Food from the Farm

Pesto Zucchini Noodles
Manager Brian Nanoff, Truce Juice in partnership with Big River Farms via Shared Ground Cooperative

It’s that time of year when many of us are up to our ears in zucchini. This simple zucchini noodle recipe uses a bunch at once, which feels satisfying. No need for fancy equipment; there are some very inexpensive, hand-held spiralizers on the market. With a few hand cranks, you’ll have a pile of zoodles in minutes.

Yield: 5 servings
5 cups spiralized zucchini (or yellow summer squash)
1 cup red bell pepper, chopped
1-1/2 cups pepita pesto (recipe follows)
toasted pepitas, crushed (for garnish)

For pepita pesto:
3/4 cup pepitas, toasted
6 cups loosely packed fresh spinach
1 cup loosely packed basil leaves
1-1/2 tablespoons olive oil
1 tablespoon lemon juice
1 teaspoon garlic, minced
1 teaspoon black pepper
1 teaspoon salt

Place all ingredients for pesto in a food processor and pulse for 1–2 minutes, scraping the sides as needed.

Mix “noodles” well with pesto and bell pepper, garnish with crushed pepitas. Serve cold.
President’s Message

Pop-up restaurant to feature Minnesota State Fair favorites

Like millions of Minnesotans, I am missing the State Fair very much. Usually at this time of year, the staff and I would be busy making coffee, contacting media, training Farmers Union Coffee Shop staff and building excitement for the Coffee Shop, Minnesota Cooks Day, 4-H and FFA livestock shows and the Agrilympics.

Unfortunately, COVID-19 continues to spread, and holding large events is still not possible. It’s also a difficult time for the restaurant industry and of course the farmers who do business with restaurants. As you may remember, we had planned to open our own restaurant this year in a joint venture with Birchwood Café, the same folks we work with on our State Fair foods. While it’s not what we originally planned, we’re still very excited to open a pop-up restaurant in the space that was formerly Spoonriver, tentatively scheduled for Thursday, August 20. The pop-up will be called F + B, for Farmers Union and Birchwood, and featured locally sourced ingredients like what we do at the State Fair.

A celebration of farm-community connections, the initial menu at F + B will feature Minnesota State Fair Farmers Union Coffee Shop favorites alongside Birchwood seasonal specialties. And yes, that includes the well-loved Heirloom Tomato + Sweet Corn BLT, Blueberry Key Lime Pie, Maple Cream Nitro Cold Press and Lavender Lemonade. We will also offer food inspired by former Spoonriver owner Brenda Langton, a pioneer of local foods in her own right. As the season changes, so too will the menu and inspirations.

The menu will be available for walk-up, take-out and curbside pickup, as well a limited amount of patio seating. There are picnic site options nearby, with the Stone Arch Bridge, Mill City Park and the Guthrie plaza. It’s also close to public transportation and the bike trails along the Mississippi River. It’s a privilege to have our restaurant in downtown Minneapolis and connect consumers with farmers through good food. What’s most important to us with this endeavor is supporting farmers, like in everything we do.

The F + B pop-up is open for dinner Thursday-Sunday from 4-8 p.m., with brunch available on weekends and lunch hours and delivery to be added soon. Days of service and hours may expand. The restaurant is located at 750 South 2nd Street, Minneapolis.

Farmfest, Fly-In go virtual

Another thing we missed this month is Farmfest. Instead of spending three days on the grounds near Redwood Falls, the event organizers arranged virtual panels on farm safety and the state of the agricultural economy, along with the anticipated Congressional and Senate candidate debates. The MFU staff and I tuned into the debates from the office – it was good to hear from the candidates about where they stand on issues connected to farming and rural Minnesota.

It is also a good reminder to order your absentee ballot for the November 3 general election if you have not and live in a place that does not already use mail-only ballots, as some townships in Minnesota do. Request your ballot at mnvotes.org. While Minnesota has waived the witness signature requirement for mail ballots, as well as established that ballots are valid as long as they are postmarked on or before Election Day, it’s recommended that you send your ballot in well ahead of time so you can be sure it’ll be counted. Ballots also must be received by your county the day before the county canvass, which may be on the second or third day following the election.

