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Minnesota Farmers Union  Standing for Agriculture, Working for Farmers
www.mfu.org
Minnesota Farmers Union members look forward to Minnesota Cooks Day every year at the State Fair. This year’s 17th annual education and outreach program not only brought tasty (and free) samples of food, it brought fairgoers together to enjoy it, as well as learn a little more about agriculture.

Family farmers and restaurants, the same pairs featured in the 2020 Minnesota Cooks Calendar, got onstage to share their stories, such as how their businesses began, and why they farm and cook the way they do – people really want to know! The benches of Dan Patch Park were full for the entire program, and the discussion between the farmers, chefs and celebrity tasters merited applause at several moments. Our wonderful audience excitedly picked up food samples as our volunteers passed them around. Calendars flew off the tables all day long – many attendees said it was their favorite giveaway at the State Fair. Don’t worry if you weren’t able to be there; we mail the calendar to all MFU members.

A special thanks to our hosts, Mary Lahammer, Stephanie Hansen and Stephanie March, who all did an excellent job facilitating discussions and keeping up with what the chefs were making.

Thanks also to our celebrity tasters: MFU President Gary Wertish, U.S. Senator Tina Smith, Minnesota Department of Agriculture Commissioner Thom Petersen, MDA Deputy Commissioner Andrea Vaubel, MDA Assistant Commissioner Patrice Bailey, Minnesota Grown Spokesperson/Olympic athlete Carrie Tollefson, Minnesota Grown Member Services Coordinator Karen Lanthier, University of Minnesota Extension Dean Bev Durgan, Minnesota Institute for Sustainable Agriculture Endowed Chair Beth Dooley, Star Tribune columnist Lori Sturdevant, Birchwood Cafe owner Tracy Singleton

Here are the farmers, chefs and recipes, in the order they appear in the 2020 Minnesota Cooks Calendar:

- The Berryhill Farm (Pine Island) and Bleu Duck Kitchen (Rochester), Braised Lamb with Garbanzo Beans
- My Minnesota Farmer (Montgomery) and Pizzeria 201 (Montgomery), Pizza al Pastor
- Jubilee Market & Peacemeals (Mountain Lake), Super Berry Smoothie and Take 10 Cookies
- Hmong American Farmers Association (Vermillion) and Union Hmong Kitchen (St. Paul), Smoked Tomato Tiger Bite Chili Sauce
- Doubting Thomas Farms (Moorhead) and Sol Avenue Kitchen (Moorhead), Mushroom Bacon Panzanella with Farm Fresh Egg Gribiche and Seasonal Vegetables
- Prairie Hollow Farm (Elgin) and Gardens of Salonica (Minneapolis), Dolmades
- Prairie Drifter Farm (Litchfield) and Model Citizen (New London), Charred Broccoli with Hummus, Herbed Yogurt, Pickled Red Onions and Toasted Pepitas
- Tanglewood Gardens Farm (Plato) and Wise Acre Eatery (Minneapolis), Cauliflower 3 Ways with Everything Bagel Seasoning
- Ferndale Market (Cannon Falls) and Harry’s Scratch Kitchen (Lakeville), Harry’s Homemade Turkey Quinoa Burger
- Iron Shoe Farm (Princeton) and Willards (Cambridge), Dirty Bird Chicken with BBQ Spiced Carrots
- Jacobson’s Pine Tree Apple Orchard (White Bear Lake), Sawtooth Mountain Cider House and North Shore Winery (Lutsen) and Lutsen Resort (Lutsen), Cider Braised Pulled Pork Sandwiches with Coleslaw and Bread and Butter Pickles

A special thanks to Farmers Union Insurance Agency, Farmers Union Industries and Minnesota Grown for making Minnesota Cooks Day possible.

Visit the new-look www.minnesotacooks.org to learn more.
August is always a busy month for Minnesota Farmers Union. Farmfest, the State Fair, a Full Board of Directors meeting and preparing for the National Farmers Union Fly-In keep us on our toes. Add in a one-on-one with the U.S. Secretary of Agriculture, national TV appearances and non-stop action at the Farmers Union Coffee Shop, and we’ve made it even busier.

Of course, there’s a reason we want to stay busy – we’re busy fighting for you. It’s been a true privilege to represent our members on this big stage. As we travel to Washington, D.C. to talk directly with our elected officials, they’ll already be thinking about issues in rural Minnesota.

Speaking up on bad trade policy

A year and a half of trade wars has devastated the farm economy. Even before it happened, I was concerned that we were headed for a crisis. The president’s trade wars, not just with China but other allies, have pushed us there all the more quickly.

USDA Secretary Sonny Perdue was invited to Minnesota Farmfest in early August, serving on a listening session panel with House Agriculture Committee Chair Collin Peterson of Minnesota, as well as a bipartisan group of members of Congress, mostly from Minnesota. I was second in line to speak to the panel and took the opportunity to address “the elephant in the room”: the Trump administration’s destructive trade policies.

I told Secretary Perdue that the President’s trade war has caused long-term damage to markets we spent years building. We agree with President Trump that we need to re-evaluate many of our trade deals. There’s no doubt that China is a bad actor, and we want to see that fixed. But this method of constant tariffs has simply prompted retaliatory tariffs on U.S. agricultural products, hitting farmers hard.

Trump has also slapped tariffs on allies we need in our court to stand up to China. This has made the international community view the U.S. as a less-than-reliable trading partner and resulted in more retaliatory tariffs. According to the United States Department of Agriculture’s latest outlook, U.S. agricultural exports are expected to decrease by $5 billion this fiscal year alone, while China looks elsewhere for grains.

Perdue later visited our Farmfest booth to follow up on what I’d said. He repeated that we can’t do business with cheaters, and that the trade war isn’t the cause of this years-long farm economic decline. He’s not wrong about that – oversupply of commodities and consolidation in the ag industry are more responsible. However, the trade war is exacerbating this financial pain even further, and China hasn’t taken noticeable steps to change. It’s not getting us closer to a fair price.

