May is Beef Month

Minnesota Agriculture
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Minnesota Farmers Union Standing for Agriculture, Working for Farmers
Dairy Together Roadshow

by Emily Pliscott, MFU intern

A group of about 100 Farmers Union members, bankers, industry members and cooperative representatives gathered on April 16 in Greenwald, Minn., to discuss the current dairy price crisis and possible solutions. The event was one of the Dairy Together Roadshows happening in states such as Wisconsin, New York, California, New Mexico, Michigan and Minnesota.

Dairy Together is a movement in conjunction with Wisconsin Farmers Union, Holstein USA and National Farmers Organization to rebuild a viable dairy economy for family farmers and rural communities. National Farmers Union Vice President Patty Edelburg, a dairy farmer from Wisconsin, addressed the room, saying we would discuss a “structural change we probably need.”

This event intended to go over national, not regional or voluntary solutions, moving away from consolidation. The meeting was to discuss long term solutions for farmers who do not want to put their fate in the hands of global dairy markets they cannot control. Low prices for dairy have caused many family dairy farms to go out of business, which in turn harms rural communities as well.

Attendees heard from retired University of Minnesota Professor Dr. Richard A. Levins. He focused on a short-term plan to support family farmers by paying out the difference of operating costs in milk prices for large and small farmers, since small farmers typically have higher costs in milk prices for large and small farmers, which in turn harms rural communities as well.

National Farmers Union Vice President Patty Edelburg, a dairy farmer from Wisconsin, introduces the Dairy Together program to attendees in Greenwald.

Attendees heard from retired University of Minnesota Professor Dr. Richard A. Levins. He focused on a short-term plan to support family farmers by paying out the difference of operating costs in milk prices for large and small farmers, since small farmers typically have higher costs of production than large farms. Levins aimed to level the playing field, saying it is “bad economics to get rid of people as competent as the farmers we have.” His proposal would be implemented in conjunction with a longer-term plan.

Shaina Kirckof, a dairy farmer from Brooten encourages farmers to reach out to elected officials about what kinds of policies they want to see implemented.

NFO Director of Operations Dave Kaseno presented his organization’s idea, which is to extend the Federal Milk Marketing Orders nation-wide. Cornell University professor Chuck Nicholson and University of Wisconsin-Madison professor Mark Stephenson analyzed three proposed options for dairy supply management. The first options were programs with an allowable annual production growth amount and a market access fee per hundred weight for expansions exceeding this allowable growth. There are two versions, one with continuous regulation and one where the market access fee and regulations are triggered by price. The other program is a marginal milk program.

The two economists analyzed their implementation as if they had been included in the 2014 Farm Bill. The programs generally showed reduced variation, enhanced prices and increased incomes. One negative impact is a possible decrease in domestic dairy sales, though were we assured this small decrease is only because of a higher price and would be overridden by positive impacts.

Minnesota dairy farmers, bankers and other stakeholders had a productive conversation about the future of the industry. While it is hard to find the perfect solution to help our farmers, the speakers wanted to share that these proposals are seriously worth considering. Today’s farmers are ready for change, and Farmers Union believes there is enough space in the market for farmers and consumers to all do well.

To learn more about Dairy Together, go to www.dairytogether.com.
Ag Census shows greater diversity, need for better policy

Last month, the United States Department of Agriculture released the 2017 Census of Agriculture, which had been delayed by the 35-day government shutdown earlier this year. The census, released every five years, gives us a snapshot of what agriculture in our country looks like. As you’ll see in the National Farmers Union Washington Corner on page 10, the 2017 census improved upon the survey questions from previously. Many farms have multiple operators, and the census showed us that more of those operators are women than it has captured before.

Unfortunately, the census also pointed toward continued downward trends in farm income and the number of farms overall. Only 5 percent of farms accounted for 75 percent of all sales in 2017. These concerning trends are why we need swift policy action to get fair prices for family farmers.

Rural Voices Discussions

We have held four Rural Voices Discussions so far, and as we have for the past three years, have gotten some excellent thoughts from you on what we can work on as an organization. I’d like to thank all of you who have attended, and we’re working to plan more in other regions of the state – stay posted for future dates. I look forward to seeing you there. Our Facebook livestreams of the discussions have gotten hundreds of views, extending our reach beyond the room. Thanks also to Congresswoman Angie Craig, National Farmers Union Vice President Patty Edelburg, Minnesota Agriculture Commissioner Thom Petersen, Assistant Commissioners Whitney Place and Susan Stokes, and chef J.D. Fratzke for serving on our listening panels with me.

Again we’ve heard that the high cost of health care is not sustainable, and that rural infrastructure needs such as roads, bridges and broadband internet access are huge issues our rural communities are facing right now. This is in addition to the low farm income we’ve been dealing with for more than five years now, which we have also heard about. More so than in previous years, attendees have brought up climate change, weather extremes and agricultural consolidation as problems affecting them. All of these have been on MFU’s priorities. Hearing them from you directly lets us know that we need to keep them there. If you are particularly passionate about something you mentioned, remember that you can save it to submit as a resolution at your county conventions this fall, and it could become part of MFU policy.

