Minnesota Agricultural Water Quality Certification Program announces 1-million-acre goal

Farmers find many benefits in Certification Program

The Minnesota Agricultural Water Quality Certification Program (MAWQCP) was the first of its kind in the nation. The program ensures farmers are protecting natural resources while giving them regulatory certainty. Now MAWQCP is doing something else unique. It's setting a major milestone to enroll one million acres by the end of 2022. Governor Tim Walz made the announcement on Dec. 22, 2020.

“This is a key effort we can undertake to ensure our lakes, rivers and drinking water are protected for future generations,” said Governor Walz. “We must do this because Minnesota’s natural resources are a unique part of our state and culture. Farmers understand this. They are stewards of our land and water and are already helping to protect these resources.”

At the end of 2020, more than 980 farms totaling over 685,000 acres have been certified across the state. Minnesota Agricultural Water Quality certified farms have added 2,000 new conservation practices, including over 110,000 acres of new cover crops, that protect Minnesota’s waters. Those new practices have kept over 38,000 tons of sediment out of Minnesota rivers while saving nearly 108,000 tons of soil and 48,000 pounds of phosphorous on farms each year. The conservation practices have also reduced nitrogen loss up to 49% and cut greenhouse gas emissions by more than 39,000 tons per year. Local conservation district experts help farmers identify and mitigate any risks their farm poses to water quality. Producers going through the certification process have priority access to financial assistance. After being certified, each farm is deemed in compliance with new water quality laws and regulations for 10 years. There are also extra endorsements available to water quality certified producers for soil health, integrated pest management, and wildlife. These endorsements celebrate farmers and landowners who are going above and beyond to implement conservation efforts on their land.

“We already know that certified farms have a major impact on our environment for the better, but the certification program is also good for our ag economy,” said Agriculture Commissioner Thom Petersen.

According to a study by AgCentric, a program of Minnesota State, the average net income of ag water quality certified farms is 26% higher, or $19,000 more per year, than non-certified farms. Other key financial metrics are also better, such as debt-to-asset ratios and operating expense ratios. The study also indicated increased yield for corn, soybeans and alfalfa on certified land.

“This provides more stability during these uncertain times, and I encourage farmers and landowners to looking into the advantages of certifying their land,” added Petersen.

Farmers and landowners interested in becoming water quality certified can contact their local Soil and Water Conservation District or visit mda.state.mn.us/environment-sustainability/minnesota-agricultural-water-quality-certification-program. ▲

Beginning Farmer Tax Credit

The Minnesota Department of Agriculture’s (MDA) Rural Finance Authority is now accepting applications for a tax credit for the sale or lease of land, equipment, machinery and livestock in Minnesota by beginning farmers. To qualify, the applicant must be a Minnesota resident with the desire to start farming or who began farming in Minnesota within the past ten years, provide positive projected earnings statements, have a net worth less than $851,000 and enroll in or have completed an approved financial management program.

The farmer cannot be directly related by blood or marriage to the person from whom they are buying or renting assets. The farmer must provide the majority of the labor and management of the farm. The tax credit for the sale or lease of assets can then be applied to the Minnesota income taxes of the owner of the agricultural land or other assets.

Three levels of credits are available:

• 5% of the lesser of the sale price or fair market value of the agricultural asset up to a maximum of $32,000
• 10% of the gross rental income of each of the first, second and third years of a rental agreement, up to a maximum of $7,000 per year
• 15% of the cash equivalent of the gross rental income in each of the first, second or third year of a share rent agreement, up to a maximum of $10,000 per year

The Beginning Farmer Tax Credit is available on a first-come, first-served basis. Applications must be received by Oct. 1, 2021. Interested farmers should note that they can also apply for a separate tax credit to offset the cost of a financial management program up to a maximum of $1,500 per year – for up to three years.

To learn more and apply, visit mda.state.mn.us/bftc. ▲
countless policy debates giving strength to necessary farm policies by building support among advocacy groups – I like to say that he preached the Gospel according to Farmers Union.

He was acting MFU president from April through August 1984 after Carpenter became National Farmers Union President and before incoming MFU president Willis Eken finished his duties as Majority Leader in the State House of Representatives.

For all he’s done for us, we nominated Dennis for a Meritorious Service Award at the 2020 NFU Convention. He traveled to Savannah, Ga., with us to receive the award, accompanied by video tributes from me, former MFU Presidents Doug Peterson and Dave Fredericksen, Agriculture Commissioner Thom Petersen, former MFU Office Manager Vivian Smith and MFU General Counsel Dave Velde.

Bill Sorg was a family dairy farmer in the Hastings area and served as Dakota County Farmers Union Vice President for about 15 years. He was a regular attendee at Lobby Day, Rural Voices Discussions and state conventions, a strong believer in the importance of farmers telling their stories. We’re sad that his consistent contributions to our organization have been cut short so abruptly and miss him very much. MFU sends thoughts and prayers to Dennis and Bill’s loved ones. Their full obituaries are included on page 15.

Happy New Year!

I think I share many people’s sentiments of being glad to see 2020 come to a close. Of course, the new year doesn’t mean the pandemic has disappeared, though many are hopeful the quick vaccine development means we’ll be able to get COVID-19 under control relatively soon. For now, MFU remains in a virtual mode, with staff working from home most of the time. We’re planning virtual programming for the winter as well, including the NFU Virtual Women’s Conference and MFU Virtual Lobby Days, as well as the Minnesota Cooks team’s “The Art of Hand Pies.” Information on all those events is included in this issue, so please check them out and join us if you can.

Dennis Sjodin, Bill Sorg pass away

We start 2021 on a somber note as well. Two leaders in our organization, Dennis Sjodin and Bill Sorg, died in December. Dennis, who farmed in Cambridge, Isanti County, was Vice President of MFU from 1996-2009, and before that was a field representative, director of Program Development, head of the Green View Program, director of the Joint MFU-NFO Livestock Marketing Program and assistant to the MFU President under Cy Carpenter. He also lent his voice to New sessions underway both in St. Paul and D.C.