Justifiably, the National Farmers Union Fall Legislative Fly-In has also been moved to a virtual format. With federal buildings closed to the public, there was really no other option. But we still must engage with our elected officials so they can hear how real family farmers are affected by the pandemic. We plan to meet virtually with our Minnesota delegation, and those meetings are open to all members. The virtual format allows room for more people to participate, so we strongly encourage you to sign up. The more farmers our elected officials can hear from, the better. While we won’t know

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State Fair favorites available at F + B pop-up restaurant: Heirloom Tomato & Sweet Corn BLT with an egg, Lavender Lemonade and Blueberry Key Lime Pie
Whether it's in a large space outdoors or a virtual meeting, we can help! Schedule online at mfu.org/county-convention-scheduling.

You can also send your county convention information to: countyconventions@mfu.org or call Membership Coordinator Diana Rico at (651) 288-4064.

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, 2020.
MDA expands options for contacting Minnesota Farm & Rural Helpline

The Minnesota Department of Agriculture (MDA) is offering two new ways that farmers and others involved in agriculture can contact the Minnesota Farm & Rural Helpline: text and email.

“We want to make it as easy as possible for our farmers to get the help they need when they need it,” said Agriculture Commissioner Thom Petersen. “COVID-19 has come on top of several years of high costs, low prices and bad weather for farmers. We know chronic stress takes a toll on people and can really affect the way they cope with challenging situations.”

The confidential service, available 24/7, connects Minnesota farmers and others in the agricultural community to counselors who can serve as a sounding board, provide emotional support, link callers with a rural mental health specialist or help them find information about financial and legal resources. Users are welcome to remain anonymous.

Contact options now include:
- Phone (toll free): (833) 600-2670
- Text: FARMSTRESS to 898211
- Email: farmstress@state.mn.us

The MDA also encourages people who are worried about family or friends and aren’t sure how to help to use this service. The MDA’s companion Coping with Farm and Rural Stress in Minnesota website at www.minnesotafarmstress.com received 4,600 visits in 2019 and has already seen more than 5,000 in the first six months of 2020.

I never seem to get used to the pace at which the summer season seems to speed through life. Maybe it’s the anticipation after a seemingly never-ending cold season, or the fact that on the farm, so much is packed into a small window. Not to mention trying to have a work/family balance can be incredibly difficult.

It’s not just today’s farmers that are making this a focal point. Growing up, my parents tried to make sure they got off the farm occasionally in the summer months, but maybe that was because they got rid of the cows when I was six and it seemed as if they had a tremendous amount of extra time! I think it’s important that we make time for our kids, grandkids and especially our spouses this time of year. It’s great for our mental health, especially when high stress is around the corner.

Farmers are often thought of as stuck in their ways, more precisely that older farm families have a tough time with change. But I would like to challenge that thought. I feel like I have a decent perspective on the issue, having spent time traveling the state with MFU. Our older generation is quite good at handling change. I can’t tell you how many farms I’ve stopped by where I end up talking about the same issues that have plagued farmers for years, and, meanwhile, one of the older generation pulls up on an ATV. They stop, say hi, pull out their smartphone, check the markets and ask which state of the art tractor they need to jump in and what angle they want the field worked. When I drive away it makes me tear up, because the things we take for granted every day were at one point a luxury. The older generation can use these new skills to help their upcoming generation continue the farm’s legacy.

In my own family, we have kids ranging from one starting the eighth grade to another entering the world January 10. We know the challenges that young families are facing with the beginning of the 2020 school year. Parents are losing their minds with the short-term change in how we deliver education to our kids. With all the technology we have, this is a golden opportunity to show we can make a change and benefit our own families. Our predecessors on the farm have been adapting to change for centuries, and I’m confident we can too.
related to the pandemic. These powers are, for example, what allowed the Governor to issue his current Stay Safe MN executive orders, expedite procurement of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE), exempt hours of service requirements for livestock haulers and limit landlords’ ability to evict tenants.

Last month, prospects of a deal on bonding seemed close at hand, after Walz offered to cede some of his powers in exchange for support of a bonding package negotiated between the GOP-controlled Senate and DFL-controlled House. House Capital Investment Committee Chair Mary Murphy (DFL-Hermantown) introduced a bill that reflected this compromise. Relevant to MFU, the bill made needed invested in rural transportation infrastructure, funded the meat processing facility and training center at the Northeast Regional Corrections Center (NERCC) and a poultry processing project in south central Minnesota, included $23 million in flood mitigation and paid for needed improvements to the laboratory at the Minnesota Department of Agriculture (MDA).

