihoods and their way of living because of it. Until the president recognizes these facts, the “greatest harvest” is well around the corner, and many of our farmers won’t be around to realize it.

Roger Johnson is president of the National Farmers Union, a grassroots organization that represents nearly 200,000 family farmers, ranchers, fishers and rural communities across the United States. Johnson is a third-generation farmer from Turtle Lake, North Dakota, and previously served as North Dakota Agriculture Commissioner.

Follow NFU on Twitter at @NFUDC and visit www.nfu.org.
On Monday, the first full day of the conference, we started out bright and early with Poppy Davis teaching us all about taxes. One of the highlights from her talk for me was learning all of the different things that can qualify as business expenses if you are looking at them in the right light such as lunch out with knowledgeable friends and your CPA’s fees. She also discussed the changes to taxes that will be impacting this year’s tax preparation such as a change in how State and Local Tax deductions work.

Later that same day, we heard from Kriss Marion who ran for Wisconsin State Senate in 2018 and had a lot to say about why more women should run for office – whether that is for your township board, your county FSA committee, a state or federal office, your co-op board and more. She pointed out that many of these organizations are currently led by men, and many don’t have even one woman in office. We also heard from Ash Bruxvoort of the Women, Food and Agriculture Network about resources for women interested in running for office.

On Tuesday we got to learn about diversifying your farm business with Lisa Kivirist. She explained how to generate ideas for new revenue streams on your farm – figure out what you like to do and how you can make a little money from it too. Some ideas she presented were farmstays and B&Bs, value-added products like jam or baked goods subject to the Cottage Food Law, on-farm food service like pizza nights, freelance writing for farm blogs and magazines and sustainable energy like solar panels – get the energy company to pay YOU. Many of these types of income she suggested could be personalized to you and your values.

Overall the experience in California was empowering. I met many wonderful, intelligent and resourceful women and I am grateful to have had the opportunity to attend the NFU Women’s Conference. It was a fulfilling experience for me and all of our Minnesota attendees!
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 Helpline, 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. Most Farm Advocates are MFU members.

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

Request for comments on draft water quality best management practices (BMPs) for atrazine

The Minnesota Department of Agriculture (MDA) developed voluntary Water Quality Best Management Practices for Atrazine BMPs in 2004 and revised them in 2011. Currently, the MDA is again revising these voluntary BMPs in response to current agricultural practices. The MDA requests comments on the following document: *Draft Water Quality Best Management Practices for Atrazine*, which represents a revision of best management practices developed in 2004 and revised in 2011.

Copies of this document are available at www.mda.state.mn.us/herbicidebmps or by contacting Larry VanLieshout at larry.vanlieshout@state.mn.us or (651) 201-6115.

The BMPs were revised following the process outlined in the MDA’s Pesticide Management Plan: A Plan for the Protection of Groundwater and Surface Water (www.mda.state.mn.us/protection/waterprotection/pmp.aspx).

After seeking information from atrazine product registrants and growers’ associations, and after consulting with University of Minnesota weed scientists, the BMPs were revised. Based on comments received, draft revised BMPs are now being made available for public comment. Below are some examples of editions made to the BMPs during revision process:

- Updated background information about atrazine's use in Minnesota agriculture, herbicide site-of-action and resistance management and impact on aquatic organisms.
- Updated table of examples of atrazine containing products on the market.
- Added background information about atrazine properties which affect runoff and leaching.
- Clarified statements on reduced atrazine use versus reduced application rates (Core practice).

Following the 60-day comment period, the MDA will consider further revisions to the BMPs based on comments received. Once finalized, the revised Water Quality Best Management Practices for Atrazine will be made available on the MDA’s website www.mda.state.mn.us/herbicidebmps.

Written comments, questions, and requests for more information on the BMP revisions can be submitted on or before March 15.

Comments should be submitted by letter or e-mail to:
Larry VanLieshout, Research Scientist 2,
Pesticide and Fertilizer Management Division
Minnesota Department of Agriculture
625 Robert St. N, St. Paul, MN, 55155
Larry.VanLieshout@state.mn.us
(651) 201-6115

Larry can also be contacted with inquiries or comments in regard to this notice.
Available Minnesota Department of Agriculture Grants

**Good Food Access Program technical grants**

The MN is now accepting applications for 2019 Good Food Access Program (GFAP) Technical Assistance Grants.

$150,000 is available for projects that otherwise improve access to affordable, nutritious and culturally appropriate foods for underserved communities. These grants will help organizations such as business and economic development organizations, regional public health organizations, foundations, and community development financial institutions provide needs-based technical assistance to eligible food retailers, such as grocery stores, corner stores and farmers markets.