Dairy Together

We also had the privilege of hosting a Dairy Together Roadshow session with the help of Wisconsin Farmers Union, National Farmers Organization and Holstein USA. It brought together dairy farmers, lenders, dairy industry experts and media to explore possibilities to solve the dairy price crisis. The ideas brought up implement some form of supply management, either by updating the Federal Milk Marketing Orders to include 2-tier milk pricing, or by instituting some kind of market access fee or allowable annual production growth. It was acknowledged rightly that we can’t trade our way out of low prices, although trade is still an important piece of farm income. We don’t all agree about what’s the right way to keep family dairy farmers in business, but we know we need to do something. USDA statistics indicate that we’ve lost about 17,000 dairy herds over the last 10 years, nearly one third of herds in the country. We have less than 3,000 dairy farms in Minnesota now. MFU policy supports supply management for dairy, although it hasn’t been politically popular.

(continued on page 4)
This session looked a little different for us than previous ones, as we brought on Stu Lourey as Government Relations Director shortly after Thom Petersen became the Commissioner of Agriculture. I’d also like to thank Programming Director Michelle Medina, Membership & Outreach Director Bruce Miller and intern Emily Pliscott, who made sure we covered all of the legislative committees we needed to; MFU Secretary Anne Schwagerl, who testified twice in support of rural broadband funding; and Jackson County Farmers Union member John Nauerth III, who submitted comments in support of the Right to Repair bill that Bruce presented to the Legislature.

It was important to me to testify at the Legislature to make sure your voices were heard. I testified on issues such as repealing the sunset of the health care provider tax; sustainable transportation funding; a grain indemnity fund; Section 179 tax code conformity; increasing the Ag2School tax credit; Right to Repair; and a well-funded Department of Agriculture. Stu, Bruce, Michelle, Emily and I will be at the Capitol often as session wraps up, making sure that family farm-friendly policies are supported.

For more about the biggest priorities for us right now, see Stu’s article on the next page.

Register for Women’s Conference
I’m pleased to inform you that registration is now open for the 2019 MFU Women’s Conference, themed “Strength in Community.” I encourage our women farmers and rural residents to attend this annual conference, which will be held at MFU member winery L’Etoile Du Nord in Parkers Prairie. Public Relations & Communications Director Brita Moore has more details on page 13; you can register today at mfuwomen2019.eventbrite.com.

We received some great feedback from those who attended our Rural Voices discussions. Thank you!

The strong turnout at the Dairy Together Roadshow, one of several taking place around the country, shows that our farmers want action.

Legislative session nears end
The 2019 legislative session will conclude on May 20. The short time remaining means the Legislature is busy finalizing omnibus bills for the various government agencies, on the House and Senate floors and in conference committee. Of notable interest to MFU are the agriculture, tax, health and human services and transportation bills.

minnesota cooks™

StoneBridge Beef & Hell’s Kitchen

Tacos de Lengua

Yield: 15-20 tacos
1 beef tongue
1 large white onion, medium dice
4 jalapeños, medium dice
1 bunch cilantro, leaves and stems
roughly chopped
6 cloves garlic, smashed
1 4-7 oz can chipotle in adobo sauce
2 cups fresh lime juice (about 8 limes,
halved and squeezed)
1 T ground cumin
1 T salt
1/4 cup dried oregano
1 T black pepper
6 cups beef stock

To serve:
tortillas, warmed
fresh cilantro, chopped
white onion, diced
lime juice

Place all ingredients in a large pot. Add enough water to cover ingredients by 1 inch. Bring to a boil for 1 minute, then reduce to a slow simmer and cover. Slowly simmer on stove top for about 4 hours.

After 4 hours, remove tongue. Place on sheet pan and cool in fridge for 2 hours. (Discard simmering ingredients or creatively recycle in another recipe.) Ensure the tongue is chilled enough to handle with bare hands, then peel outer layer of skin off with a paring knife, removing 1/4 inch of tissue off the base and underside of tongue (discard these pieces). Dice remaining tongue to desired thickness.

Serve with warmed tortillas, cilantro, white onion, and fresh lime juice.
If there’s one issue that farmers and others in rural areas have spoken up most on, it’s health care: People are paying far too much for care they need. That’s why MFU is backing two legislative proposals to defend investments in affordable health care, bring down costs and provide needed options.

First, MFU has been advocating to repeal the sunset of the provider tax, which is a key funding source for MinnesotaCare, Medical Assistance, the office of Rural Health and Primary Care and other important programs. The tax is set to expire at the end of 2019, making action this legislative session critical.

Second, the team is working hard to advance Gov. Tim Walz’s ONECare proposal in the Legislature. This would allow Minnesotans to buy into a state plan, like MinnesotaCare, and includes cost controls such as using the state’s purchasing power to negotiate with drug companies. In addition to testifying, MFU has been building momentum for this proposal across the state, joining the governor and agency commissioners for roundtables and talking about why we support the plan with the media.

Goodhue County Farmers Union President Deborah Mills, a dairy farmer from Lake City, was invited to join the governor for his State of the State address, after she participated in one such roundtable in the Rochester area. In addition to highlighting the strain that high health care costs put on farm families, Gov. Walz made the case for increased mental health resources for farmers. Deborah’s story about reaching out to farm mental health counselor Ted Matthews and continued advocacy are needed to push the Senate to provide increased resources for rural mental health counseling and Farm Advocates that passed unanimously out of the MN House in early March.