The Minnesota 2021 legislative session has already begun, with business conducted mostly virtually. The new members elected in November have been sworn in. I plan to participate in hearings virtually and submit written testimony where most appropriate. Stu has more details about our specific legislative priorities on page 7. With access to the Capitol sharply restricted, it’s especially important to contact your legislators through phone, email, social media or mail if you have a question or comment for them. We’re happy to help make the connection if you are unsure – our job is to make sure elected officials are hearing from family farmers.

The new Congress has also been sworn in, and President-elect Joe Biden will be sworn in on Jan. 20. Obviously, COVID financial relief and vaccine distribution are top priorities. The recent federal stimulus package, while a good step, leaves more to be done to support people and businesses to weather the pandemic. Millions of people are still out of work and are food insecure, so we must do all we can to help each other. We’ve included a summary of the stimulus package, particularly pertaining to farm, food and rural provisions, on pages 10-11, thanks to NFU Vice President of Advocacy Mike Stranz. We’ll continue to advocate for relief on the state and federal levels.
We started the year attending agricultural trade shows and conferences. Little did we know, this would be the last time in-person for the entire year. As Congress dealt with a long government shutdown, we watched carefully as the U.S. finalized its “Phase One” trade deal with China and news of the novel coronavirus trickled in.

Meanwhile, the New Leader Academy Class 2 held their second meeting in Duluth, eating at Minnesota Cooks restaurants and talking with State Rep. Liz Olson. And two new MFU local chapters were organized – St. Louis County, which includes Duluth, and Hennepin/Ramsey County. We are delighted to see this growth.

The 2020 Minnesota Legislature session began in February, and we held our annual Lobby Day Drive-In during the second week of it. We were delighted to have Gov. Tim Walz, Lt. Gov. Peggy Flanagan, Agriculture Commissioner Thom Petersen, Revenue Commissioner Cynthia Bauerly, Transportation Commissioner Margaret Anderson Kelliher, House Speaker Melissa Hortman, House Majority Leader Ryan Winkler and House Agriculture Committee Chair Jeanne Poppe come to us and talk directly with members. We also met with legislators representing members’ home districts and had productive conversations surrounding health care, biofuels, farm safety, climate change, rural broadband and more.

At the very beginning of March, about 40 MFU members traveled to Savannah, Ga., for the annual National Farmers Union Convention. The event saw the end of NFU President Roger Johnson's tenure, as he retired. Delegates elected Rob Larew as the new NFU President; Larew had previously been NFU Senior Vice President for Public Policy and Communications. NFU Vice President Patty Edelburg of Wisconsin was re-elected to her second term. The convention also was full of lively discussion with farmers from across the country on climate change, supporting Black farmers, local foods, renewable energy and much more and included the passage of national policy and special orders. And the late MFU leader Dennis Sjodin received the Meritorious Service Award.

Less than two weeks later, COVID-19 hit Minnesota. MFU staff began working from home to stay safe and an official stay-at-home order from Gov. Walz was announced in late March. We canceled all in-person events until further notice.

To help keep farmers and eaters connected during our time of social distancing, we launched the Buy Local While Social Distancing data sheet on the Minnesota Cooks website. This list allowed farmers to share ways people can purchase their goods safely. The closures of schools and restaurants was a huge blow to many local producers; though farmers’ markets have thankfully remained open.

The Minnesota Legislature went on hiatus for the first few weeks of the stay-at-home order. However, MFU stayed in touch with leaders, successfully advocating for farmers and food workers to be considered essential workers, who are exempt from stay-at-home orders and may continue traveling to their jobs. We also sent letters to both state leaders and our whole Congressional delegation, calling on them to extend the deadline for Farmer-Lender Mediation, institute a moratorium on farm foreclosures and make family farms eligible for emergency small business loans established through the federal Coronavirus Aid, Relief and Economic Security (CARES) Act. Though we didn’t see a foreclosure moratorium, we were pleased that the mediation extension and emergency loan eligibility updates were passed. These have been hugely helpful to family farmers during these challenging times.

In non-COVID good news, Agriculture Commissioner Petersen was formally confirmed to his position by the Minnesota Senate on April 27.

Early in May, we donated 30,000 pounds of pork ribs to Second Harvest Heartland! This was thanks to Farmers Union Industries’ Redwood Farms processing plant having a surplus of pork. Each of the Farmers Union Enterprises states – Minnesota, North Dakota, South Dakota, Montana and Wisconsin – made a pork donation to a local food bank. We plan to make another donation soon. Meat processing dominated agriculture’s headlines throughout the spring. COVID-19 outbreaks at several large plants prompted them to close, overwhelming smaller processors and leaving many farmers to euthanize hogs. MFU worked with the Minnesota Department of Agriculture to spread information about resources to help farmers find a place for their livestock. MDA has gratefully been a solid partner throughout the pandemic.

The impact of these plant closures laid bare the problem of consolidation in the meat industry, with a few companies controlling so much of the market. Minnesota Attorney General Keith Ellison joined a bipartisan group of state attorneys general calling for a federal probe of price-fixing by four beef processors – Tyson, JBS, Cargill and National Beef.

We kicked off our spring virtual conversation series in late April with NFU President Larew and Vice President Edelburg as guests. This was followed by educational webinars on COVID-19 farm financing, direct-to-consumer sales and policy solutions for expanding local meat processing. We intend to continue these conversations during winter 2021.

The Minnesota Legislature re-convened and passed the agriculture finance and policy bills, which extended Farmer-Lender Mediation deadlines and provided meaningful financial support to family farmers through the MDA Farm Advocates and new markets to replace those lost to COVID. Unfortunately, they ran out of time to complete necessary business, such as a bonding bill, in the regular session. This, along with the need to approve extension of Gov. Walz’s peacetime emergency powers, led to seven special sessions, one each month from June-December 2020.

Our world was shaken by protests for racial justice – and Minnesota was at the epicenter. The May 25 killing of George Floyd, a Black man, by the knee of a Minneapolis police

(continued on page 5)
officer sparked uprisings around the country and abroad. This has prompted soul-searching in agriculture as well as many other industries about how systemic racism continues to harm people. MFU posted a statement about the incident on our social media pages, acknowledging that racism is not just an urban issue, but an everybody issue. This led to inspiring conversation at our virtual state convention months later, where members passed a special order calling on our agricultural community to become more affirming of underrepresented people. The conversation continues in our office – and among you all – to this day.