Then, reflecting more progress on a global deal, a supplemental tax relief package that included conformity with Section 179, which MFU supports, was amended onto the bonding bill. This priority was shared by House Tax Chair Paul Marquart (DFL-Dilworth), Senate Tax Chair Roger Chamberlain (R-Lino Lakes) and others who understand that this could bring needed tax relief to many farmers and small business. However, the House minority maintained that they were not adequately included in negotiations and that the Governor’s concessions weren’t meaningful enough to warrant support, so the Legislature again adjourned without passing a bonding bill.

On the federal level, lawmakers continue to negotiate another round of stimulus. Agriculture priorities being negotiated include further direct relief for farmers, investments in meat processing and support for biofuels infrastructure.

On Monday, July 27, the U.S. Senate released their proposal for the next round of COVID relief dubbed the Health, Economic Assistance, Liability Protection and Schools (HEALS) Act. Out of the approximately $1 trillion provided by the proposal, $23.5 billion is earmarked for agriculture. The vast majority of this ($20.457 billion) is allocated to the Secretary of Agriculture to “prevent, prepare for and respond to coronavirus by providing support for agricultural producers, growers, and processors impacted by coronavirus.” Other relevant provisions in the HEALS Act would authorize another round of $1,200 stimulus checks, reduce federal unemployment benefits and extend the Paycheck Protection Program (PPP).

In response to the Senate package, NFU president Rob Larew expressed appreciation for the additional support provided by the HEALS Act but urged “congressional oversight of and greater transparency about how and to whom assistance is offered.” He also requested
Below are example resolutions from 2019 and potential topics for resolutions or discussion at your county conventions in 2020. We encourage you to bring forward resolutions on any topics you feel are important. If you have any questions, or need help crafting resolutions, don’t hesitate to contact Stu at stu@mfu.org or (320) 232-3047.

Sample Resolutions – here are three examples of resolutions that were passed by counties and incorporated into MFU’s policy last year – in case they are helpful when drafting yours:

- “We support better funded farm to school programs and the growing of the local foods movement.” (Swift County)
- “We support development of a meat cutting school in the state and ongoing support for it.” (Chippewa County)
- “Wabasha County FU proposes legislation which allows MN to negotiate with pharmaceutical companies for lower prices.” (Wabasha County)

Potential Topics – while there are many issues discussed at county conventions, there are some that MFU staff hear a lot about from policy makers and others in St. Paul and Washington, D.C. Here are some of these topics, which could inspire ideas for resolutions and updates to MFU policy:

- Health care – Do you have thoughts on how legislators should change our health care system to make sure it works for farmers and others in rural Minnesota?
- Meat processing – MDA has made meat processing a top priority, recognizing the shortage across the state. What can policymakers do to increase capacity at small and mid-sized meat processors and increase opportunities for livestock farmers?
- Broadband – Do you have thoughts on how to ensure that every household is linked up to quality internet? How to hold internet companies accountable for serving homes to the last mile?
- Trade – Do you support or oppose the current state of trade negotiations with China, USMCA, etc.? What are your thoughts on trade more generally? What about Country of Origin Labeling (COOL)?
- Local foods – What are the barriers to farmers selling local foods direct to the consumer? What about to large purchasers (i.e. schools)? Do you have ideas about how to create new markets?
- Emerging farmers – How can policymakers help new farmers get on the land? And how can we help ‘emerging’ farmers – including people who are Black, Indigenous, people of color (BIPOC), LGBTQ women, veterans, people with disabilities and others – find success in agriculture?
- Racial equity – How can MFU help make agriculture and our rural communities more welcoming, safe and just for BIPOC farmers and others?
- Climate change – What policies could help farmers lead on addressing climate change? What should policymakers do to protect our food system from the effects of climate change (i.e. excess rainfall)?
- Renewable energy – Do you have thoughts about biofuel production or wind and solar development? RFS waivers? How should farmers be involved in a transition to renewable energy?
- Farm income – Broadly, are there state or national policies that can help farmers get fair prices?
- Market competition – Do you have thoughts on how to ensure market competition in agriculture?
- Right to repair – Digital fair repair legislation would compel manufacturers – including those of farm equipment – to provide the needed tools, parts, diagnostic tools and manuals to repair digital equipment at cost. Do you have thoughts on Right to Repair as it relates to farm equipment?
- Transportation – Do you have thoughts on how the state should repair rural roads and bridges?

Again, these are just a few issues to think about at county conventions. MFU is grateful for the hundreds of resolutions received from members every year that form our policy. ▲

Legislative Update (continued)

that they include a boost to SNAP benefits, on which more families are relying amid the global pandemic.