It’s also worth mentioning that Perdue made a joke at Farmfest that we did not appreciate. In response to a question about crop projection reporting, he said, “What do you call two farmers in a basement? A whine cellar.” We found that insensitive, particularly during this hard time in agriculture. It’s not whining when your family’s livelihood is at stake.

Media response

Soon after I spoke to the secretary, a story appeared on the major news site Bloomberg about farmer backlash to the trade war. Then I started getting contacted by major outlets such as CNN and MSNBC, who wanted to know why our organization doesn’t support this action by President Trump. CNN even sent a reporter out to my family farm in Renville, where I was joined by members Cindy VanDerPol and Tim Velde. They did a great job speaking up on their personal experiences with financial stress on the farm.

I’ve spoken with several print and radio news outlets as well, including Lori Sturdevant of the Star Tribune, Tim Krohn of the Mankato Free Press and several farm broadcasters. Lynn Ketelsen of the Linder Farm Network did a live broadcast from the Farmers Union Coffee Shop at the State Fair, and we discussed the trade damage at length.

Something I hope to help the public understand is that farmers don’t want the so-called “bailouts” from the USDA. We appreciate the agency doing something, but farmers don’t want to be bailed out because of bad policy.
We want fair markets, fair trade policy and of course, fair prices. Simply being “great patriots” won’t make any of that happen.

**Biofuels take another hit**

As if to rub salt on the wounds, Environmental Protection Agency Administrator Andrew Wheeler recently announced that the agency was granting 31 small refinery exemptions under the Renewable Fuels Standard for 2018. This means that these refineries are not required to comply with the RFS’s renewable volume obligations, and the demand for homegrown biofuels will decrease even further than it already has. It’s also been reported that President Trump personally authorized these exemptions.

Administrator Wheeler is continuing the trend of his predecessor, Scott Pruitt, by misappropriating RFS waivers. The standard exists to drive investment in renewable fuels, which are another important market for family farmers, as well as a savings for consumers at the pump. For a president who has promised repeatedly to make investments in biofuels, he’s not doing much to keep that promise. It’s another barrier we face in our fight to get fair markets.

**Pies, coffee, BLTs**

On a more positive note, MFU had another incredibly successful time at the State Fair this year. The Farmers Union Coffee Shop was busy day and night serving Blueberry Key Lime Pies, Lavender Lemonade, Heirloom Tomato & Sweet Corn BLTs (many with eggs on them), Maple Cream Nitro Cold Press, hot and iced coffee, ice cream bars, frappes and espresso drinks. We continued our partnerships with Birchwood Cafe, JS Bean Factory, Stony Creek Dairy and Grand Ole Creamery for our products and thank them for working with us.

We have been working with Birchwood in the past several years because they source their ingredients directly from Minnesota family farmers. That means, when you eat something at the Farmers Union Coffee Shop, you are supporting a market for these farmers. It goes back to our roots in helping farmers market their products through cooperatives. All of our farmer vendors were listed on a map in the coffee shop.

**Minnesota Cooks™**

Along the same lines, I’m pleased to have held our 17th annual Minnesota Cooks Day at the State Fair and releasing the 2020 Minnesota Cooks calendar. Minnesota Cooks celebrates restaurants who, like Birchwood, source directly from Minnesota family farmers. Since we started this program in 2003, we’ve seen this local food movement expand statewide – it’s not just a metro-area trend – but something everyone can support. Thanks to our farmer and restaurant guests this year, and check your mailbox soon for your copy of the 2020 calendar.

**Fly-In**

As I said before, a group of us are going out to Washington, D.C. from Sept. 8-11 to advocate for good family farm policy on the NFU Fly-In. We do this annually to make sure the voices of family farmers are heard in Congress and the administration. MFU Government Relations Director Stu Lourey is working hard to set up appointments with our delegation and has more information about what we’ll be working on on page 7.
I have travelled our state border to border, from Canada to Iowa, from Wisconsin to the Dakotas, and witnessed first-hand the true united front of our organization. The need to advocate for all forms of agriculture and the challenges that come with it are of the utmost importance.

Minnesota is a large state. We have areas with great crops and healthy livestock, and we also have areas with no crops, damaged barns and closing co-ops. This is where MFU is the leading voice for farmers in Minnesota, advocating for policy that improves life for family farmers, fair prices on the farm and beneficial rural programs. Our farmers are struggling economically and can depend on MFU for support. As a big tent organization, we represent all kinds of agriculture and want to know how we can best work for you.

Part of what brings us together is our harvest season. It doesn’t matter what you produce, farm safety always needs to be at the forefront. Youth are our future and teaching them safety not speed will keep our family farms continuing for generations to come. Resources available regarding farm safety can be found at nfu.org/farmsafety.

I would like to wish everyone a safe and bountiful harvest.

Livestock producers encouraged to take survey on screenings

The weed was first found in Minnesota in 2016 in conservation plantings. Since then, the MDA has identified it in several row crop fields. Palmer amaranth gotten into those fields through manure. It’s been determined that animals had been fed screenings containing the weed seed.

What do we mean by the word “screenings”?

Screenings are the byproducts of seed processing and are obtained through the cleaning of grains. Screenings are commonly sold and used as animal feed, roughage and bedding and can consist of many kinds of grain byproducts. Types of screenings that are used may include:

- Grain screenings: contain 70 percent or more grains (corn, barley, oats, rice, sorghum, wheat)
- Cereals and mixed grain screenings
- Chaff and/or dust screenings: material that is separated from grain or seeds during the cleaning process, and may include hulls, joints, straw, dust, sweeping, sand, dirt, grain and seeds

Because screenings are mostly unregulated, often moved across the U.S., and may contain noxious weed seeds, it’s important officials get a better understanding of the use, types and origin of screenings.

Please help reduce the risk of Palmer amaranth and other noxious weeds entering Minnesota by filling out this voluntary survey.

To take the survey, go to www.mda.state.mn.us/minnesota-feedlot-survey

If you have questions about Palmer amaranth or this survey, please contact Mike Merriman at the Minnesota Department of Agriculture at michael.merriman@state.mn.us or (651) 201-6386.