We pivoted to a virtual summer camp series in July. While a huge change and not ideal, the camps ended up a great success. Thanks to the leadership of our counselors, our young people enjoyed time together learning about cooperatives, Farmers Union history, mental health and more, as well as the beloved Theme Nights. The senior campers elected ten to the MFU Youth Advisory Council, who work together each year to plan camp activities.

It was a strange month of August for us, with Farmfest and the Minnesota State Fair being canceled. We kicked off with National Farmers’ Market Week virtual celebrations and virtual Farmfest forums with Congressional candidates.

The annual county conventions also had to pivot from normal meetings. Many of them were held via Zoom, some in-person with safety precautions and some as a hybrid of in-person and virtual. Our county chapters still completed their business, debating policy resolutions and electing delegates to the virtual 79th Annual MFU Convention.

 Attempting to make up for the lack of the State Fair, we opened a pop-up local food restaurant concept in late August as part of the MFU-Birchwood Alliance, called F + B. It was in the space formerly housing Spoonriver and where eventually we will open a full-service restaurant. People enjoyed stopping by for an Heirloom Tomato + Sweet Corn BLT or Blueberry Key Lime Pie, fair favorites from 2019, as well as many other locally grown delicacies. The pop-up stayed open into October.

The annual National Farmers Union Legislative Fly-In was also moved to virtual in mid-September. That didn’t stop us from meeting on Zoom with every member or staff representative of the Minnesota Congressional delegation, except for Rep. Jim Hagedorn. NFU also arranged a question-and-answer session with House Speaker Nancy Pelosi and House Agriculture Committee Chair Collin Peterson. Meat processing again was a major topic of discussion.

Amid all this turmoil, we had a general election. Joe Biden defeated Donald Trump to become our next U.S. President, with Kamala Harris as his running-mate. Minnesota saw some significant turnover as well – sadly including the loss of Chair Peterson, who represented western Minnesota for 30 years and was a voice of reason for agriculture. Rep. Poppe, the Minnesota House Ag Chair, also lost. The state House stayed in DFL control, while the Senate remained with a GOP majority.

We spent October and November planning for our 79th Annual MFU Convention, which like most things in 2020 was virtual. Thankfully, we figured out how to make Zoom work, as well as it possibly could have for our discussions. Gov. Walz, Sens. Amy Klobuchar and Tina Smith, Rep. Angie Craig and Commissioner Petersen all made live appearances on our Zoom meeting. Delegates voted to re-affirm our current policy document along with seven special orders affirming our stance on issues such as: health care, COVID-19 relief, climate change, meat processing, anti-racism, biofuels, agricultural markets, rural broadband. These were based on the policy resolutions submitted from county conventions. Delegates elected ten to serve as delegates at the upcoming virtual NFU Convention as well, and voted unanimously to award Rep. Peterson and Rep. Poppe with the Leadership in Agriculture Award for their service to Minnesota agriculture.

Minnesota Cooks held its first-ever virtual event in December, a virtual happy hour with Loon Liquors, Little Hill Berry Farm and Shepherd’s Way Farms on locally produced spirits and cheese pairings. We’re looking forward to more demonstrations from Minnesota Cooks in 2021!

Thank you for sticking with us in a year no one is likely to forget. We wish you a happier, healthier 2021, and we’ll see you soon (either on the screen or in the field).
To state the obvious, 2020 was quite a year, throwing some serious curveballs and prompting us – the Minnesota Cooks Team – to become even more reflective and intentional about the Minnesota Cooks program. One major curveball included not being able to host Minnesota Cooks Day at the Minnesota State Fair. But as we adapted, we discovered the vision for Minnesota Cooks’ expanding and began creating more avenues to continue supporting the health of Minnesota’s local foods community, especially as we head into 2021.

As we kick off the new year, we wanted to share a brief recap of our 2020 efforts and a preview of what’s up our sleeve for 2021.

**2020 Review:**

- **Buying Local While Social Distancing List:** When the pandemic hit in March, we quickly compiled an extensive list of safe, direct-to-consumer opportunities we named the “Buying Local While Social Distancing List”. This was circulated widely and garnered significant attention from news outlets, Mpls St Paul magazine, Senator Smith’s office, and many more. This list, along with meaningful brainstorming conversations, inspired the creation of a new site coming in early 2021 called **Minnesota Foodshed**, which is focused on connecting farmers with wholesale buyers (more details follow).

- **Local Food is Essential:** We became a founding partner in the Local Food is Essential campaign, a collaborative effort across many organizations to continue fostering the growth of a strong local foods system in Minnesota. [localfoodisessential.org](http://localfoodisessential.org)

- **2021 Minnesota Cooks Calendar:** Though we couldn’t host our annual local foods celebration at the State Fair, we printed another beautiful 2021 Minnesota Cooks calendar, reflecting eighteen years of MFU’s local foods program.

- **Outreach:** Throughout the year, several of our calendar participants were also highlighted in radio spots and podcasts, and we continue to explore additional mediums for showcasing their work/products.

- **Virtual Networking:** We hosted our first ever virtual Minnesota Cooks Happy Hour in early December and enjoyed toasting to farmer-buyer relationships, as we highlighted Loon Liquor Company, Shepherd’s Way Farms and Little Hill Berry Farm. Registration was robust, smiles were abundant and a good time was had by all!

**Looking forward to 2021:**

- **Minnesota Foodshed (Launching early February 2021):** Minnesota Foodshed is an online matchmaking platform for farmers and wholesale buyers to connect easily, begin building professional relationships with one another and buy and sell more local food. Users will be able to browse profiles of each other and post about items they are either seeking to sell or seeking to buy. You’ll be hearing more about this soon.

- **Mini Minnesota Cooks Events:** Stay tuned for more “mini” Minnesota Cooks events – virtual throughout winter and early spring and (hopefully) in-person next summer and fall. If you have an idea for a local foods event, send us a note at mncooks@mfu.org.