MFU has also been working to secure property tax relief for farmers. President Gary Wertish and others testified in support of the House Tax Bill, which includes Rep. Paul Marquardt’s (DFL-Dilworth) proposal to increase 30 the Ag2School tax credit from 40 to 70 percent, a move that is estimated to provide over $30 million in property tax relief to farmers over the next two years. The bill also includes full conformity on Section 179 and a limited fix intended to keep farmers from losing their homestead status when they transition their farms to the next generation. As of the Legislature’s April recess, Senate Tax Committee Chair Roger Chamberlain (R-Lino Lakes) had yet to release that chamber’s tax proposal.

The Senate and the House passed their agriculture budget bills out of committee ahead of the April recess. The chambers are working within budget targets that force committee members to choose between worthy investments. The House committee, led by Chair Jeanne Poppe (DFL-Austin), largely did a good job balancing needs of the agriculture community with budget constraints. This bill proposes investing an additional $6 million in ag programs and includes several MFU priorities like funding meat inspections, noxious weed control and farmer mental health. The Senate bill invests in dairy modernization grants, but proposes cuts in other areas, including at MDA. MFU will be working with legislators in both chambers to help make sure that whatever compromise is ultimately reached works for family farmers.

These are just a few issues the MFU legislative team has been working on at the State Capitol. If you have thoughts or questions, don’t hesitate to reach out to me at stu@mfu.org, (320) 232-3047 or @stulourey on Twitter.
MFU President Gary Wertish was part of the listening panel each time. Others who have participated are Congresswoman Angie Craig, Minnesota Commissioner of Agriculture Thom Petersen, Assistant Commissioners of Agriculture Susan Stokes and Whitney Place, National Farmers Union Vice President Patty Edelburg and Artisan Plaza Chef J.D. Fratzke.

This is our way of making rural Minnesotans' voices heard when they too often aren't, at least not clearly enough. Policymakers and media are eager to attend as well, so they can address what's going on in their communities. Our listening panelists, who vary by location, have no agenda for what they want to talk about – it's open to whatever those in attendance want to say.

We have been deeply moved by what MFU members and others in the community have shared in this open model, from the negative income they are making in farming, to unsustainable health care costs upwards of $35,000/year, to anxiety about the changing climate, to the economic struggles of small towns at this time. These unfiltered thoughts reflect what we've been hearing in general for the past few years, as the average income made on the farm has not been enough to cover input costs, let alone pay for health care and property taxes. Prices were low even before Trump administration tariffs prompted retaliation from our allies, with tariffs of their own on U.S. agriculture driving down prices even more, and mergers of large agribusinesses decreasing competition and raising input costs.

Then, of course, there's the weather, the biggest factor farmers can't control, which has been particularly devastating in Minnesota this spring with floods.

"We have too much water," Ted Suss, Redwood County President, put simply at the Winthrop discussion. "The farm down the road from me is flooded three or four times a year now."

It's just one symptom of the changing climate, which was brought up at all four of the discussions we've had.

The depressed agricultural economy and all the forces that have come with it have led to population declines in our small towns, which means schools have consolidated and it's harder to do business there, including starting farms of your own. It is clear from what we heard that rural Minnesotans want to see real action to solve these problems.

We hear you, and we're getting your message out there with the Legislature, the Walz administration and the media. Additionally, we livestreamed all of the discussions on our Facebook page, so they were viewed by hundreds of people outside of those in attendance. Several newspapers and radio stations covered the discussions as well.

We hope to reschedule the Granite Falls Rural Voices Discussion and cover other areas of the state as well. Stay posted on mfu.org/events and the weekly e-news for updates.
Many farmers have come to us over the past few years wondering how they should go about installing clean energy systems on their farmland, such as wind and solar. There’s a lot to consider in these projects to make sure you get exactly what you are looking for, as well as legal provisions to navigate.

That’s why MFU partnered with the Farmers’ Legal Action Group (FLAG) to create the Farmers’ Guide to Solar and Wind Energy in Minnesota, a resource for farmers considering large scale solar and wind installations on their farm. The guide has general legal information for farmers, intended as a starting point for these projects. As always, farmers should consult with an attorney regarding their specific situations or contracts.

The guide is meant to be a resource for farmers and covers many topics including legal agreements, leases, easements, covenants, contract provisions, assignment clauses, liability provisions, insurance provisions, tax considerations, equipment responsibility and maintenance, compensation, land use restrictions and more.

The guide will be available to print as a PDF on MFU’s website at www.mfu.org/farmers’-guide-to-solar-and-wind and on FLAG’s website at http://www.flaginc.org/. We will also have printed copies of the guide, which will be available at the MFU State Office and free for members. Join us at the Renewable Energy Working Sessions this summer to learn more about it.

Clean energy technology is increasingly providing a real financial boost to Minnesotans. Smart energy efficiency projects can reduce heating and cooling costs. Solar and wind energy can help reduce energy bills further, or, in the case of large installations, supplement annual farm income. In Minnesota, clean energy also employs more people than teachers and education services, banking and credit unions and the medical technology sector.