More than two months ago, the U.S. House passed their relief proposal, the Health and Economic Recovery Omnibus Emergency Solutions (HEROES) Act. The $3 trillion aid package provides relief across the economy and includes significant support for agriculture, though it falls short of the systemic reforms needed to ensure that our food system is fair for family farmers and resilient. The House’s bill provides approximately $33 billion worth of support for agriculture. Among these provisions, the bill invests another $16.5 billion in direct support for farmers, strengthens mental health resources, expands nutrition assistance and bolsters the struggling biofuels industry.

If the House and Senate can reach a compromise position, this package would follow the last major stimulus package – the approximately $1.8 trillion CARES Act – which was passed in March. Meanwhile, MFU Swift County President Jim Falk testified remotely before a subcommittee of the U.S. House Agriculture Committee on July 30. He shared information about his family’s investments in small-scale, on-farm wind and solar projects and what it’s meant for his operation.

“All told, on-farm renewable energy and biofuels production are vital tools for U.S. farmers and ranchers and their businesses as they work toward economic and environmental sustainability and combat climate change,” Jim shared in his remarks. “Our farm and business are just one example of that.” Thanks Jim for sharing your story with lawmakers – it makes a difference when they can hear from real family farmers!

If you have any questions or concerns about MFU’s legislative work, please don’t hesitate to connect with me at (320) 232-3047 or stu@mfu.org. ▲
USDA expands CFAP
As part of its efforts to support family farmers and ranchers coping with pandemic-related supply chain disruptions and price declines, the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) has distributed more than $5.8 billion worth of direct payments through the Coronavirus Food Assistance Program (CFAP) as of mid-July. Another $10 billion is available, and farmers can apply for assistance through Aug. 28.

Most of the funding has been allocated to growers of just a handful of commodities. Cattle producers have received $2.6 billion, or upwards of half of the total, while dairy farmers have claimed a fifth at $1.2 billion. Corn growers were a close third, with $1.1 billion. All other commodities trail far behind, with hogs coming in as the fourth highest commodity at $375 million, followed by soybeans, cotton, almonds, sheep, strawberries and wheat. In all, specialty crops received just 2.7% of the program’s funding.

Midwestern states collected the most money, with Iowa leading the pack at $618 billion, and Alaska received the least at just $56,000.

Initially, specialty crops eligible for assistance was limited to certain produce, nuts, beans and mushrooms. Responding to feedback from industry groups and legislators, USDA has extended the program to growers of 42 other fruits, vegetables, herbs, roots and commodities who have experienced at least a 5% drop in prices or are facing significant additional marketing costs. Additionally, the agency corrected payment rates for several commodities and expanded payment eligibility for seven others, including apples, blueberries, garlic, potatoes and raspberries.

While National Farmers Union (NFU) was pleased that USDA amended the program to better assist those affected by the pandemic, there are still many producers who have been excluded from CFAP. Those who operate small farms, agritourism businesses or farms that sell directly to consumers or local markets have often found that they do not qualify for payments. Additionally, the payment calculation only considers damages incurred before April 15, 2020, and does not fully account for additional financial loss from value-added sales. To ensure that assistance is both being distributed fairly and equitably, as well as reaching all family farmers and ranchers who need it, NFU is urging Congress to address these eligibility issues in the next stimulus package.

House makes progress on next year’s funding bill
In July, the House Appropriations Committee approved a bill that would set spending levels for agriculture, rural development, the Food and Drug Administration and other related agencies and programs for fiscal year (FY) 2021.

The bill authorizes approximately $24 billion in discretionary spending, a two percent increase over 2020’s spending levels. NFU is pleased with many of the bill’s provisions, including a significant boost in funding for the expansion of rural broadband; strong support for programs that help develop value-added products and local agriculture markets; and a modest budget increase for public agriculture research and conservation programs. The organization was similarly pleased that the package fully funds the Farm and Ranch Stress Assistance Network (FRSAN), which provides grants for mental health services for agricultural professionals.

In addition to setting spending for agricultural programs, the bill also funds the majority of the nutrition safety net, such as the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) and child nutrition programs, and includes language that would affect the administration of such programs. Most notably, it would block a rule that unnecessarily toughens work requirements for able-bodied adults without dependents who receive SNAP, causing an estimated 755,000 to lose benefits.