- **The Farmer and the Chef: Farm Fresh Minnesota Recipes and Stories:** Our farmer-forward cookbook featuring chef-driven recipes and farmers’ stories is on track for its revised release date of May 1, 2021, which shifted because of the pandemic.

- **Local Foods Community Partnership:** Unless the pandemic stands in our way, the Minnesota Cooks Team will join Sod House Theater Company on a tour of Arla Mae’s Booyah Wagon, their play about local foods, throughout Greater Minnesota beginning in September of 2021. We are excited and grateful for the opportunity to promote The Farmer and the Chef alongside their production.

- **Minnesota Cooks Day and 2022 calendar:** We plan to bring you another Minnesota Cooks calendar and Minnesota Cooks Day at the State Fair, with a whole new set of faces and expertise, as part of the 19th annual Minnesota Cooks program.

It’s going to be a great year. We can feel it. And we look forward to connecting with many of you this year!

**The Minnesota Cooks Team**

Claudine Arndt, Katie Cannon and Anne Schwagerl

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### The Farmer and the Chef: Farm Fresh Minnesota Recipes and Stories

*by Bruce Miller, Claudine Arndt & Katie Cannon – Minnesota Farmers Union*

Recipes from breakfast to dessert accompanied by stunning photography showcasing Minnesota farmers and the bounty they harvest. Recipes are created by some of Minnesota’s finest chefs and professional cooks who serve up local food at popular restaurants around the state.

The release date is May 1. You can find all the places to pre-order by going to [minnesotacooks.org/the-farmer-and-the-chef](http://minnesotacooks.org/the-farmer-and-the-chef).
At noon on Tuesday, Jan. 5, Minnesota’s regular legislative session officially began. This event is made less notable by the fact that legislators have convened for a special session every month since the last regular session adjourned in May. But the day did mark the swearing in of newly elected legislators, the start of negotiations on the next two-year budget and renewal of regular committee work.

As always, with leadership and help from you, MFU will work hard to make sure that Minnesota’s family farmers have a voice in shaping policies that affect their farms, families and communities. Though opportunities to participate in conversations at the Legislature will be virtual for the foreseeable future, including our annual Lobby Day, we plan to take every opportunity to make our members’ voices heard – be that by joining Zoom committee hearings, submitting written testimony or contacting elected officials by phone, email and social media.

As it was in 2019-2020, the Legislature is divided. In the November election, Republicans maintained a slim majority in the Senate, as did DFLers with a narrowed majority in the House. That dynamic aside, legislators and DFL Governor Tim Walz are unified in needing to address the public health, economic and social consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic. Additionally, legislators will be tasked with developing the next two-year budget (2022-23) and redistricting legislative maps following the 2020 census.

Though rhetoric can be divisive – and there are certainly strong differences of opinion among elected officials – there is much reason to be hopeful that they will be able to come together and deliver for people across Minnesota. Budget negotiations were successful in 2019 with a similar political dynamic. And since the start of the pandemic, legislators united in passing a bonding bill and multiple state aid packages aimed at addressing some of the worst effects of COVID-19.

Agriculture, in particular, has remained a bright spot of bipartisan work throughout the pandemic with legislators approving some relief for farmers and other businesses, new investments to expand local meat and poultry processing and changes to the Rural Finance Authority (RFA) to make sure farmers affected by COVID-19 could have access to low-interest disaster loans. Given the real challenges many farmers are facing – as well as the opportunities the state could help them pursue – we hope this year will be no different.

Approving a budget for the Minnesota Department of Agriculture (MDA), making our agriculture markets more resilient, fixing the bottleneck in local meat processing, expanding the use of biofuels and a host of other issues will be the purview of the House and Senate Agriculture Committees. Senator Torrey Westrom (R-Elbow Lake), who previously served as the Senate Ag Finance Committee Chair, will resume that role again this session. Last session, he helped secure funding for local meat processing, a top MFU priority.

“I am proud to be able to once again chair the Senate’s Ag Committee. I grew up on a farm. I have lived in Greater Minnesota my entire life,” said Sen. Westrom. “I know how important agriculture is – not just to the numerous small towns that make up most of Minnesota’s 87 counties, but to our state as a whole.”

Newly-elected Sen. Erin Murphy (DFL-St. Paul) will take on the role of Minority Lead. On the committee, she plans to use her role on the committee to work to build strong rural families, end hunger and champion economic justice. Sen. Murphy has previously served as the Minority Leader while in the state House.

In the House, Representative Mike Sundin (DFL-Esko) will be chairing the Ag Committee. He previously served on the ag committee, represents Carlton and parts of Pine and St. Louis counties and grew up on a dairy farm in Koochiching County.

“In addition to ensuring we all have something to eat on the kitchen table, agriculture is part of our state’s economic backbone, and the industry has been facing significant challenges,” Chair Sundin said. “I look forward to tackling this work in a committee that is traditionally one of the most bipartisan in the entire House.”

Leading minority members on the House Ag Committee is Rep. Paul Anderson (R-Starbuck), a farmer and active MFU member. He worked hard with MFU to develop a grain indemnity fund and plans to continue championing moving the state’s ethanol blend rate up from E10 to E15. In 2019, we awarded him the MFU Service to Agriculture Award at our 78th Annual Convention.

MFU plans to work with the Legislature, the Governor, state agencies and others to make health care more affordable, to make sure everyone has access to high-speed internet, tackle climate change and make sure our state is an inclusive and affirming place for everyone. All these issues were defined as priorities by MFU members and ratified as Special Orders by delegates to our State Convention in November.

As always, if you have any questions, thoughts, or concerns about MFU’s legislative work, don’t hesitate to reach out to me.
Minnesota Agriculture in the Classroom – Robust Resources with Impact

Submitted by Ann Marie Ward, MN Ag in the Classroom Foundation Executive Director

Working toward the vision that Agriculture is Valued by All!

Minnesota Agriculture in the Classroom connects with educators, students and ag advocates in many ways. The months past and yet ahead are very important as we continue to strengthen the connection to agriculture, cultivating understanding and feeding the curiosity of many!