Palmer amaranth infestation
(Photo courtesy of MDA – image credit: Alan Cressler)
At Farmfest last month, the 2019 University of Minnesota Farm Families of the Year were formally recognized. A farming family from each of our state’s 87 counties is chosen every year.

Nine families who are current MFU members earned the distinction this year:

Jerry & Ruth Ann Lee, Chippewa County
Magnus Nelson, Crow Wing County
Wayne & Lois Boettcher, Isanti County
Daniel & Diane Younggren, Kittson County
Wendy Schalek-Sterzinger, Lincoln County
Bill & Dawn Gordon, Nobles County
David & Gayle Dahlen, Pennington County
Joel Mathiowetz, Redwood County
Steve & Lori Dockendorf, Stearns County

Congratulations to all the winning families!

MFU, FUIA, FUI contribute to record Purple Ribbon Auction

By Brita Moore, Public Relations & Communications Director

It’s not just the Farmers Union Coffee Shop where MFU makes a splash at the Minnesota State Fair. For years, we’ve been major contributors at the Minnesota 4-H Purple Ribbon Livestock Auction. This auction, held yearly on the first Saturday of the fair, brings out the 4-H champion livestock exhibitors for the opportunity to get the highest possible price for their animals. The money goes to each 4-H exhibitor, with a portion going to the Minnesota Livestock Breeders Association for 4-H animal science programs, among others.

Together with Farmers Union Insurance Agency and Farmers Union Industries, we are proud to be among the top buyers in the Purple Ribbon Livestock Auction, platinum-level members of the Champion Buyers’ Club. We joined a large group of individuals and businesses who collectively contributed a record amount to these bright young people through the auction in 2019.

We were also honored with the attendance of Minnesota Gov. Tim Walz and Agriculture Commissioner Thom Petersen.

We purchased four Grand Champion and Reserve Champion animals this year:

• Grand Champion Market Sheep, shown by Grace Arthur of Steele County;
• Grand Champion Market Meat Goat, shown by Thomas Sell of Cottonwood County;
• Reserve Champion Market Beef, shown by Teagan Young of Winona; and
• Reserve Champion Market Gilt, shown by Lilly Carr of Houston County.

We also sponsored a scholarship that went to Thomas Netzke of Redwood County.

Every chance we can get to support young people in agriculture, we take it.

Congratulations to all the champion 4-H’ers on their hard work. For more about the Purple Ribbon Auction, visit mnpurpleribbonauction.org.
August was a busy month, bookended by Farmfest and the State Fair and packed with county conventions, listening sessions and other events across the state. Significantly, many of these meetings and events were attended by elected officials and their staff, allowing MFU members the opportunity to engage with them on priority issues including farm prices, climate change, competition and trade.

At Farmfest, Gov. Tim Walz and Agriculture Commissioner Thom Petersen recruited nine other state commissioners, whose agencies oversee health, infrastructure, taxes and economic development, to sit on a panel and field questions from farmers. Part of their intent was to demonstrate a commitment to knocking down needless bureaucratic silos and working across state agencies to solve problems for farmers and others across the state.

Topics discussed ranged from drainage to mental health, with each commissioner listening and adding their unique perspective on complex issues that span multiple agencies’ jurisdictions.

Another notable panel was moderated by U.S. House Agriculture Committee Chairman Collin Peterson and attended by Secretary of Agriculture Sonny Perdue. MFU President Gary Wertish respectfully challenged the Secretary on the administration’s “go it alone” approach to trade – a sentiment that was echoed by others in the room over the course of the panel. This exchange brought national media attention that has led to opportunities for President Wertish to speak out against President Trump’s devastating approach to trade on CNN, MSNBC and other national media outlets.

After each panel at Farmfest, legislators, commissioners and others visited MFU’s tent to greet members, discuss priority issues and follow up on questions. Similarly, at the State Fair, MFU members had the opportunity to engage directly with people making important decisions that affect farmers across the state. In fact, on the opening day of the fair Gov. Walz, Lt. Gov. Flanagan and U.S. Senator Tina Smith all stopped by the Farmers Union Coffee shop within the first hour of the fair to get their cup of coffee and sample some of the new foods.

These conversations with Congresspeople, administration officials and staff will help frame more in-depth meetings that MFU members will participate in as part of this year’s annual NFU Legislative Fly-In. During our time in Washington, D.C., 44 MFU members and staff will meet with officials at the USDA, our Congressional delegation and ag committee staff, in addition to engaging with and learning from NFU staff and members. Coming just after

These priorities, which are compiled by NFU, will help provide a framework for our conversations in D.C. However, outside of these four priorities, members who are joining the fly-in will have the opportunity speak about whatever issues are most affecting their farm and their family—be that broadband, infrastructure, education funding or the cost of health care in rural Minnesota. If you have any issues, stories, or experiences that you want relayed to your representatives in D.C., don’t hesitate to reach out to me at (320) 232-3047 or stu@mfu.org.

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Counties are eligible for a $200 early bird bonus if they hold conventions by October 1 and submit all paperwork to the MFU state office by October 15, 2019.

Contact Brita Moore at (651) 288-4068 or countyconventions@mfu.org to schedule your annual county convention.

Conventions already scheduled are listed on page 15.
First, we currently have **five outstanding Outreach Workers**: Lee Johnson in South Central Minnesota; Ken Pazdernik in Northwest Minnesota; Amanda Rosendahl in West Central Minnesota; Peter Ripka in Northeast Minnesota; and Diana Rico in the Metro Area.

Coupled with the outreach work of MFU office staff, county officers and MFU members, we can reach out and tell farmers, the media and consumers about how and why MFU stands up for agriculture and works for family farmers.

While we attend and sponsor several events, I would like to highlight a few that we have been at this summer.

First up: **Garlic Fest** – a one day celebration of everything garlic and how some farmers are using this crop for income. MFU had a table and information at this annual event in Hutchinson, and we talked to people about what we do; and how prices and markets are a very real factor in farmers lives, whether they grow garlic or soybeans or corn.