“Access to affordable, healthy foods is important, so it’s vital that we partner with our grocers and food retailers to increase availability of nutritious foods,” said Department of Minnesota Agriculture Deputy Commissioner Andrea Vaubel. “The Good Food Access Program Grants helps our partners offset the cost of equipment they need, which enables them to provide nutritious food to our community. We encourage those who qualify to apply.”

For the Technical Assistance Grants, applicants may request between $5,000 and $75,000 and must contribute 25 percent of project costs. **Grant applications are due by 4 p.m. CDT on March 7.**

For more information, including the online application, visit the Good Food Access Technical Assistance Grant website: [www.mda.state.mn.us/business-dev-loans-grants/gfap-tech-assist-grant](http://www.mda.state.mn.us/business-dev-loans-grants/gfap-tech-assist-grant).

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**Specialty crop research and development grants**

The MDA is encouraging organizations that benefit Minnesota fruit, vegetable and other specialty crop producers to apply for Specialty Crop Block Grants (SCBG) to help increase the competitiveness of their crops in local, regional or global markets. **Applications are due by 4 p.m. CST on Thursday, March 7.**

Grant projects can begin as early as Nov. 1 and can take up to two-and-a-half years to complete.

Examples of projects include research on a disease or pest affecting a specialty crop, improving a distribution system, development of improved plant varieties, technical assistance to producers to increase profitability and producer education on compliance with the Food Safety Modernization Act requirements.

The United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) defines specialty crops as fruits and vegetables, dried fruits, tree nuts, horticulture and nursery crops, including floriculture and processed products with 50 percent or more specialty crop content by weight. Nonprofit organizations, producer organizations, government agencies, universities, and other organizations involved in research, education or market development of specialty crops are eligible/encouraged to apply. Eligible project costs include personnel, consultant and subcontractor services, supplies and materials, travel, equipment rental, special purpose equipment and other costs necessary for completion of the project. Funding for these grants is through the USDA from the Farm Bill. Approximately $1.1 million is available for grants that range from $10,000 to $100,000.

Grant applications are submitted through the online application system. Additional information, including the Request for Proposal, funding priorities, questions and answers and previously funded project summaries can be accessed from the Specialty Crop Grant website [www.mda.state.mn.us/business-dev-loans-grants/specialty-crop-block-grant](http://www.mda.state.mn.us/business-dev-loans-grants/specialty-crop-block-grant). Proposals that are approved by the MDA will be notified in April and included in MDA’s application to the USDA for a Specialty Crop Block Grant in May 2019.

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**MDA requests value-added grant proposals**

The MDA is accepting applications for the competitive AGRI Value-Added Grant Program. The MDA anticipates awarding up to $2.5 million in this round of proposals.

The aim of the Value-Added Grant is to increase sales of Minnesota agricultural products by diversifying markets, increasing market access, and increasing food safety of value-added products through equipment purchases and facility improvements.

New or established for-profit businesses can apply for funding to support start-up, expansion, and updates; develop the processing and aggregating capacity of farmers selling to institutions; and increase food safety. Grant funds reimburse up to 25 percent of the overall project cost. Funding under this round will come at two levels. Level 1 projects will have a maximum award of $200,000 and a minimum of $1,000. Level 2 projects will have a maximum award of $1 million and a minimum of $200,001. Level 2 projects will be subject to Minnesota’s Prevailing Wage Requirements.

**Applications must be received no later than Friday, March 8 at 4 p.m. CST.** Applications are available and may be submitted online at [www.mda.state.mn.us/business-dev-loans-grants/agri-value-added-grant-program](http://www.mda.state.mn.us/business-dev-loans-grants/agri-value-added-grant-program), or by mail or in-person.
Thunder Cookies
Positively 3rd Street Bakery, Duluth, MN

1 pound butter, room temperature
2 cups brown sugar
1 1/2 cups white sugar
2 eggs
1 1/4 cups peanut butter
1 1/2 tsp. baking soda
1/2 tsp. salt
2 cups thick rolled oats
13/4 cups chocolate chips
4 cups whole wheat pastry flour

Love

Preheat oven to 375°F. Combine butter, brown sugar, and white sugar; mix well until creamed together and no visible butter lumps remain. If your butter is soft, this is easily done by hand; if your butter is cold, an electric mixer is helpful.

Add eggs and mix until well combined, then add peanut butter and mix until well combined. Add baking soda, salt, oats, and chocolate chips; stir well. Finally, mix in whole wheat pastry flour.

Place heaping tablespoons of cookie dough onto baking sheets, allowing plenty of space to spread. Bake cookies in preheated oven for 10-11 minutes. Let them cool, then enjoy.

Bakers' note: If you noticed ‘Love’ in the ingredient list, you may be wondering when it gets added. Love begins with an intention at the beginning of the baking process and gets added every step of the way. Love what you are doing, love the people for whom you are baking and love yourself.