The Minnesota Agriculture in the Classroom (MAITC) program offers agriculture-themed, academic standards-based resources to assist K-12 students and educators in a variety of teaching environments. The MAITC team of Education Specialists and Regional Curriculum Specialists offer guidance and assistance to empower K-12 educators to use agriculture as an authentic learning context in science, social studies, English language arts and health/nutrition. This past program year, MAITC worked with 278 school Districts. The MAITC Specialists logged 1,727 Teacher contacts and a record number of students, 143,000+, up 16,000 from the previous year, even during a pandemic.

Resources from Minnesota Agriculture in the Classroom

AgMag series

The AgMag is MAITC’s most popular resource, focused on kindergarten through sixth grade. When educators subscribe, they automatically receive the fall/October and spring/April issues, free. This well-respected resource has engaged students for 35-years. The “Reengineering” of AgMag will be complete in 2022 as it moves from a grade range resource to grade specific. The content from the printed AgMag issues is available digitally www.mnagmag.org. This website features flippable pdfs of the print magazines, interactive activities and an easy-to-follow navigation system perfect for online learning.

Food for Thought geography curricular resource

Explore the seventeen lessons, forty-two county level maps and new interactive crop and climate maps that are part of the newly released fifth edition of Food for Thought. Use the online order form to request the FREE printed lesson book and student desk maps.

Virtual field trips

Virtual Field Trips have proven very successful in making connections between students and local food and farms. In in-person classrooms, as well as distance learning, students attend to meet farmers. This includes touring farms that provide hot dogs, lettuce, apples, vegetables, milk and more to Minnesota school cafeterias. Additional details can be found on the MAITC website. MAITC plans to continue with monthly virtual field trips, pending funding.

Minnesota Agriculture in the Classroom works to represent all aspects of agriculture, with diverse curricula, outreach and highly engaging program enhancements. Lessons from the farm and beyond and across oceans, looking at economics and the impact of agriculture, globally and here in Minnesota, the lessons are engaging and the dedication of the team that trains and supports educators is fueled by passion for agriculture and education.

MAITC appreciates the continued encouragement and support of Farmers Union and its members. Every donor makes a difference. Thank you for opening doors and minds as we move forward working together to achieve the vision that Agriculture is Valued by All.

To learn more about MAITC, or make a contribution, check out minnesota.agclassroom.org or contact Ann Marie Ward, Executive Director of MAITC Foundation at MAITCExecutiveDirector@gmail.com.

Farewell from Molly Jansen, Legislative & Operations Coordinator

As of January 1, I have moved on from MFU to work at The Nature Conservancy as their Government Relations Associate. While I will really miss the talented staff at MFU, I’m very excited to be working full-time in policy with an organization we partner with often at the Capitol.

During my time at MFU, I had the absolute honor of coordinating the credentials and elections committees at the 2019 and 2020 annual conventions – the second of which was virtual. The members who serve on these committees volunteer their weekend to do the unglamorous work that makes our state convention run smoothly. It was such a pleasure to get to know each of them in the counting room, and without a doubt it was the highlight of my time at MFU. The credentials and elections committee members are just some of the many hard-working members who volunteer their time and resources for Minnesota Farmers Union.

While the Operations department is often behind the scenes, I enjoyed the connections I made while sitting at our reception desk and coordinating our events. I wish Minnesota Farmers Union and its members the best in the unprecedented year ahead!
Midwest Chicken Pot Pie
Submitted by MFU member Lisa Patrin

Yields Approximately 8 servings

Pie Crust
Prep Time: 10 minutes plus 4 hours to overnight for chilling

Ingredients
- 2-1/2 cups flour (I used 1/2 cup NETZRO upcycled organic whole wheat flour and 2 cups of all-purpose flour. You can use all purpose for this entire step or sub another wheat flour if you don’t have access to the NETZRO products.)
- 1 teaspoon kosher salt
- 1 cup (2 sticks) of unsalted butter, chilled
- 1/4 cup heavy cream (I used 1/2 cup NETZRO products.)
- 1 large egg, beaten for the egg wash
- 4 tablespoons ice water

Modifications: A store bought pie crust can easily be used if time is a factor. Roll, top the pot pie mixture and bake according to the instructions on the package.

Directions
1. Mix flour and salt in a medium bowl. Cut in chilled butter with a pastry cutter until mixture resembles coarse sand. (You may use a food processor to blend the dry ingredients and butter as a time saver or if you do not wish to use a pastry cutter.)
2. Add 4 tablespoons of ice water. Using a wooden spoon or sturdy spatula, work ingredients and butter as a time saver or if you do not wish to use a pastry cutter.)
3. When ready to use, remove one disk from the refrigerator and roll out on a lightly floured surface to a 12-inch circle. (Because this is a single crust pie and I only needed one for the top, I froze my second disk. I used a cookie cutter and the scraps from the rolled dough to decorate the top of my pot pie.)
4. Add bacon to the same skillet and cook until fat renders and the bacon becomes crisp. Remove from the pan and set aside.
5. Add onions, leeks, garlic, parsnips, carrots and mushrooms to the still warm pan. Cook until vegetables are tender. (The bacon drippings give the vegetables a wonderful smoky flavor!)
7. Add flour to the pan and stir until all of the contents are coated.
8. Add chicken stock and heavy cream. Stir well.
9. Add chicken and bacon back to the pan and stir until combined.
10. Reduce heat to a simmer and allow mixture to thicken slightly. This should take 8-10 minutes.
11. Pour filling into a 9-inch pie plate or a cast iron skillet of a similar size.
12. Place rolled dough round over the top of the filling. Press dough around the sides of the plate or skillet to seal/crimp the edges. Cut four 1-inch slits in the top of the crust to vent.
13. Bake at 400 degrees for 30-40 minutes or until the top is golden brown in color.