More than 61,000 Minnesotans now work in the clean energy industry after adding 2,737 jobs in 2018, according to the Clean Jobs Midwest Report, an analysis of energy jobs data from Clean Energy Trust (CET) and E2 (Environmental Entrepreneurs). According to the report, released on April 9 by Clean Energy Economy Minnesota (CEEM), clean energy jobs in Minnesota grew by 4.7 percent, or 2.5 times faster than the overall state job market (which grew 1.9 percent). Nearly 40 percent of these jobs are in Greater Minnesota.
New Information for Dairy Producers

Limited 2018 Margin Protection for dairy signup

To be eligible to participate in the Margin Protection Program (MPP), a dairy operation must be commercially marketing milk at the time of their annual coverage election, according to 1-MPP, subparagraph 10 B. However, many dairy operations that were commercially marketing milk in 2018 stopped marketing milk before or during the re-enrollment period and were determined ineligible for 2018 coverage. For these cases only, DAFP is granting blanket relief for affected dairy operations to make MPP-Dairy coverage elections during a limited 2018 signup period.

The limited 2018 MPP-Dairy signup is only for dairy operations who were producing and commercially marketing milk in 2018 but stopped commercially marketing milk before or during the 2018 re-enrollment period from April 9, 2018 through June 22, 2018. The limited MPP-Dairy re-enrollment runs through COB on May 10. Interested eligible producers must visit their county office to sign up for coverage. Dairy operations can only sign up for the months they were marketing milk in 2018.

Retroactive enrollment for producers with 2018 LGM coverage

Dairy producers who elected to participate in the Livestock Gross Margin for Dairy Cattle Program (LGM-Dairy) now can participate in the Margin Protection Program for Dairy (MPP-Dairy) for 2018 coverage. Sign-up runs through May 10.

Producers enrolled in 2018 LGM-Dairy, administered by USDA’s Risk Management Agency (RMA), previously were determined by the 2014 Farm Bill to be ineligible for coverage under MPP-Dairy, a safety net program available through USDA’s Farm Service Agency (FSA).

“The 2018 Farm Bill included substantial changes to USDA dairy programs,” said FSA Administrator Richard Fordyce. “This includes the ability for producers with LGM coverage to retroactively enroll in MPP-Dairy for 2018. It also integrated recent improvements to the MPP-Dairy in the new Dairy Margin Coverage (DMC) program, beginning with the 2019 calendar year.”

Dairy Margin Coverage program

The USDA has announced that the January 2019 income over feed cost margin was $7.99 per hundredweight, triggering the first payment for eligible dairy producers who purchase the appropriate level of coverage under the DMC program.

DMC, which replaces MPP, is a voluntary risk management program for dairy producers that was authorized by the 2018 Farm Bill. DMC offers protection to dairy producers when the difference between the all milk price and the average feed cost (the margin) falls below a certain dollar amount selected by the producer.

Agriculture Secretary Sonny Perdue announced that sign up for DMC will open by mid-June of this year. At the time of sign up, producers who elect a DMC coverage level between $8 and $9.50 would be eligible for a payment for January 2019.

Operations making a one-time election to participate in DMC through 2023 are eligible to receive a 25 percent discount on their premium for the existing margin coverage rates.

“Congress created the Dairy Margin Coverage program to provide an important financial safety net for dairy producers, helping them weather shifting milk and feed prices,” Fordyce said. “This program builds on the previous Margin Protection Program for Dairy, carrying forward many of the program upgrades made last year based on feedback from producers. We’re working diligently to implement the DMC program and other FSA programs authorized by the 2018 Farm Bill.”

Additional details about DMC and other FSA Farm Bill program changes can be found at farmers.gov/farmbill.
Every year, Minnesota Farmers Union and National Farmers Union offer scholarship opportunities to members and their children. Altogether, there was more than $14,000 worth of scholarship money available.

Of that, $1,000 is awarded to five students through the Minnesota Farmers Union Scholarship. The winners of the 2019 Minnesota Farmers Union Scholarships are:

Daniel Williamson, son of Donnel & Christa Williamson of Spicer. Daniel plans to attend South Dakota State University for Agricultural Sciences. Daniel said, “I have always been involved in agriculture. Whether it was riding with my dad in a tractor, or helping him with cattle chores, I was always exposed to it. I have had the unique experience of being raised on the same farm site as my grandparents. I have been able to learn about agriculture from both my father and grandfather. Although we have a small certified organic farm, my parents have taken the time to expose me to all sides of the agriculture industry through involvement in the community and Minnesota Farmers Union.”

Carolyn Pavlish, daughter of Jerome Slette of Mahnomen. Carolyn plans to attend the University of Minnesota Crookston to study Agricultural Education. Carolyn said, “I strive to educate others on the various areas of the material and help them to see the importance of the many occupations in the industry. The world is beautiful, and diverse. Agriculture is fascinating and I can’t imagine my life without it.”

Carly Feldewerd, daughter of Cory and Heidi Feldewerd of Melrose. Carly will be attending North Dakota State University to study Nursing. Carly said, “As I have been learning more about our country and government in my American Government class. I have started to notice the importance of representation in our government. I understand that the Minnesota Farmers Union is present to represent farmers as a whole in Minnesota. This is vital for my family, and for other farming families around us. Without representation, we could run the risk of not being stood up for. Our government runs off the basis of being represented, so there has been a significant impact on my life and my family’s life due to the Minnesota Farmers Union political representation.”

Alma Jorgenson, daughter of Mike Jorgenson and Kathy Draeger of Clinton. Alma is currently attending Gustavus Adolphus College and majoring in Psychology and Environmental Science. In Alma’s own words, “One day really stands out to me when thinking about how rural life shaped my future. On this day, an elderly woman came in and started telling me about her family trauma. We started chatting about the availability of rural mental health practitioners. Near the end of this conversation, she started crying, saying how helpless she felt. When she left I broke down. My heart hurt for my community. My time working at the grocery store inspired me to want to do everything that I can to help rural communities. To do that I am going to school to be a rural psychologist. I hope that I am able to use my education to be in a rural community and to make a difference in those people’s lives.”