Second, we conducted another three **Rural Voices Discussions** in Thief River Falls, Fergus Falls and Little Falls (The Falls Tour). Once again, our goal in setting out on these Discussions is to find out what is on people’s minds… what are they thinking about? With President Gary Wertish at the head table and others from state agencies and Congressional staff there to listen, we heard once again that the high cost of health care insurance is a critical issue. We heard much about people concerned that farmers are not winning in the trade war with China, and we heard that people want to see Farmers Union continue to be a leading organization in rural Minnesota.

Third was **Farmfest**. Again, Farmers Union had a strong outreach presence at this annual event. Our building was consistently bustling with ag leaders and farmers concerned about agriculture and the economy. Big River Pizza partnered with us to serve wood-fired pizza daily, made with Minnesota-grown ingredients.

The outreach work of Minnesota Farmers Union is stronger when members reach out to their neighbors, invite them to county conventions and help organize issue meetings. If you would like to get more involved in outreach work, send me an email and we can arrange to talk about it more in depth. Or call me at (651) 288-4064. ▲

**FREE agritourism signs**

Thinking of inviting the public onto your farm for a farm tour, breakfast, U-pick, etc.? The Limited Liability Law requires that providers of any 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, MFU will provide interested members one **FREE sign** that meets the specific guidelines in accordance to the Limited Liability Law and a two-page guide to the law. Additional signs for members can be purchased for $7. Signs for non-members cost $10.

To get your sign, contact MFU Membership and Outreach Director Bruce Miller at bruce@mfu.org or (651) 288-4064.
Farmers Union’s roots are in its local chapters, based in townships and small cities. These helped our members become very close to one another, building relationships and carrying out cooperative principles. The number of farmers has decreased over time, unfortunately, and now counties are the grassroots level of most Farmers Union chapters. That doesn’t mean that the legacy of locals has been forgotten, though. Richard Berg of Redwood County was a member of the Wanda Local when it was active, as well as president of Redwood County Farmers Union. He’s brought his family into the fold — his wife Mary, son Bob, daughter-in-law Tracie and grandsons Theo, 16, and Reese, 13.

“I don’t remember (what got me to join Farmers Union),” Richard said. “Everyone in our area was a member of the Wanda Local. There were a lot of little farms.”

The Berg Farm still stands today where it has since 1887 in Clements. Their corn, soybean and hog operation has been challenged by bad weather and low prices. But it hasn’t stopped them from working hard every day and being dedicated to MFU.

**Determined farmers**

Richard told us he’s been farming for 69 years now altogether. That’s more than half the time the Bergs have owned the land.

“He lost his father when he was nine and his brother was 12,” Mary said. “They didn’t farm for a few years.”

It couldn’t keep them down for good. Richard began farming his own 240 acres when he was in high school.

“We started out with a two-row planter,” he said.

“They didn’t even have cabs on the tractors when they started,” Mary added with a chuckle.

With 55 years of marriage, Mary and Richard have seen the farm through. At one time they raised cattle, oats, wheat and flax, and have expanded to 1,500 acres today, still farming alongside Bob and Tracie.

Like many farmers today, Bob and Tracie have taken off-farm jobs.

“I’ve got to feed mouths and make house payments,” Bob said. “It has to come out of my day job because farming can’t pay for it.”

The year 2018 brought a blow to the Berg farm, with storms drowning 200 of their soybean acres. That’s 200 fewer acres to be paid for.

“We didn’t get crop insurance payments for it because the fields yielded above Actual Production History,” Bob said. “And we didn’t get any of the (Market Facilitation Program payments) either. It was a double whammy. But we got through it. We always do.”

It’s tough news for Theo, who said he wants to farm the land eventually, too. He does quite a bit of work already. The winters come so fast, we barely get done harvesting,” Bob said. “If it weren’t for Theo, there’s a lot of stuff we wouldn’t have gotten done. It’s gonna be that way this year, too, I think.”

**How to endure**

The Bergs were chronicled in the 2018 series of videos that debuted at the Farmers Union Coffee Shop at the Minnesota State Fair, highlighting various MFU members. Bob opened up about the drowned acres and admitted that it was tough on him and his family.

“But you’ve got to have hope,” he added.

In today’s farm economy, hope is easier said than done. However, there are a few areas farmers can control, including whom they work with.

“You’ve got to work with a good lender, that’s probably most important,” Bob said.

Being involved with MFU is another way the Bergs endure. They know they can trust our organization to be a voice for family farmers at the Legislature. In particular, the need for the next generation of farmers concerns them.

“They want to farm, but it’s really hard,” Mary said. “It takes money.”

“The problem is, if you’re not working close with the landlord to rent your land at a reasonable price, somebody will always outbid you,” Bob added. “I don’t care where you’re at, somebody will pay more than what you’re going to pay and there’s a breaking point for a young farmer to get involved in farming.”

That’s why MFU advocates for programs such as the Beginning Farmer Tax Credit, which incentivizes retiring farmers to sell or rent their land to beginning farmers. Richard lauded it as a step in the right direction. But we’ve got much more work to do.

“It helps that we have Thom (Petersen) in there now (as Commissioner of Agriculture),” Tracie said. Thom was a strong advocate for beginning farmer programs as MFU Government Relations Director for 16 years, and now leads the way on them as Commissioner.

**From Wanda to Washington**

The Wanda Local that Richard and Mary Berg were active in once has disbanded, but they haven’t forgotten what it meant to them.

“We had a neighbor who was really strong in Farmers Union,” Richard said. “He even went to Washington, D.C. with about a hundred people to speak up for the railroads.”

Bob and Tracie got to go to the nation’s capital themselves in 2018, as part of the Farmers Union Enterprises Leadership Couples program. Together with couples from North Dakota, South Dakota, Montana and Wisconsin Farmers Unions, they went through leadership training, public speaking and advocacy work.

“We met a lot of wonderful people from the other states, and they deal with a lot of the same issues we do,” Bob said. “I wish we were still in it.”

The Washington trip for the couples was the 2018 National Farmers Union Legislative Fly-In, which Bob and Tracie remember fondly.