Yields 5 doz. cookies
Look for MFU at these upcoming events!

MFU will have a presence at several trade shows and conferences coming up. Members are welcome to help us staff the booths during the events. If you are interested in doing this, contact MFU Membership & Outreach Director Bruce Miller at (651) 470-5438 or bruce@mfu.org. Or, come and say hello and get some MFU swag!

Trade Shows and Conferences:
- Feb. 9 • Sustainable Farming Association Annual Conference • College of St. Benedict, St. Joseph
- Feb. 14-17 • NFU College Conference on Cooperatives • Twin Cities
- Feb. 20-21 • International Crop Expo • Alerus Center, Grand Forks, ND
- Feb. 26-28 • Central Minnesota Farm Show • River’s Edge Convention Center, St. Cloud
- March 14-16 • North American Farm & Power Show • Four Seasons Centre, Owatonna

Kandiyohi County Farmers Union Spaghetti Dinner
- Feb. 17 • 11 a.m. – 1 p.m. • Atwater Community Center – 107 N 2nd St., Atwater
- Cost: Adults $8, Children 6-10 $3, Children 5 and under are free
- Dinner, silent auction and bake sale, with proceeds benefiting the Kandiyohi County Farmers Union Educational Fund
- FFI contact Kandiyohi County Farmers Union President Donnel Williamson, (320) 220-3100

National Farmers Union Convention
- March 3-5 • Bellevue, Wash.

MFU Full Board Meeting
- Feb. 16 • 9 a.m.
- MFU State Office, St. Paul

Crow Wing County Farmers Union Meeting
- Feb. 18 • 12 noon
- Saw Mill Inn, Brainerd

FSMA Produce Safety Rule Grower Trainings

This fall and winter, MFU is partnering with the Minnesota Department of Agriculture (MDA), University of Minnesota (UMN) Extension, Minnesota Fruit and Vegetable Growers Association (MFVGA), Minnesota Farmers Market Association (MFMA) and other partners to host Food Safety Modernization Act (FSMA) Produce Safety Rule trainings around the state for produce farmers.

The Produce Safety Rule is one of seven parts of FSMA, which is a new federal food safety regulation. The Produce Safety Rule applies to produce growers who sell more than $25,000 in produce per year (adjusted for inflation). Some farms covered by the rule may also qualify for an exemption based on sales, crops grown or the intended use of the produce.

To comply with this rule, fruit and vegetable farms that grow, pack, harvest and/or hold produce and that do not qualify for an exemption or exclusion need to attend this training that uses the FDA-approved curriculum. To learn if your farm is fully covered by the rule, view the FDA’s Coverage and Exemptions/Exclusions Chart at www.fda.gov/downloads/Food/GuidanceRegulation/FSMA/UCM472499.pdf or see this fact sheet by UMN at extension.umn.edu/growing-safe-food/fsma-and-produce-safety-rule-does-rule-apply-me.

However, all growers interested in learning about produce safety, Good Agricultural Practices (GAPs) and the FSMA Produce Safety Rule are encouraged to attend. Learning about and implementing good agricultural practices protects your farm and business, can help you get a GAP audit if needed and keeps our local foods safe and healthy.

These courses will be co-led by trained fruit and vegetable farmers and staff from UMN Extension and MDA.

Register: www.psp.tix.com. Deadline is 10 days before each class or until full. Producers are encouraged to register early, as last year 4 of 5 courses were sold out with wait lists.

Cost: $25 (this cost is subsidized and will likely rise in the coming years). Registration includes training materials, lunch, refreshments and a certificate of attendance issued by the Association of Food and Drug Officials (AFDO). Certificate of attendance is good for life.

Schedule: Check-in is at 8:30 a.m. Training runs from 9 a.m. – 5 p.m.

Class Size: Limited to 40 participants. No walk-ins accepted.

For more information: Contact the MDA Produce Safety Program at (651) 539-3648 or www.mda.state.mn.us/food-feed/fsma-produce-safety-rule-grower-training-courses. Visit UMN Extension On-Farm GAPs Education Program for more information on Good Agricultural Practices and the FSMA Produce Safety Rule at extension.umn.edu/safety/growing-safe-food.

Learn about FSMA: www.fda.gov/Food/GuidanceRegulation/FSMA/ucm334114.htm.

Learn about the Produce Safety Alliance: producesafetyalliance.cornell.edu/

Dates and Locations
- Feb. 20 • Andover • Bunker Hills Activity Center
- Mar. 13 • Moorhead • Hjemkomst Center
- Mar. 20 • Farmington • University of Minnesota Reg. Ext. Office
Now is the time to start thinking about your MPCI coverage. The March 15th submission deadline will be here before you know it!

Our Agents have access to many companies with competitive rates and prices to better serve your needs, so if you need quotes for your farm and equipment, we can do that, too!