Andrew Johnson, son of Darren and Kari Johnson of Fergus Falls. Andrew will be attending North Dakota State University, majoring in Agriculture Economics and minor in Soil Science. Andrew said, “My increased time working on the farm helped me decide my career path which includes attending NDSU and majoring in Agriculture Economics and minor in Soil Science. These degrees will provide a good knowledge base for marketing our crops and valuable insight into our crop production. Following graduation from college, I will return home and be the 4th generation to operate the family farm. Also, following my dad’s, grandpa’s and great grandpa’s footsteps, I plan to be an active member of Farmers Union.”

These young adults have distinguished themselves through their passionate commitment to agriculture, MFU, their communities and their future careers. Congratulations to all!

Nominees needed for 2020 Beef Board

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) Agricultural Marketing Service is requesting nominations by June 17 to fill positions that will become vacant on the Cattlemen’s Beef Promotion and Research Board (Board) in January 2020. There will be one position open for Minnesota.

Any beef producer who owns cattle or any importer that imports cattle or beef may be nominated. Producers and importers must be nominated by a USDA certified producer organization (of which MFU is one) and submit a completed application. USDA will select appointees from the nominated producers and importers. Nomination forms and a list of certified producer organizations in each state or unit are available on the Cattlemen’s Beef Board page on the AMS website. If you have suggestions for whom MFU should nominate, please contact us.

The Cattlemen’s Beef Board is authorized by the Beef Promotion and Research Act of 1985 and is composed of 99 members representing 34 separate states, five units of geographically grouped states and one importer unit.

For more information, contact Barbara Josselyn at (202) 690-2611 or Barbara.Josselyn@usda.gov or fax (202) 720-1125. You may also send mail to: Research and Promotion Division; Livestock and Poultry Program; AMS, USDA; 1400 Independence Ave., SW; Room 2610-S, STOP 0251; Washington, D.C. 20250-0251.

GLEN SCHMIDT
EDUCATION DIRECTOR
glen@mfu.org

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Minnesota Farmers Union Standing for Agriculture, Working for Farmers
A monthly update from National Farmers Union

In the coming weeks and months, Congress will set discretionary funding for fiscal year 2020. Several important food and farm programs are included in this, including conservation programs, rural development, farm assistance and food safety inspections. National Farmers Union is hard at work advocating for programs that matter most to our members to ensure they receive adequate funding. NFU hopes that policymakers take these data into account in the appropriation process, Farm Bill implementation and all future federal agricultural and rural policy development.

Census provides clearer picture of U.S. agriculture

The U.S. Department of Agriculture released the results of the 2017 Census of Agriculture in mid-April. The Census, which is taken every five years, is the most complete set of data for American agriculture, providing an abundance of information about land use, farm ownership and decision-making, demographics, production practices, income and expenditures.

NFU President Roger Johnson stressed the importance of the Ag Census in data-driven policy making. “The ag census is important to federal, state and local policymakers, as well as farmers and ranchers. The data will inform farm policy, rural policy, and long-term decisions made over the next five years,” said Johnson. “We’re grateful to the farm and ranch families who put in the time to filling out the 2017 Census of Agriculture and thereby giving a voice to their operations and their communities.”

This is the first Census that allowed operations to list more than one principal operator, thus offering a more accurate picture of the role of women and young farmers who in previous years were often listed as secondary operators, regardless of their level of involvement. As a result, the number of women producers jumped almost 27 percent, with more than half of farms listing at least one woman as a decision maker.

Though the number of beginning farmers grew as well to 27 percent of total farmers, they are still overwhelmingly outnumbered by older producers: For every producer younger than 35, there are more than six farmers older than 65. This alarming trend has pushed the average age of farmers up to 57.5 years old. If older farmers retire at a faster rate than new farmers join the industry, it will put significant strain on the agricultural system.

The census points to some other troubling changes in farm-level consolidation and the farm economy. For one, the overall number of farms and ranches dropped by 3 percent to just over 2 million, and total acres cultivated fell by 1.6 percent to 900 million. Additionally, while the number of large- and small-sized farms grew between 2012 and 2017, the middle-sized farms fell. As farms consolidated, so did farm production; just over 5 percent of farms accounted for 75 percent of all sales. That doesn’t mean farmers are making more money; 56.4 percent of farm operations lost money in 2017.

NFU advocates for conservation programs and farm stress assistance

NFU recently joined 140+ leading farm, conservation and wildlife groups in sending a letter to the Senate and House agriculture appropriations subcommittees, urging them to protect funding for Farm Bill conservation programs in the FY 2020 appropriations process. A week prior to that, NFU and a broad coalition of leading farm and rural advocacy groups sent a separate letter to the appropriations subcommittees to encourage them to fully fund the Farm and Ranch Stress Assistance Network (FRSAN), which is intended to provide farmers, ranchers, and farmworkers with affordable stress assistance.