“All the training was overwhelming when we were doing it, but when you think about it later, it’s really beneficial,” Tracie said.

And how will the farm’s next generation become leaders? Theo got his start by attending MFU Leadership Camp in 2017, learning how to build cooperatives. Reese hasn’t gotten the chance to attend yet, but it’s likely he will too.

In the meantime, we’ll keep fighting for families like the Bergs to farm for many more generations to come, and to make it possible for everyone with farm dreams to live them out.
A monthly update from National Farmers Union

As we travel to Washington D.C. for the National Farmers Union Legislative Fly-In, our members are gearing up to talk to their elected representatives about the most pressing issues in rural America: trade, biofuels, the farm economy and corporate consolidation.

**Trump delays some tariffs, but China doesn’t let up**

The United States’ trade war with China is now more than a year old. There are no signs that it will let up any time soon. Despite ongoing negotiation efforts, President Donald Trump tweeted in early August that he intended to impose a 10 percent tariff on another $300 billion worth of Chinese goods on Sept. 1.

President Trump indicated that the decision was partly spurred by China’s failure to follow through on a promise to “buy agricultural product from the U.S. in large quantities.” Ironically, Beijing responded by halting all U.S. farm imports. Additionally, the country allowed its currency, the renminbi, fall to its lowest value in over a decade, which could give Chinese products an unfair advantage in international markets. Although President Trump later said he would delay tariffs on $160 billion of the $300 billion until Dec. 15, China has not resumed its imports of American agricultural products.

China has already significantly slowed its import of American agricultural products over the past year. According to the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) Economic Research Service (ERS), China imported just 8.7 million metric tons of soybeans from the United States between October and June. That’s 16.3 million metric tons – about $6.5 billion – less than they imported over the same period last year. This recent escalation will likely cost farmers even more in lost export markets and depressed prices.

Though NFU and MFU support efforts to address China’s unfair trade practices, NFU President Roger Johnson expressed frustration over the latest tariffs, saying that the administration’s strategy of “constant escalation and antagonism” has provoked worse behavior from China, at the expense of family farmers and ranchers.

“(Farmers) can’t withstand this kind of pressure much longer,” said Johnson. “If this administration really wants to protect family farm agriculture and address China’s misconduct, they will stop levying tariffs indiscriminately and will instead work in concert with our allies to force the change that is needed.”

**USDA releases MFP details**

Two months after announcing its intentions to provide a new package to assist family farmers and ranchers coping with trade damages, USDA released finalized details about the next round of the Market Facilitation Program (MFP). The agency has earmarked up to $14.5 billion for the program to be distributed in three separate tranches.

Eligible producers can submit applications for the first tranche through Dec. 6, 2019, and payments started going out last month. More details can be found in the FSA update on page 12.

NFU is grateful that farmers are receiving assistance. However, the organization has some concerns about the program.

Firstly, there are substantial disparities in payment rates from county to county, which could put some farmers at a financial disadvantage. On top of that, the convoluted structure of the package and complicated rollout has created significant confusion for farmers, who have already navigated a difficult spring planting season. And, as NFU President Roger Johnson said, the organization is disappointed that the plan doesn’t include “incentives to reduce production, which could help alleviate the chronic challenges of excess supply and depressed prices.”

In addition to MFP, there is more assistance on the way. As part of its trade assistance package, USDA awarded $100 million to 48 organizations for the development of new export markets through the Agricultural Trade Promotion Program. The agency also allocated $1.4 billion for commodity purchases through the Food Purchase and Distribution Program.

Agriculture Secretary Sonny Perdue announced that farmers affected by recent hurricanes, tornadoes, flooding, earthquakes, wildfires, volcanic eruptions, typhoons and snowstorms would start receiving assistance in August. Three billion dollars have been designated for crop loss, including on-farm stored commodities and crops that could not be planted due to environmental disasters, while another $558 million will help repair damage to farmlands and put in place methods for water conservation during severe droughts.

Additional funding has been set aside to help rural communities rebuild and prepare for future weather events. USDA apportioned $435 million for watershed protection and restoration and $150 million to provide health care, education, public safety and public services to rural communities affected by extreme weather events.

**Currency realignment would boost market outlook for U.S. agriculture**

According to the International Monetary Fund, the U.S. dollar is overvalued by 6 to 12 percent. As a result, American exports are more expensive than they should be and therefore less competitive than cheaper alternatives from other countries. This has larger implications for family farmers and ranchers – while other countries are less inclined to import American agricultural products, the issue of oversupply has gotten worse, which has consequently pushed down commodity prices.

The Competitive Dollar for Jobs and Prosperity Act (CDJPA), a bipartisan bill introduced by Sens. Tammy Baldwin (D-WI)
and Josh Hawley (R-MO), would work to realign the value of the dollar, making U.S. agricultural exports more competitive abroad. By applying a market access charge on foreign investments, the legislation would strategically slow the flood of foreign capital that is currently driving up the dollar’s value to noncompetitive levels. As the value of the dollar declines, U.S. agricultural exports will be more competitive, spurring demand for those goods in markets abroad. As the demand for those products increases, so in turn will the prices paid to U.S. farmers and ranchers. A one percent decline in the value of the dollar could lead to as much as a 2.5 percent increase in the prices of certain crops. NFU supports the bill, as it would help address the longstanding commodity surplus and low prices.

“American family farmers and ranchers know that the over-valued dollar has reduced the prices they are paid for their goods and has harmed the long-term prosperity of their communities,” said President Johnson. “The Competitive Dollar for Jobs and Prosperity Act is needed to restore fairness to international trade markets and to provide opportunity for economic prosperity for family farmers and all of rural America.”

**EPA approves 31 RFS waivers**

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency announced it had approved 31 of its 38 pending small refinery exemptions (SREs) for 2018. Recipients of the exemptions are not required to comply with renewable volume obligations (RVOs) under the Renewable Fuel Standard (RFS).