NFU strongly opposed this measure when it was first introduced and continues to oppose it, particularly given the high rates of unemployment and food insecurity our nation is currently experiencing.
of finalizing the rule, EPA had requested information on octane levels and how they could be increased in accordance with the Clean Air Act, but ultimately failed to address these concerns. In doing so, EPA downplayed the harm from reduced emission standards, ignored the efficiency and health benefits of higher ethanol blends, and failed to realize the promise of increased octane in gasoline—all of which contributed to the coalition’s decision to challenge the rule.

“There is strong evidence that ethanol can improve fuel efficiency and reduce greenhouse gas emissions, all while providing new markets for farmers and bolstering rural economies,” said NFU President Rob Larew. “Given their benefits, NFU advocated a clear path to adoption of mid-level ethanol blends in our earlier comments—which EPA all but ignored.”

House releases climate action plan

In response to the mounting challenges caused by a rapidly changing climate, the House Select Committee on the Climate Crisis published a report outlining an economy-wide blueprint to both mitigate the threat of climate change and adapt to its effects.

The plan recognizes not only the threat climate change presents to agriculture, but also the role that family farmers and ranchers must play in the solution. Specifically, it calls for providing financial and technical support for on-farm conservation practices that sequester carbon and build resilience to extreme weather events; promoting crop and livestock management practices and technologies that reduce greenhouse gas emissions; supporting on-farm renewable energy production and efficiency; protecting farmland from development; and reducing food waste and the distance between food production and consumption.

“The Washington Corner can always be found at nfu.org/corner.”

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FARMERS UNION AGENCY DONATIONS BENEFIT LOCAL NON-PROFITS AFFECTED BY COVID-19

Clockwise from top left: Goodhue Agent Ali Peters donated her check to Faith in Action, Red Wing, to provide transportation for healthcare, respite care, caregiver support group administration, and book delivery. Ivanhoe & Canby Agent Mike Panka donated his funds to the United Way of SW MN in Marshall. Ada Agent Rod Mathsen donated funds to the Valley Food Shelf benefitting Norman County and the surrounding areas. Crystal Munter, Activities Director at First Care Medical Services (Essentia Health), Fosston, received Fosston Agent Barb Sweep’s donation to help residents of the nursing home with activities.

Our Agents and Staff are so proud to be involved in our communities! We’ll be featuring further donations in future editions of the MN Ag.

We are Trusted. Local. Committed.
I would like to bring two programs to your attention. The deadline for the Coronavirus Food Assistance Program (CFAP) is Aug. 28. Livestock, dairy, wool, specialty and non-specialty crops are eligible. If the markets for commodities you raise have been affected by the coronavirus, you'll want to read the information below. The Second program to bring to your attention is the Wildfire, Hurricane Indemnity Program Plus (WHIP+). If you suffered crop losses or reduced yields in either 2018 or 2019 due to natural disasters such as flood, tornadoes or excessive moisture you will want to consider WHIP+.

**CFAP deadline is Aug. 28**

Was your operation affected by the coronavirus pandemic? Apply for CFAP today. USDA’s Farm Service Agency (FSA) is accepting applications through Aug. 28, 2020, which helps offset price declines and additional marketing costs because of the coronavirus pandemic. I know many of you have applied for CFAP already, but numbers indicate that some who are eligible have not. If you’re still unsure about CFAP and your operation, I encourage you to take five minutes today to visit farmers.gov/cfap or call your county FSA office to learn about eligibility and options to apply. Whether you’ve worked with FSA for years or this will be a first, we’re here to help you every step of the way.

**Ongoing WHIP+ Signup**

Did you suffer crop losses in either 2018 or 2019 due to floods, excessive moisture or tornadoes? You may have heard of WHIP+, but did you know that the Wildfire and Hurricane Indemnity Program Plus (WHIP+) provides disaster payments to producers to offset eligible losses due to qualifying floods, excessive moisture and tornadoes in Minnesota in either 2018 or 2019? USDA has started making payments through the Wildfire and Hurricane Indemnity Program – Plus (WHIP+) to agricultural producers who suffered eligible losses because of drought or excess moisture in 2018 and 2019. Signup for these causes of loss opened March 23, and producers who suffered losses from drought (in counties designated D3 or above), excess moisture, hurricanes, floods, tornadoes, typhoons, volcanic activity, snowstorms or wildfires can still apply for assistance through WHIP+.