Pot Pie Filling
Prep Time: approximately 30 minutes
Baking time: 30-40 minutes

Ingredients
- 2 tablespoons olive oil
- 1 lb chicken thighs, cut into bite sized pieces (I used chicken from the Larry Schultz Organic Farm)
- 2 strips of Nueske's cherrywood smoked bacon, cut into small pieces
- 1 large onion, chopped
- 1 medium leek, sliced thinly
- 3 garlic cloves, minced
- 2 parsnips, peeled and sliced
- 3 carrots, peeled and sliced (I used organic tricolor)
- 8 ounces of sliced crimini mushrooms (I used mushrooms from R&R Cultivation, an urban farm in Roseville, MN)
- 1 teaspoon sea salt
- 1/2 teaspoon fresh ground pepper
- 1/2 cup heavy cream
- 1/3 cup all-purpose flour
- 1/2 teaspoon fresh ground sage
- 1/3 cup chicken stock
- 1 teaspoon chopped fresh rosemary
- 1/2 teaspoon chopped fresh thyme
- 1/2 cup heavy cream
- 1/2 teaspoon chopped fresh sage
- 1/2 teaspoon chopped fresh thyme
- 1/2 teaspoon chopped fresh rosemary

Directions
1. Preheat the oven to 400 degrees.
2. Heat olive oil in a large skillet over medium-high heat.
3. Add chicken and cook until pieces are lightly browned and cooked through, remove from pan and set aside.
4. Add bacon to the same skillet and cook until fat renders and the bacon becomes crisp. Remove from the pan and set aside.
5. Add onions, leeks, garlic, parsnips, carrots and mushrooms to the still warm pan. Cook until vegetables are tender. (The bacon drippings give the vegetables a wonderful smoky flavor!)

For more information about Lisa Patrin, please visit her website at www.theemptynesterskitchen.com. You can find her on Instagram and Facebook as The Empty Nesters Kitchen. She is the photographer, recipe creator and the author of The Empty Nesters Kitchen Blog. Her mission is to bring awareness to the importance of living sustainably. She believes that local food is essential and works hard to create and share recipes and dishes that utilize locally and sustainably sourced ingredients.

If you would like to schedule a visit to Lisa’s family’s farm, you can contact her at lspatrin@gmail.com. She is currently scheduling visits starting up again in Spring 2021.
Mike Stranz, NFU Vice President of Advocacy

In December, Congress passed an omnibus bill that funds the federal government through Sept. 30, 2021 and provides $900 billion in stimulus to the economy in response to COVID-19. Though President Trump publicly criticized key provisions after Congress approved it, he did sign it.

Since passage of the CARES Act in March 2020, the dire situation in rural health care, growing food insecurity and instability in the farm economy has made clear the need for further federal relief. On several occasions, NFU publicly called for further stimulus legislation to help with the coronavirus response: in May, when the House first passed the HEROES Act; in July, to spur the Senate to action; in September during the NFU Virtual Fly-in; and in October when the House passed a revised version of the HEROES Act. The bill just passed spends significantly less than most previous proposals. Additional legislation will be needed to address serious budget gaps for state and local governments.

It is important to note that this bill includes both routine annual appropriations bills and the stimulus package. Congress punted the appropriations bills to the end of the year and tied the stimulus and the omnibus together to present lawmakers with a must-pass, 5,600-page package, despite concerns from members of both parties. This summary covers the stimulus parts of the bill, mostly those that affect agricultural producers, the food system and rural communities.

Economy-Wide Provisions

In addition to $600 per person direct payments, which scale down as an individual’s 2019 taxable income exceeds $75,000 and are phased out for anyone with income exceeding $99,000, there are many other broad provisions. A supplemental $300 per week of federal assistance for individuals receiving state unemployment benefits is extended through March 14. Flexible Savings Account balances may be rolled from the 2020 tax year into 2021, and 2021 balances can be rolled into 2022. Charitable giving maximum tax deductions are increased, and Child Tax Credit and earned income tax credit eligibility is made more flexible so that individuals with a lower taxable income for 2020 than in 2019 can still receive tax benefits that their previously higher income allowed.

Production Agriculture

Overall, $26 billion was provided to the ag committees to help with pandemic relief, which was split roughly equally between nutrition assistance and farm and rural relief. The farm-related provisions of the bill largely build upon the structure of the Coronavirus Food Assistance Program (CFAP) that was set forth by USDA as a result of the CARES Act. Direct financial assistance totaling nearly $11.2 billion will be made available to farmers in the form of $20 per acre payments if they produced “price trigger commodities” or “flat rate crops.” Both of these terms were established in the second round of CFAP. Payments will be made based on 2020 planted acres. These payments will be available to all producers of non-specialty crops, with the notable exception of dry peas, lentils and chickpeas.

Additional flexibility will be made available to farmers who grow specialty crops, have made use of existing government programs or have alternative marketing arrangements. Specialty crop growers who show losses due to the pandemic may include price differentiation factors that can arise from specialized varieties, local markets and organic production. When calculating losses in 2020 as compared to previous years, this bill allows crop insurance indemnities and USDA disaster payments from either 2018 or 2019 to be considered.

The bill allows USDA to make supplemental CFAP payments to cattle producers and specifically allows payments of no more than $1 billion to livestock and poultry contract growers who had revenue losses due to contract changes because of COVID-19. Ranchers who received payments for cattle claimed as inventory in the first round of CFAP will be eligible for an additional payment through this bill. Farmers and ranchers who have not yet received assistance through the first two rounds of CFAP will be eligible for an 80% reimbursement of losses due to euthanization or canceled orders for their livestock.

Outside of CFAP, USDA may extend the term of marketing loans by three months. For specialty crop farmers, farmers markets and value-added production facilities impacted by marketing disruptions, the bill provides $100 million to the Local Agriculture Market Program and a further $100 million to the Specialty Crop Block Grant Program to aid at the state level.

We’d like to note the inclusion of a revised version of the RAMP-UP Act, which was introduced in July with strong support from NFU and was one of our Virtual Fly-In asks. This bill provides $60 million to help small-scale meat and poultry processing facilities engage in interstate shipment of meat products. Grants will be available to these establishments to make necessary improvements to be federally inspected. This investment will help provide more marketing choices for farmers and ranchers, which should prove to be very helpful in today’s consolidated marketplace. Furthermore, the bill also includes language to establish a livestock dealer trust, which has long been an NFU priority and will help farmers and ranchers receive payment if a dealer goes out of business.