Though EPA has offered SREs for the past six years, the number of approved exemptions has skyrocketed recently. By comparison, the agency issued just 8 SREs in 2013. The effect on American-grown biofuels has been substantial – collectively, the waivers have already cut demand for biofuels by 2.6 billion gallons. The most recent installment of SREs is expected to decrease demand by another 1.43 billion gallons.

NFU was dismayed by the news. “It has been month after month of bad news,” said President Johnson, adding that the President’s inclination to “destroy the United States’ reputation as a reliable supplier of quality agricultural products” as well as the EPA’s efforts to undermine “our domestic market for renewable fuels” are “crippling our markets, creating enormous stress in the countryside and forcing more and more farmers into bankruptcy.”

The Washington Corner can be found at [www.nfu.org/corner](http://www.nfu.org/corner).
American farmers have been dealing with retaliatory tariffs and decades of non-tariff trade disruptions, which have curtailed U.S. exports to China and other nations. Trade damages from such retaliation and market distortions have impacted a host of U.S. commodities. High tariffs disrupt normal marketing patterns, raising costs by forcing commodities to find new markets.

Additionally, American goods shipped to China have been slowed from reaching market by strict or cumbersome entry procedures, which affect the quality and marketability of perishable crops. These boost marketing costs and unfairly affect our producers.

USDA has announced another round of Market Facilitation Program (MFP) payments to help offset income loss for farmers and ranchers. MFP signup at local Farm Service Agency (FSA) offices will run through Friday, Dec. 6, 2019.

Payments will be made by FSA under the authority of the Commodity Credit Corporation (CCC) Charter Act to producers of alfalfa hay, barley, canola, corn, crambe, dried beans, dry peas, extra-long staple cotton, flaxseed, lentils, long grain and medium grain rice, millet, mustard seed, oats, peanuts, rapeseed, rye, safflower, sesame seed, small and large chickpeas, sorghum, soybeans, sunflower seed, temperate japonica rice, triticale, upland cotton and wheat. MFP assistance for those non-specialty crops is based on a single county payment rate multiplied by a farm’s total plantings of MFP-eligible crops in aggregate in 2019. Those per-acre payments are not dependent on which of those crops are planted in 2019. A producer’s total payment-eligible plantings cannot exceed total 2018 plantings. County payment rates range from $15 to $150 per acre, depending on the impact of tariffs in that county.

Dairy producers who were in business as of June 1, 2019, will receive a per hundredweight payment on production history. Hog producers will receive a payment based on the number of live hogs owned on a day selected by the producer between April 1 and May 15, 2019.

MFP payments will also be made to producers of almonds, cranberries, cultivated ginseng, fresh grapes, fresh sweet cherries, hazelnuts, macadamia nuts, pecans, pistachios and walnuts. Each specialty crop will receive a payment based on 2019 acres of fruit or nut bearing plants, or in the case of ginseng, based on harvested acres in 2019.

Acres of non-specialty crops and cover crops must have been planted by Aug. 1, 2019 to be eligible for MFP payments.

The MFP rule and a related Notice of Funding Availability are published in the Federal Register. Per-acre non-specialty crop county payment rates, specialty crop payment rates and livestock payment rates are currently available on farmers.gov.

MFP payments will be made in up to three tranches, with the second and third tranches evaluated as market conditions dictate. If conditions warrant, the second and third tranches will be made in November and early January, respectively. The first tranche will be comprised of the higher of either 50 percent of a producer’s calculated payment or $15 per acre, which may reduce potential payments to be made in tranches two or three. USDA began making first tranche payments in mid-to-late August.

MFP payments are limited to a combined $250,000 for non-specialty crops per person or legal entity, and to a combined $250,000 for dairy and hog producers and a combined $250,000 for specialty crop producers. However, no applicant can receive more than $500,000. Eligible applicants must also have an average adjusted gross income (AGI) for tax years 2014, 2015 and 2016 of less than $900,000, or, 75 percent of the person’s or legal entity’s average AGI for tax years 2014, 2015 and 2016 must have been derived from farming and ranching. Applicants must also comply with the provisions of the Highly Erodible Land and Wetland Conservation regulations.

Producers who filed a prevented planting claim and planted an FSA-certified cover crop with the potential to be harvested qualify for a $15 per acre payment. Acres that were never planted in 2019 are not eligible for an MFP payment. In June, H.R. 2157, the Additional Supplemental Appropriations for Disaster Relief Act of 2019 was signed into law by President Trump, requiring a change to the first round of MFP assistance provided in 2018. Producers previously deemed ineligible for MFP in 2018 because they had an average AGI level higher than $900,000 may now be eligible for 2018 MFP benefits. Those producers must be able to verify 75 percent or more of their average AGI was derived from farming and ranching to qualify. This supplemental MFP signup period will run parallel to the 2019 MFP signup, through Dec. 6, 2019.

For more information on the MFP, visit www.farmers.gov/mfp or contact your local FSA office, which can be found at www.farmers.gov.
Two Minnesotans selected for NFU Beginning Farmer Institute

Building on over a century of agricultural education, National Farmers Union (NFU) today announced its ninth Beginning Farmer Institute (BFI) cohort. Thirteen beginning farmers and ranchers from across the United States will take part in the education program, which promotes the success of the next generation of agricultural professionals by providing mentorship, technical training, and leadership development.

Two of these farmers are from Minnesota: Carissa Elmstrand, who farms in North Branch, and Diana Weinhardt-Treangen, who farms in Dennison.

BFI was established in 2011 in response to many of the demographic challenges the agricultural industry is currently confronting. At the time, the median age for American farmers was 55.5 years; today, that number has crept up to 57.5. An estimated 33 percent of American farmland will transfer ownership in the next 15 years.

This scarcity of young and beginning farmers is not due to a lack of interest—rather, it is due to immense barriers to entry, including the difficulty of land acquisition, high upfront costs and a shortage of educational opportunities. As these hurdles have grown and multiplied over time, the training offered through BFI has become Farm and Ranch Business Health Assessment even more valuable. “We are facing a seismic shift in agriculture in the coming years,” said NFU President Roger Johnson. “Many of today’s farmers won’t be in the field in 10 or 15 years. When they retire, we need to ensure that there are plenty of qualified and well-equipped beginning farmers ready to take their place.”