To be eligible for WHIP+, producers must have suffered losses of certain crops, trees, bushes or vines in counties with a Presidential Emergency Disaster Declaration or a Secretarial Disaster Designation (primary counties only) for qualifying natural disaster events that occurred in calendar years 2018 or 2019. Also, losses located in a county not designated by the Secretary as a primary county may be eligible if a producer provides documentation showing that the loss was due to a qualifying natural disaster event.

USDA Service Centers, including FSA county offices, are open for business by appointment, and field work will continue with appropriate social distancing. While program delivery staff will continue to come into the office, they will be working with producers by phone and using online tools whenever possible. All Service Center visitors wishing to conduct business with the FSA, Natural Resources Conservation Service or any other Service Center agency are required to call their Service Center to schedule a phone appointment.

More information on Service Centers can be found at farmers.gov/coronavirus, and more information on WHIP+ can be found at farmers.gov/recover/whip-plus.

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**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 Membership Coordinator Diana Rico at diana@mfu.org or (651) 288-4064.

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DAN MAHONEY, PUBLIC AFFAIRS AND OUTREACH COORDINATOR, MINN. FSA
daniel.mahoney@mn.usda.gov

MFU offers FREE agritourism sign to members
In June, MFU decided not to hold in-person summer camps this year to support the well-being and safety of our campers and staff. Fortunately, the camp staff and I were able to turn our attention to planning the first MFU online camp. When campers registered for the online camp, they were presented with a variety of lessons and activities from which to select, creating a personalized experience based on their interests. These options included a trip around the globe (from the comfort of their computer), origami-making, a mental wellness lesson, lessons on co-ops and MFU history, a comic-con theme night and much more. All required materials were shipped directly to the campers, so there was no need to worry about picking anything up from a store! None of this would have been possible without the excellent camp staff that put in a lot of hard work and long days to make the camp fun, engaging and as true to the MFU camp experience as possible.

During the online camp, the 2021 Youth Advisory Council (YAC) was also elected. Every year I get the opportunity to collaborate with some very impressive young leaders as part of the MFU YAC. The council consists of campers, elected by their peers at MFU Senior High camp to help plan camp and represent their fellow MFU youth at events throughout the year. Being elected to serve on YAC is the crowning camp achievement for many campers and is another example of how the MFU youth camp program provides opportunities for leadership to grow.

The 2021 YAC members are:

I am very excited to work with the new YAC and see them grow through the program.
Ryan Pesch, farmer, MFU member and MANNA founder

founding board member and the treasurer of the MANNA Food Cooperative in Detroit Lakes, a beloved, intimate co-op poised for growth and actively seeking investors for a capital campaign to relocate the co-op to downtown Detroit Lakes.

The central mission at MANNA Food Co-op revolves around building community, fostering health and wellness, building a sustainable food system and supporting the local economy. The small co-op already works with dozens of local farmers to create access to healthy food for everyone. After three years in business and a burgeoning membership, they are ready to expand.

Ryan has a Master’s Degree in Urban and Regional Planning from the University of Minnesota’s Humphrey School of Public Affairs. As an Extension Educator with UMN, he works with communities and organizations on issues of economic development tourism, and business development. All this experience reinforces what he intuitively knows to be true: Grocery stores revive downtown Main Streets and are central to building healthy communities.

“Downtowns are the center of a community,” Ryan said. “For many years, we turned our backs on main streets and built a bunch of strip malls on the edges of town, but that turned out to be unsatisfying. Now community psychology is trending toward rediscovering riverfronts and downtowns – both nationally and here in Detroit Lakes. So how do we reimagine and redevelop our downtowns?

“The co-op is based on the notion that we don’t just sell groceries – we’re cooperative. It’s about producers and consumers building something better together. Where else would be better than in the heart of a community? That feels like where a heartfelt business should be.”

Ryan frames the capital campaign as an opportunity for people to invest in their local economies.

“This pandemic seems to have woken people up to the importance of local independent businesses, and – we hope – local investments,” he said. “Maybe now is the time to put our dollars into Main Street businesses.”

The folks at MANNA hope to raise a minimum of $200,000 to successfully accomplish their mission, ultimately striving for $400,000. Supporters can help in three ways: buying preferred shares, giving a tax-deductible contribution or becoming a member.