For dairy, the bill makes some adjustments to the Dairy Margin Coverage program to allow for coverage increases if small- to mid-sized dairies have grown in the last seven years. It also will use $400 million to process donated fluid milk into dairy products for non-profit entities.

Government payments are forecast to make up 39% of net farm income for 2020. While this stimulus financial assistance to farmers would be made in 2021, the payments are indicative of a longer-term problem for the farm economy: dependence on ad hoc programs.

Biofuels

The bill makes biofuels refineries eligible for direct support from USDA to recover from the financial impacts of the pandemic. The biofuels industry provides hundreds of thousands of jobs, primarily in rural communities, and is a key consumer of agricultural commodities. NFU has called for assistance for biofuels since the early days of the pandemic. The details of how this support will be structured will be determined and implemented by USDA.

Nutrition Assistance

The bill provides approximately $13 billion for nutrition assistance. Participants in the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) will receive a 15% increase in monthly SNAP benefits for six months. The bill will expand the SNAP online purchasing program, including by helping farmers’ markets and direct market farmers access it. Several provisions in the bill help fund and support food purchases and donations. Additionally, the Gus Schumacher Nutrition Incentive Program (GusNIP) will receive additional funding and flexibilities to support the purchase of fresh fruits and vegetables in low-income communities.

Small business funds

The suite of programs in the Small Business Administration, a few of which farmers are eligible for, has been renewed and enhanced. The Paycheck Protection Program (PPP) received additional funding and is extended (continued on page 11)
through March 31, 2021. Loan applications and forgiveness provisions for PPP loans of less than $150,000 are simplified, and greater flexibility is allowed for setting coverage periods after the origination of a loan. The bill also clarifies that expenses incurred to arrive at PPP loan forgiveness will remain fully deductible for tax purposes.

One key change to the PPP program allows farmers and ranchers to qualify for a PPP loan based on 2019 gross revenue (up to $100,000). This added flexibility allows farmers who experienced net negative income in 2019 to be eligible to receive a PPP loan. To qualify for a loan under this provision, a farmer or rancher must be operating as sole proprietor, independent contractor or self-employed individual. In practice, the maximum loan amount under this provision is $20,833.

For those who have already received and used a PPP loan, there is a new “second draw” opportunity for certain small businesses and non-profits. Eligible entities would need to employ no more than 300 employees and must demonstrate at least a 25% revenue loss in the first, second or third quarter of 2020 compared to the same quarter in 2019 (applications submitted after Jan. 1, 2021 can use revenue from the fourth quarter of 2020). The maximum loan amount for second-draw PPP loans is $2 million.

The Economic Injury Disaster Loan (EIDL) emergency grants/advances received new funding, and the covered period now runs through Dec. 31, 2021. The bill repeals EIDL advance deduction, which required PPP borrowers to deduct the amount of their EIDL advance from their PPP forgiveness amount.

Rural Infrastructure
More than $7 billion in broadband funding has been included as part of the COVID-19 relief package. This includes broadband coverage mapping, interagency coordination and telehealth. It appropriates $65 million to the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) to create broadband data maps. Also appropriated is a sum of $250 million to the FCC for its COVID-19 Telehealth Program authorized under the CARES Act.

Other broadband items in this legislation include the establishment of two grant programs at the NTIA. The first, funded at $1 billion, is directed to tribal governments to be used not only for broadband deployment on tribal lands, but also telehealth, distance learning, broadband affordability and digital inclusion. The second is a $300 million broadband deployment program to support broadband infrastructure deployment to areas lacking broadband, especially rural areas.

The newly established Emergency Broadband Benefit Program at the FCC is based on the Emergency Broadband Connections Act and is appropriated $3.2 billion. Under the program, eligible households may receive a discount of up to $50, or up to $75 on Tribal lands, for the cost of internet service and a subsidy for low-cost devices such as computers and tablets.

Lastly, this legislation established an Office of Minority Broadband Initiatives at the NTIA to focus on access and adoption at Historically Black colleges or universities, tribal colleges and universities and other minority-serving institutions, including the students, faculty and staff of such institutions and their surrounding communities. It also appropriates $285 million for a pilot program to award grants to these institutions, including to help students of these institutions afford broadband service.

Health care
Qualified providers of health care, services and support may receive Provider Relief Fund payments for health care-related expenses or lost revenue due to COVID-19 and this bill provides $3 billion to that effort. For mental health, an additional $10 million has also been allocated to the Farm and Ranch Stress Assistance Network (FRSAN) and $28 million is to be distributed through block grants to the states for farm stress programs.
A monthly update from National Farmers Union

2020 was certainly not the year the American agriculture industry hoped for or expected. After several years of trade wars and depressed prices, many thought 2020 would finally bring good news for farmers and ranchers. Instead, it brought a pandemic and a slew of natural disasters, further complicating an already complicated situation. However, there are reasons to be optimistic about 2021; for one, a vaccine has been approved and is being distributed across the country, which means the end of the pandemic and its associated social and economic challenges is in sight. Additionally, the next administration has expressed its commitment to address many of National Farmers Union's top priorities, including corporate consolidation, climate change and racial inequity in agriculture.

Ag leadership under Biden becomes clearer

President-elect Joe Biden has nominated Tom Vilsack to return to his previous post of U.S. Secretary of Agriculture, which he held for eight years under President Barack Obama. A former governor of Iowa, Vilsack has been serving as president and CEO of the U.S. Dairy Export Council for the last four years.

With such extensive knowledge of USDA and agricultural issues, Vilsack certainly “has the necessary qualifications and experience to steer the agency,” NFU President Rob Larew said in a statement. However, the road ahead isn’t easy; the agency has some exceptionally complex issues to resolve. Larew urged Vilsack to “implement and enforce rules that protect farmers from anticompetitive practices, enact meaningful structural reforms that balance supply with demand, restore competition to agricultural markets, strengthen local and regional food systems, advance racial equity in agriculture, and mitigate the threat of climate change.”