Though the 2018 Farm Bill called for discretionary spending levels for its programs, the materialization of that money is dependent on the passage of an appropriations bill. The budget and appropriations process occurs annually. The release of President Trump’s proposed budget last month was the first step in the process. This budget is not binding; it serves as a recommendation to Congress, indicating the White House’s financial priorities for the upcoming year. From there, Congress will work to set to set limits on spending, which will be finalized in a congressional budget resolution. Finally, specific committees draft 12 appropriations bills for discretionary spending, which are separated by agency or groups of agencies.

Agricultural spending, which has its own appropriations bill, is often shortchanged
NFU opposes NIFA/ERS relocation, reorganization

The U.S. House Agriculture Appropriations Subcommittee held a hearing in late March to examine the impacts of relocating the Economic Research Service (ERS) and the National Institute of Food and Agriculture (NIFA) and reorganizing ERS under the office of the Chief Economist.

The USDA first announced plans to move the two major research agencies to somewhere outside of the nation’s capital and to reorganize the ERS from under the Research, Education and Economics mission area to the Office of the Chief Economist last August. The announcement was met with significant criticism, as it would move two key agencies far away from other organizations with which they closely collaborate, force hundreds of government employees to move or find new jobs, potentially allow for the politicization of scientific and economic research and hinder the capabilities of the organizations.

NFU first expressed concern about the plan last September due to “concerns regarding how the move would impact the agencies’ functions and the lack of information surrounding the Administration’s justifications.” NFU Vice President of Public Policy and Communications Rob Larew reiterated those concerns, emphasizing the importance of prioritizing “the work of the agencies” and maintaining “the integrity and impacts of public research” and urged the USDA “to end the relocation of these two important agencies.”

The Washington Corner can be found at www.nfu.org/corner.
Registration for 2018 MFU Leadership Camps

There's still time to sign up for our 2018 MFU Leadership Camps! Go to www.mfu.org/camp to register.

Day Camps
June 10-14 and July 8-12
Various locations in Minnesota

Weeklong Camps
Northern Elementary Camp (Ages 8-11)
June 17-21 (Mon-Fri) • Farmers Union Lake Sarah Campground (near Erskine)

Northern Junior Camp (Ages 11-14)
June 24-28 (Mon-Fri) • Lake Sarah Campground

Southern Elementary Camp (Ages 8-11)
July 16-20 (Tues-Sat) • Sibley State Park (near New London)

Southern Junior Camp (Ages 11-14)
July 22-26 (Mon-Fri) • Sibley State Park

Senior High Camp (Ages 14-18)
July 28- Aug 2 (Sun-Fri) • Sibley State Park

2019 MFU Theme Nights

Each night at camp we hold different activities, according to themes chosen by our Youth Advisory Council. This year the themes are Mythical Fantasy Night, Fake an Injury Night, The Letter S Night, Roaring 20’s Night (Senior Camp only) and Banquet Night! We ask that campers please try their best to dress up in themed costumes to make the most fun of the nights. Be creative and have fun!

Mythical Fantasy Night
Camp will transform before your very eyes to your favorite mythical fantasy! Dress up as a dwarf to get ready for a hike to Mt. Mordor, Harry Potter for a game of Quidditch, or you could even be a fairy to fly to Neverland! Art thou brave enough to step into this other realm for this night of camp? Whether you’re a king, queen, goblin, wizard, knight in shining armor or even a dragon, it’s going to be a blast!

The Letter S Night
Seriously, this stupendous theme will surely be a success! The Letter S Night is the night to get creative and dress up as anything that starts with an S. Choose anything from a shark to a solar system and get ready for a talent show you won’t soon forget!

Fake an Injury Night
Ever wonder what it would look like if you had a broken arm? Well dig up all those old crutches, eye patches, gauze and slings, because on Fake an Injury Night we want you to dress up in your best fake injury gear!

Banquet Night
A camp tradition! Put on your best dress clothes and join us for an evening of fine dining, fine music and awards.

Roarin’ 20’s Night (Senior Camp Only)
Get ready to really put on the Ritz this night of camp. Know your onion and dress up in your most sophisticated garb. Try your hand at some of the casino games or just hang out at the speakeasy. Party like it’s 1929 at the dance! This night is sure to be the bee’s knees! ▲

June Dairy Month Farm Events

June 1 • Clay County Breakfast on the Farm • Kasin Farms, 3050 Hwy. 32 South, Hawley
June 15 • Kanabec/Isanti County Breakfast on the Farm • Haubenschild Farms, 35050 Nacre St. NW, Princeton

June 20 • Wabasha County Family Night on the Farm • Stelling Farms, 62728 305th Ave., Millville
June 22 • Olmsted County Breakfast on the Farm • Blue Horizons Family Farm, 4329 75th St. NE, Rochester

June 22 • Todd County Breakfast on the Farm • Twin Eagle Dairy, 20061 380th St., Clarissa
June 22: Wright-Carver County Breakfast on the Farm • Hoese Dairy Inc., 5520 Polk Ave., Mayer
June 29: Carlton County Breakfast on the Farm • Laveau Dairy, 508 Cemetery Road, Wrenshall
Minnesota Farmers Union Women’s Conference: Strength in Community

One of the biggest stories in agriculture and rural Minnesota lately has been the stress. Many factors are responsible for this, including negative farm income, farm transitions, the weather and our intense political climate. On its own, farming is stressful. But it’s easy to overlook the isolation that’s becomingly increasingly prevalent in our rural communities, with fewer and fewer farmers and small-town businesses.