To learn more and contribute to the capital campaign to bring MANNA downtown, visit: mannafoodcoop.com/capital.
COVID-19 has shown how important and precarious food access can be, and how essential it is to have a strong local food system. Unfortunately, Minnesota farmers and food producers who rely on sales to restaurants, schools, corporate campuses, farmers markets and colleges face severely decreased access to these markets, resulting in major financial losses. Many beloved local foods restaurants have gone out of business entirely.

MFU stepped up early on during the Stay-at-Home order by publishing the Buying Local While Social Distancing list on the Minnesota Cooks website. This list is still posted there, containing a list of direct-market farmers who offer consumers ways to safely purchase their products. Soon thereafter, we joined the Local Food is Essential (LFIE) campaign, a collaboration of several groups including The Good Acre, Mill City Farmers Market, Lakewinds Food Co-op, Minnesota Grown, Driftless Grown, Renewing the Countryside and more.

The Minnesota Cooks team has been representing us in the coalition. This campaign was spurred out of a recognition of services, workers and industries deemed “essential” by Governor Walz in the COVID-19 State of workers and industries deemed “essential” by Emergency declaration. We saw the need to elevate local food system workers – farmers, farm workers, food service providers, restaurateurs – who are always essential, especially now.

LFIE’s main call-to-action is for people to take the Eat Local Pledge. This signifies your commitment to buying at least one locally grown item each time you go grocery shopping. This helps farmers earn a fair price, decreases greenhouse gas emissions from shipping food and invests in your local communities. We also encourage options such joining a local community-supported agriculture (CSA) program, buying directly from a farmer in other ways and shopping at farmers’ markets. Through each of these ways of buying local, consumers can get to know who’s producing their food that we all need to live and strengthen a sustainable supply chain for everyone. Since the campaign launched in mid-July, LFIE has launched a merchandise store, where you can purchase shirts and lawn signs after taking the pledge.

We are committed to upholding values that foster equity in our food system, where Black, Indigenous and People of Color (BIPOC) and all marginalized communities can thrive. COVID-19 has had a disproportionate effect on BIPOC, especially since many of them are essential frontline workers who have not been able to physically distance from others.

Learn more, take the pledge and get your lawn sign at localfoodisessential.org.
Farmer survey: Lack of local meat processing is limiting farm businesses, underscoring need for sustained investment

A survey of livestock producers from this year shows that Minnesota has a growing local livestock industry, but a persistent challenge for small and mid-sized producers is limited small-scale meat and poultry processing. A group of organizations including MFU, Sustainable Farming Association of Minnesota (SFA) and Land Stewardship Project (LSP) sent the survey to members in mid-May to learn about how livestock producers were affected by COVID-19 and plant closures. Survey results, largely from farmers who ‘direct market’ their livestock to consumers, restaurants and food cooperatives, confirm what ag groups and others have known for a long time: Family farmers are experiencing a shortage of local livestock processing, made worse by COVID-19 plant closures, and this is limiting their farm businesses. The survey was conducted May 15-26 and was sent to participating groups’ members. Well over half of the 111 survey respondents reported that there were too few livestock processing operations to meet farmers’ needs for local meat processing, while only 17% reported that they did have adequate access. Some 64% said even before the pandemic, processing was inadequate for their business. And a majority of respondents, 54%, indicated that they would raise more livestock if there was more processing available.

“We were lucky to have already booked fall appointments but due to soaring demand for processing, I’m already booked for fall 2021 which would have been unthinkable in year’s past,” said one respondent. The survey also revealed that 65% of respondents have seen an increase in demand for their products. "Direct marketing is an opportunity for family farmers to supply their local markets and keep a larger share of the food dollar on the farm,” MFU President Gary Wertish said. “Our members have frequently shared with us that they need more local meat processing infrastructure to build their businesses and support their communities, without dealing with long backlogs at the processor. An investment in local processors is an investment in rural Minnesota.” The majority of respondents direct market or sell at sales barns or auctions, and reported that processors of all types – USDA, “equal to” and Custom-Exempt – are booked out for months.

“Consumers are more aware of how important buying and supporting local (food) really is,” said one farmer. Notably, only 9.5% have experienced an increase in sale price, though some who were surveyed reported market disruption causing cash flow problems this summer. The lack of competitive markets and concentration in the meatpacking industry has been a decades-long problem, laid bare when workers became ill with COVID-19, forcing shutdowns of major plants and heightening community spread of COVID-19. The resulting backups created more demand at local processors and reduced available slaughter dates for producers who regularly rely on these plants.