Through sessions hosted in Washington, D.C., California and Georgia, the program’s hands-on training will address the many challenges beginning farmers may face in their careers, including business planning, accounting, insurance and labor. This is the first year the program will employ the Farm and Ranch Business Health Assessment, a tool authored by Poppy Davis and developed in 2017 through a Farm Service Agency funded project with California FarmLink and Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education (SARE). The 2019 update funded by Farm Credit Council follows two years of field testing in partnership with various training organizations around the country.

In addition to an aging population, agriculture has another demographic challenge: gender imbalance. Though it has improved gradually over time, women and nonbinary farmers continue to be underrepresented and underserved: in 2017, only 36 percent of producers identified as female. NFU, an early supporter of women’s suffrage, has been working to overcome this gender disparity for the duration of its 117-year existence. The organization has offered women-focused educational programming for many decades and continues to prioritize the specific needs and interests of women farmers.

Women have been active participants of the Beginning Farmer Institute, accounting for more than 61 percent of the 116 beginning farmers who have completed BFI and 8 of the 13 participants announced for this year.

NFU Foundation has continued to grow the BFI program through the generous support of CHS Foundation, Farm Aid, Farm Credit and Farmers Union Industries Foundation. More information about BFI is available at nfu.org/education/beginning-farmer-institute.
It has been an exciting and eventful summer. From the looks of it, it’s not slowing down anytime soon.

The camp season is concluded, and I’m happy to report that we had 280 campers at our week-long camp and about another 100 at our day camps. I also had an excellent camp staff that put in a lot of hard work and long days to make the camp a success. When you see them at the 78th Annual MFU Convention, be sure to say thanks.

**MFU Youth Advisory Council**

Every year, I am very lucky to work with some very impressive young leaders as part of the MFU Youth Advisory Council (YAC). At the Senior High Camp in early August, the 2020 YAC was elected by their camp peers. Through the year, the YAC participates in the state convention, plans the camp activities for the following year, bonds as a group and grow as leaders. This is the crowning camp achievement for many of the campers. The YAC is just another example of how the MFU youth camp program provides opportunities for leadership to blossom.

The 2020 YAC members are: Nicholas Foss, son of Debbie Foss, from St. Bonifacius; Trevor Rieck, son of Hope Rieck, from Litchfield; Daniel Guillemette, son of Shasta Paheln, from Red Lake Falls; Jacob Talty, son of Rebecca Talty, from Chaska; Lillyan Guillemette, daughter of Shasta Paheln, from Red Lake Falls; Sydney Sanders, daughter of Heather Weyker, from St. Paul; Josie Mercier, daughter of Linda Jenson, from Chaska; and Ella Pratt, daughter of Melissa Pratt, from St. Paul. I am very excited to work with the new YAC and see them grow through the program.

**In other news…**

Maydean Petersen, the long-time camp cook for our Southern camps, has informed me that this past summer will be her last summer as camp cook. Maydean has been the Southern camp cook since 1997. From a rough crunching of the numbers, we believe that Maydean has served over 700 camp meals!

Maydean received the Youth Education Award from MFU at the 71st Annual MFU Convention. She is the oldest of 15 children and started cooking and canning at age seven to help her family. Previously, she worked at Willmar Poultry and managed the 4-H Food Stand at the Kandiyohi County Fair.

Maydean is married to Calvin Petersen, and they live in Willmar. They have three grown children: Dwight (Debbra), Mark (Amanda) & VaLoris (Tony Anderson) and seven grandchildren.

I want to thank Maydean for her many years of service and hope she knows that she will be sorely missed.

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**New Leader Academy applications due Oct. 1**

The New Leader Academy will continue this fall with Class Two. This program seeks to identify leaders within MFU and give them the resources and training needed to become active leaders in their communities and in MFU. We want to ensure that rural and urban communities, farmers and consumers have leaders who understand the agricultural landscape. NLA Class One has had an excellent year getting to know each other and growing as leaders, and we are excited for the next round to join us.

The New Leader Academy Class Two will kick off at the 78th Annual MFU Convention in November and end in September 2020 with a trip to Washington, D.C. for the National Farmers Union Legislative Fly-in. Between those two events, the program will include three other sessions over the course of the year. Most sessions will take place over a weekend and cover the three sides of the Farmers Union triangle: Education, Cooperation and Legislation. These sessions will be held in different locations, urban and rural, so that participants can experience the diversity of our state.

MFU covers participants’ costs for lodging, materials, most meals and airfare to Washington. We believe the investment we make in our emerging leaders will pay back tenfold in the future, with participants engaging in food issues, leading their communities and helping sustain our local economies.

This program was created to help individuals develop and polish the skills they need to effectively create and sustain vibrant communities. It offers opportunities to compare and address local urban and rural issues, as well as lessons in advocacy that will help participants understand how the various levels of government form a community. The class will include approximately a dozen selected individuals from Minnesota. MFU is looking for participants that come from various backgrounds and ages. Participants can be farmers, Farmers Union Insurance Agents, cooperative leaders, local food and urban food advocates, entrepreneurs and anyone looking to get more involved in MFU and rural leadership.

The program does emphasize the history and role of Farmers Union in the topics addressed, and participants must become MFU members before the start of the kickoff session in November, if they aren’t already members.

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**How to apply for the New Leader Academy**

Interested in applying? Great!
You can apply right on our website at [www.mfu.org/new-leader-academy](http://www.mfu.org/new-leader-academy).
The application deadline is Oct. 1.

**Application Guidelines**

- There is no age limit for participation; however, participants must be 21 years or older to apply and be selected.
- Applicants should be interested in pursuing leadership roles within Minnesota Farmers Union.
- Spouses are encouraged to participate but must apply separately.
- Babies and children may not attend any New Leader Academy activities.

Interested or have questions? Contact MFU Education Director Glen Schmidt at glen@mfu.org or (651) 288-4066.
Sept. 8-11 • National Farmers Union Legislative Fly-In • Washington, D.C.