Minnesota Farmers Union is all about working together and supporting each other through these hard times, counteracting this isolation. At our 2018 MFU Women’s Conference, participants told us they appreciated how it helped them feel less alone. We are building on that for the 2019 conference, seeking to build community among MFU women with political advocacy, local food and learning about available resources.

Confirmed as speakers so far are:

Mary Nell Preisler, Director of Farmer-Lender Mediation at the University of Minnesota
Whitney Place, Assistant Commissioner at the Minnesota Department of Agriculture
Alana Petersen, Deputy Chief of Staff for U.S. Senator Tina Smith, D-Minn.

We’ve also reached out to Dream of Wild Health, an indigenous local foods organization. The community extends beyond the speakers, as MFU members Polly Perkins and David Christianson have generously agreed to host the conference at their beautiful vineyard, L’Etoile Du Nord, in Parkers Prairie, just north of Alexandria. A local foods lunch will be provided by Minnesota Cooks restaurant La Ferme. Through all of this, we hope conference participants will come away knowing they are valued and are truly not alone. It’s one thing to tell someone they aren’t alone; it’s another to make them feel it. With the stressful times in agriculture right now, there’s so much we can’t control. But we can remind each other that the bonds of the MFU family are strong. Together we can call for change, make a difference in our food systems and help each other get what we need.

BRITA MOORE, PUBLIC RELATIONS & COMMUNICATIONS DIRECTOR
brita@mfu.org

MFU Women’s Conference 2019

Date: Saturday, June 8
Date: 9 a.m. (registration begins) until 2 p.m. (end of programming)
Attendees are invited to stay after 2 p.m. for optional wine tasting, vineyard tours and socializing.
Location: L’Etoile Du Nord Vineyard, 16451 NW Irene Court NE, Parkers Prairie, MN
Registration: mfuwomen2019.eventbrite.com
Limited to 40 participants due to space constraints. Please register by June 1.
Cost: $10 per person
FFI: Programming Director Michelle Medina, (651) 288-4096 or michelle@mfu.org
Public Relations & Communications Director Brita Moore, (651) 288-4068 or brita@mfu.org
Child care will be available. Please mark on your registration if you will need it.

MFU offers FREE agritourism sign to members

Thinking of inviting the public onto your farm this summer for a farm tour, breakfast, U-pick, etc.? MFU worked to pass the state agritourism bill in 2015. To be protected, the provider of the agritourism activity must post signs warning attendees of the inherent risks of visiting a farm. These signs should be posted at the entrance to the property and be clearly visible to all visitors.

Upon request, Minnesota Farmers Union will provide interested members one FREE sign that meets the specific guidelines in accordance to the Limited Liability Law. With the sign, you’ll also receive a two-page guide to the law that was put together by Farmers’ Legal Action Group (FLAG). Additional signs for members can be purchased for $7. Signs for non-members cost $10.

To get your sign, contact MFU Operations Director Laura Sherar at laura@mfu.org or (651) 639-1223.
NEW! Farm Stress Radio Series

Prompted by the many sources of stress currently impacting farmers and ranchers, the Minnesota Department of Agriculture (MDA) and the Red River Farm Network (RRFN) have joined forces to create a new radio series called TransFARMation. MFU is proud to be one of its sponsors.

The series uses farm radio, podcasts and social media to increase awareness and reduce inhibitions about acknowledging farmer stress while highlighting sources of support. “Many people are struggling and need to know they’re not alone,” said Agriculture Commissioner Thom Petersen. “This is a powerful series. We hear from farmers, ranchers and others in agriculture talk about some of the strategies and solutions that helped them when times got tough.”

The 60 second prime-time radio stories can be heard on all of RRFN’s 20 stations throughout Minnesota, North Dakota and South Dakota. In addition, the in-depth podcasts can be found at www.rrfn.com/transfarmation.

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:

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Phone Number</th>
<th>Area</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Jan Boll</td>
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<td>Bruce Lubitz</td>
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<td>Connie Dykes</td>
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<td>Dean Hetland</td>
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<td>Dan Hunz</td>
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<td>Fosston</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Steve Zenk</td>
<td>(320) 894-2517</td>
<td>Danube</td>
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www.mda.state.mn.us/about/commissionersoffice/farmadvocates

Order MFU County Fair Kits!

Want to share the message of Minnesota Farmers Union at your county fair this year? We can help you!

Each year, MFU compiles county fair kits consisting of MFU logo items you can easily distribute at the fair, at no cost to you. You can either order a full kit, or individual items.

Some examples of items included in the kits:
- Pens
- MFU Brochures
- Copies of Minnesota Agriculture

County fairs bring together rural Minnesotans each year. Make it an opportunity to help people in your county learn more about MFU!

For more about county fair kits, contact MFU Programming Director Michelle Medina at michelle@mfu.org. The order form will be available on the MFU website.

Please allow 2 weeks to receive your items.
“You have to like raising animals to do it,” said Greg Hilgeman. “If you’re just in it for the money, don’t do it.” Fortunately, Greg and his family do enjoy it. He farms 300 cow-calf pairs and 3,500 acres alongside his wife Gayle and son Scott in rural Oklee in Pennington County. The all-Hereford herd is sold as feeder calves.