The Minnesota Department of Agriculture (MDA) has provided resources for producers and small-scale processors, recognizing that the pandemic and large packing plant closures have put pressure on small plants and the farmers they serve, including by expediting approvals for new “equal to” state-inspected plants, moving them up from “Custom Exempt,” and fast tracking grant funding to increase slaughter capacity at small grants.

The survey results also suggested a need for greater investment in meat inspection, and expanded opportunities for workforce development training. In addition, the survey respondents encouraged livestock producers to build pro-active relationships with local processors.

The survey results can be viewed in full at www.misa.umn.edu/resources/livestock/livestock-processing.

OFFICIAL CONVENTION CALL
79th Annual Convention of the Minnesota Farmers Union

Notice is hereby given that the 79th annual convention of the Minnesota Farmers Union will begin on Saturday, Nov. 21, 2020 until all business has been concluded. Business to be conducted will include election of delegates to the National Farmers Union convention and discussion and passage of resolutions into MFU policy.

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. County and local units must submit credentials forms to the MFU State Office by Nov. 15. Forms will no longer be accepted at the time of registration and must be processed ahead of time. 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 the Farmers Union.

Gary Wertish     Anne Schwagerl
President       Secretary

www.mfu.org
graduating from the Institute for Integrative Nutrition has come from farmers. The author, a physician, explores what farming can teach us about nurturing ourselves and presents the idea of “farm as medicine,” a concept I’d love to see gain widespread traction. As she travels to various family farms around the country, she seeks to discover the hidden connections between how food is grown and raised and the link to our health, asking questions like, “Are there connections between soil microbes and those in our bodies?” and “Why does a dirty farm offer protection from allergies while a dirty urban apartment does not?”

As Dr. Miller tells stories and shares insights from the farms she visits, she also introduces the reader to one of her most challenging and mysterious patients, Allie, who struggles with a laundry list of health concerns nobody can resolve: chronic bloating, allergies, weight gain, premature aging and extreme fatigue. Allie never experienced a dramatic illness or accident; instead her symptoms started out low-grade and mushroomed. By the time she found Dr. Miller, Allie had reached a point where simply getting out of bed each morning felt challenging. High-dose supplementation, energy bars and sophisticated testing from various medical specialists hadn’t been helpful.

As Dr. Miller gleans as much knowledge as she can from each farmer she meets, she approaches Allie with a radical idea: would Allie be willing to “join a farm cycle?” When Allie agrees, essentially Dr. Miller prescribes the following:

- **Choose farm-fresh food:** shop at farmers’ markets and join a CSA to ensure she is consuming the freshest, most nutrient-dense food possible.
- **Eat for biodiversity:** to save the plant-loving microbiota (a community of beneficial bacteria, protists, fungi and more) in her gut, eat a diverse assortment of local grains, vegetables and fruits.
- **Eat dirt and bugs:** not literally! Simply don’t be too obsessive about cleaning farm-fresh produce, knowing that micro traces of healthy soil clinging to food carries healthy bacteria and minerals.
- **Engage in farm love:** seek out opportunities to engage with a community garden or farm, which offer natural opportunities for physical activity, increase the chances for interpersonal connection and have anti-depressant effects, according to research.

Definitely not your typical doctor’s office prescription. Yet four months later, Allie was feeling better than she had in years and her labs came back normal.

Dr. Miller writes, “…it is fair to say that most of us in the medical profession are just starting to grapple with what it means to take a ‘whole system’ approach to health and healing. Agriculture, meanwhile, has been considering this question for decades. From my perspective, there are many reasons why agriculture is ahead of medicine when it comes to weblike thinking, starting with the simple fact that farming, even at its most technological, has never completely turned its back on nature.” I would love to see us move beyond the well-accepted “food as medicine” mantra and adopt a richer “farm as medicine” philosophy. I have no doubt that farmacology has the potential to gently guide us back to a natural state of health.

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**FARM AS MEDICINE**

Author Daphne Miller, M.D.
Through a partnership with carrier partner IMT’s Month of Giving and as part of his Agency’s Referral Program, Mike Panka and the Panka Agency were able to donate a total of $2,000 to Child Care & Nutrition, Inc. of Ivanhoe this past month. Follow Mike’s Agency and read about his community involvement on Facebook at @PankaInsurance.

This is just one shining example of how our Agents are committed to making a difference in the communities in which they live and serve.

If you haven’t already, please consider contacting one of our full-service Agencies for all of your insurance needs. FUA is fully owned by Minnesota Farmers Union.

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