Oct. 1 • New Leader Academy application deadline

Upcoming County Conventions

Sept. 12: Swift & Kandiyohi Counties • 6 p.m.
• Kerkhoven Civic Center, 208 10th St., Kerkhoven • FFI: Swift County President Jim Falk at (320) 875-4341 or Kandiyohi County President Donnel Williamson at (320) 220-3100

Sept. 15: Big Stone & Traverse Counties • 1 p.m.
• Camp for Christ, 37897 State Hwy. 7, Ortonville • FFI: Big Stone County President Peter Schwagerl at (320) 304-0679

Sept. 15: Lac Qui Parle County • 5 p.m.
• Dawson Senior Center, 735 6th St., Dawson • FFI: Lac Qui Parle County Secretary Deb Breberg at (320) 769-2088

Sept. 15: Yellow Medicine, Lyon & Lincoln Counties • 6 p.m.
• Prairie’s Edge Casino, 5616 Prairie’s Edge Lane, Granite Falls • FFI: Yellow Medicine County President Tim Velde at (507) 828-5343 or Lyon County President Alan Benz at (507) 530-6985

Sept. 16: West Ottertail, East Ottertail & Wilkin Counties • 11:30 a.m.
• Pizza Ranch, 604 Frontier Dr., Fergus Falls • FFI: West Ottertail County President Dave Johnson at (218) 736-7734, East Ottertail County President Dean Lubitz at (218) 346-4274, Wilkin County President Milan Drewlow at (218) 643-2813

Sept. 16: Crow Wing & Cass Counties • 12 p.m.
• Pizza Ranch, 14643 Edgewood Dr., Baxter • FFI: Crow Wing County President Steven Koering at (218) 251-8650 or Cass County President Gary Sampson at (218) 296-1154

Sept. 16: Pope, Douglas & Grant Counties • 5:30 p.m.
• Lakeside Steak & Chop House, 180 Lakeshore Dr. N, Glenwood • FFI: Pope County President Vernon Pooch at (320) 815-8360; Douglas County President David Christianson at (952) 484-0839; Grant County President Bob Klahsen at (320) 491-2431

Sept. 16: Aitkin County • 7 p.m.
• Palisade Fire Hall, 48052 Nature Ave., Palisade • FFI: Aitkin County President Mark Vallort at (218) 927-2215 or Secretary John Grimso at (218) 845-2913

Sept. 16: Sibley & McLeod Counties • 7 p.m.
• Prairie House, 20 6th St., Gaylord • FFI: Sibley County President Lowell Grams or McLeod County President Matt Nelson

Sept. 17: Polk County • 9 a.m.
• Farmers Union Park at Lake Sarah, Erskine • FFI: Polk County President Judy Moen at (218) 289-2868

Sept. 17: Brown County • 7 p.m.
• Chubby’s Bar & Grill, 101 Broadway St., Hanska • FFI: Brown County President Jerome Graff at (507) 723-4791

Sept. 18: Carver County • 12 p.m.
• Luce Line Lodge, 305 Lewis Ave. S, Watertown • FFI: Carver County President Scott Hoese at (952) 693-6645

Sept. 18: Morrison County • 12:30 p.m.
• Royal Cafe, 120 W Broadway, Little Falls • FFI: Morrison County President Lee Johnston at (320) 630-6111

Sept. 18: Todd County • 7 p.m.
• Thunder Lodge Sports Bar & Supper Club, 22056 U.S. Hwy. 71, Long Prairie • FFI: Todd County President Alan Perish at (320) 760-2516

Sept. 20: Carlton County • 9:30 a.m.
• location TBD, Wrenshall • FFI: Carlton County President Mark Thell at (218) 851-7718

Sept. 21: Chippewa County • 5 p.m.
• Pastures ‘a’ Plenty Farm, 4077 110th Ave. NE, Clara City • FFI: Chippewa County President Josh VanDerPol at (320) 905-4348

Sept. 23: Chisago & Isanti Counties • 9:00 a.m.
• location TBD • FFI: Chisago County President Alan Teich at (320) 629-2233 or Isanti County President Bruce Bloomgren at (763) 689-2319

Sept. 25: Pine County • 1 p.m.
• American Legion, 525 Main St. N, Pine City • FFI: Pine County President Kay Hills at (715) 635-9521

Sept. 25: Kittson County • 6 p.m.
• Last Chance Trading Post, 104 2nd St. SE, Hallock • FFI: MFU Outreach Representative Ken Pazdernik at (218) 206-4499

Sept. 26: Benton County • 7 p.m.
• Coyote Moon Grille, 480 55th Ave. SE, St. Cloud • FFI: Benton County President Carol Anderson at (320) 492-1663

The basis of representation at the Minnesota Farmers Union state convention, as provided by the constitution and bylaws, shall be one delegate from each local union who will represent as many as ten regular dues-paying members and one additional delegate who will represent each additional ten dues-paying members or a major fraction thereof. Credentials blanks will be mailed to county presidents and should be returned prior to the convention to: Minnesota Farmers Union, 305 Roselawn Ave. E, Ste. 200, St. Paul, MN 55117. If county or local units are unable to submit credentials in advance, they must be brought to the convention by the delegate and submitted at the time of registration.

Members of unchartered, at-large membership within a county are eligible to become delegates to the state convention provided they are elected at a special meeting conducted for the specific purpose of delegate election. At-large delegates will represent their counties by the same manner and terms as regular local delegates. To qualify, the delegate must be in good standing with Farmers Union.

Gary Wertish • Anne Schwagerl
President • Secretary

Minnesota Farmers Union  Standing for Agriculture, Working for Farmers 15
Standing for Agriculture,
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BIG IRON XXXIX

Visit Farmers Union Insurance Agents and Staff at the Big Iron Farm Show at the Red River Valley Fairgrounds, West Fargo, September 10-12. Our booth is located in Building K. Come for Field Demonstrations, Seminars on Land Value and Market Outlook, Health Screenings, Exhibitors, a MN and ND FFA Foundation Silent Auction, and more!

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