The Hilgeman beef operation is medium-sized compared to others in Minnesota, from Greg’s perspective. The cows take a lot of work, but so does the grain part of the farm – wheat, corn, soybeans and sunflowers grow on their land, and they’re looking to continually diversify their crops as markets evolve.

Typical of our hardworking Minnesota beef producers, the Hilgemans started their calving process in early February, when temperatures were in the negative double-digits. This might sound terrifying to someone who doesn’t raise livestock. Greg shrugged it off. “Cold weather is easier to deal with than mud.”

**A process of experimentation**

The farm where Greg and Gayle reside is on the land homesteaded by Greg’s maternal grandfather in 1904. Greg’s mother was one of 11 children and raised him in the Twin Cities. But he enjoyed summer farm work with his “Norwegian bachelor farmer” uncles so much that he took over the farm.

“There’s always been livestock here,” Greg said. “My uncles milked cows and sold cream. They quit milking way before I took over. We had a few cows after that, but it was just a hobby.”

Gayle’s entrance into the operation spurred the farm’s evolution into the sizable cattle business it is now. Growing up on a dairy farm three miles away from Greg’s family, she preferred to stay home with the cows during the summer instead of going to camp.

“She took the cow herd and expanded, bred and managed it,” Greg said. “It’s really been her business.”

The couple has experimented with various cattle breed crosses, from shorthorns to Angus to Simmentals, ultimately settling on Herefords due to Gayle’s liking for them.

“They’re nice to work with, they’re really calm,” Scott said.

A significant portion of their land goes toward feeding and bedding for the cattle, including pasture, wheat and alfalfa.

“We were doing barley, but the contracts have gotten too small so we’re not doing it anymore,” Scott said. “Otherwise wheat, corn, soybeans, sunflowers, getting into grass seed production.”

Scott’s been farming as long as he can remember in some capacity, as his mother pointed out.

“One day he got into the pickup and said, ‘See, I can reach the drive!” Gayle said. “He’s been hauling hay bales since he was five.”

Though Frances and Sylvia moved away, becoming the North Valley Health Center Public Health Director and an FBI special agent, respectively, Scott stuck around, marrying his wife Nicole. They have two young children, Hannah and Logan, and live a couple miles from Greg and Gayle. Nicole is a nurse in Thief River Falls. Scott does as much as he can on the farm.

**Real impact of trade**

One thing that makes Northwest Minnesota unlike Southern Minnesota is that there are no biofuels or processing plants that corn or soybeans can go to. They are reliant on exports as the end point for their grains. Now that the tariff battle with China has effectively taken away their soybean market, the Hilgemans are looking elsewhere.

“We’re really dependent on shipping to the Pacific Northwest export market. When that market disappeared, what killed us was basis more than price,” Greg said. “We need that Pacific Northwest export market. When that market disappeared, what killed us was basis more than price,”

“We can’t compete trying to send it down the (Asian) market back if we’re going to raise beans successfully. We used to ship a lot of grain out of Duluth, but there’s very little of that anymore. We can’t compete trying to send it down the Mississippi River.”

They can’t compete with Southern Minnesota’s access to domestic biofuels plants and other farmers’ access to sugar beet and canola processing plants. Plus they face competition from Russia on wheat production too, which they have to keep growing for cattle bedding at least.

Luckily, sunflowers are a bright spot for them. “Where we haul our sunflowers, they have to hull them for baking purposes,” Scott said. “So there they process them as you haul them in and ship them out.”

Their foray into grass seed looks promising too, although it remains to be seen how it’ll turn out.

**Weather woes**

Any farmer can tell you that the weather is the most worrisome factor they can’t control. The Hilgemans are no exception.

In addition to calving in Arctic temperatures, they were combining until Christmas last year because of the wettest soil they’d had in years.

“Last year it was a late spring, and then it got hot and dry really fast,” Scott said. “We hadn’t even combined an acre of soybeans when we got a foot of snow.”

They’re luckier than their compatriots in Southern Minnesota, who got even more massive rains last summer and devastating blizzards this past winter.

“Our country here is so flat and poorly drained, if we got a big rain like that, it would be a disaster for everything,” Greg said. “It doesn’t run off very quickly.”

**Respect for MFU**

Gayle has a longer history with MFU than her husband does. “My parents were members of Farmers Union and National Farmers Organization,” she said. Greg didn’t join any agricultural organizations for a long time, though eventually he joined the Minnesota State Cattlemen’s Association and MFU after that, as well as the Minnesota Wheat Growers.

“I don’t agree with everything that any one group does, but that doesn’t mean I shouldn’t belong to them and have a voice,” he said.

“Farmers are a diverse group of people; you can’t get them to agree on everything.”

Scott joined MFU for himself about two years ago and has already served as a delegate to the National Farmers Union Convention in 2018. He’s still considering how he most wants to be involved and what he most cares about, but is excited for the next convention.

“A lot of the Farm Bill stuff is important to me,” Greg said, “like the environmental and conservation parts of it. I’m not an extremist on that, I try to find common sense in the middle.”

What he connects with most about our organization is the philosophy that started it all: cooperation.

“I have a lot of respect for how MFU does things, forming cooperatives to supply farmers with products they need. Like now with insurance, Green View, Farmers Union Industries, and the Grain Terminal Association and Cenex before. There are a lot of farmers who don’t realize all that Farmers Union is.”

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MEMBERS IN FOCUS: HILGEMAN FAMILY

Standing for Agriculture, Working for Farmers

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