More immediately, Larew stated that the agency must “expand nutrition assistance programs in order to ensure that millions of individuals who are facing unemployment and food insecurity are able to meet their most basic needs through the pandemic.” But the Secretary for Agriculture isn’t the only position critical to shaping food and farm policy in the years to come; the chairs of the Congressional Agriculture Committees will also play an important role. A week before the secretary announcement, Georgia Representative David Scott was selected by his fellow House Democrats to lead the House Agriculture Committee as its next chair, while Pennsylvania Representative Glenn Thompson was elected to serve as the ranking Republican member of the committee.

Larew congratulated Scott and Thompson in a statement, saying that they “not only … have strong backgrounds in agricultural policy, but they both understand the importance of bringing together a broad coalition to support the food system.” He indicated that he looked forward to “working with them to develop policies that support family farmers, ensure food security and bolster rural communities.”

New bill addresses racism in agriculture

There is a long, rich history of Black farmers in the United States: a century ago, Black families owned an estimated 15 million acres and operated 14 percent of all U.S. farms. But decades of systemic discrimination and the abuse of legal loopholes have robbed black families of millions of acres of farmland worth billions of dollars and forced the vast majority out of the industry.

To correct racial inequities in agricultural policies and institutions, Senators Cory Booker, Elizabeth Warren and Kirsten Gillibrand introduced the Justice for Black Farmers Act, the most comprehensive piece of food and agricultural justice legislation proposed in modern American history. The bill aims to end discrimination within USDA by creating a civil rights board to investigate reports of discrimination, review appeals of civil rights complaints and oversee Farm Service Agency county committees; protect Black-owned land by assisting Black farmers with succession planning, land ownership issues and the development of farmer cooperatives; restore land to Black farmers by creating an Equitable Land Access Service within USDA to acquire farmland and provide land grants of up to 160 acres to existing and aspiring Black farmers; train the next generation of Black farmers by providing them with the academic, vocational and social skills necessary to pursue careers in farming and ranching; support historically Black colleges and universities (HBCUs) and nonprofits that serve Black farmers so they can identify land for land grants, offer farming training and provide other support, including succession planning and legal assistance; assist socially disadvantaged farmers by increasing funding for technical assistance and conservation programs; and help all farmers and ranchers by addressing corporate control of the food system and restoring competition to agricultural markets. NFU, which promotes “efforts to remedy historical inequities in access to farm programs and other systemic barriers” that hold back socially disadvantaged farmers, endorsed the bill. President Larew called the Justice for Black Farmers Act “the most consequential racial equity legislation the agricultural sector has seen to date” and said it was “a big and important step towards giving farmers of all races a fair shot at success.” He urged Congress to take up the bill and “guarantee Black farmers the fair treatment they have so long deserved.”

(continued on page 13)
Rule would shield meatpackers from legal challenges
Due to unchecked corporate consolidation in the livestock industry, family farmers and ranchers have been subject to unfair and anticompetitive practices. A new rule finalized by the USDA falls short of providing meaningful protections from such practices.

The rule in question outlines criteria for determining whether a company has shown “undue or unreasonable preferences and advantages” for one farmer over another. An action may be permissible if it can be justified based on either cost savings or meeting the terms or prices offered by competitors, or if it’s a “reasonable business decision that would be customary in the industry.”

As NFU pointed out in comments submitted earlier this year, as written, the rule not only fails to defend farmers – it also shields corporations from legal challenges to discriminatory actions. Upon its finalization, President Larew reiterated those concerns, saying that “USDA’s rule will inexplicably offer even more power to meatpackers, further tipping the scales in their favor.” He then urged the incoming administration to “reverse this harmful rule and replace it with one that actually protects farmers from unfair, deceptive and discriminatory practices.”

EPA fails to release 2021 FVOs
Every year, the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) is required to release renewable volume obligations (RVOs), which set the quantity of biofuel and biodiesel that refiners are obligated to blend into transportation fuel under the Renewable Fuel Standard (RFS).

This year, however, the agency failed to finalize RVOs for 2021 by the statutory deadline, raising concerns that the RVOs will not be updated until the next administration takes office. According to President Larew, the absence of RVOs introduces “yet more uncertainty to the biofuels industry,” which is already reeling after the misappropriation of small refinery exemptions and lower demand for fuel during the pandemic.

Larew said EPA had “fallen short in its handling” of the obligations and urged the agency under the next administration to take biofuels policy “in a much more promising direction.”

USDA Service Centers are here to help
At USDA, we are committed to helping farmers complete loan applications, environmental reviews and other paperwork free of charge. One-on-one support is available at more than 2,300 USDA Service Centers nationwide. USDA’s Farm Service Agency and Natural Resources Conservation Service staff are usually co-located at these Service Centers and can help guide farmers to the best USDA assistance based on their unique goals, whether it is loans, conservation programs or insurance.

Service Center staff can guide farmers through the process of preparing and submitting required paperwork on their own, with no need to hire a paid preparer. Language translation service is available in all USDA Service Centers, so one-on-one assistance with a Service Center employee can be translated in real time for farmers requiring it. And while some program and loan applications do have an administrative fee for filing, there is never a charge for preparation services provided by USDA staff.

Farmers who come to the USDA Service Center can:
• Establish their farm by registering for a farm number, which is required for USDA programs and assistance.
• Learn how to meet conservation compliance provisions.
• Verify eligibility for USDA programs.
• Discuss their business and conservation goals.
• Create a conservation plan.
• Fill out and file loan and program applications.

To find the nearest USDA Service Center, visit farmers.gov/service-center-locator.

All USDA Service Centers are open for business, including those that restrict in-person visits or require appointments. All Service Center visitors wishing to conduct business with FSA, Natural Resources Conservation Service or any other Service Center agency should call ahead and schedule an appointment. Service Centers that are open for appointments will pre-screen visitors based on health concerns or recent travel, and visitors must adhere to social distancing guidelines. Visitors are also required to wear a face covering during their appointment. Our program delivery staff will continue to work with our producers by phone, email and using online tools. More information can be found at farmers.gov/coronavirus.
Upcoming Virtual Events

Every Thursday in January • Minnesota Organic Conference sessions • 3 p.m. • register at mda.state.mn.us/environment-sustainability/minnesota-organic-conference
Jan. 17-18 • National Farmers Union Virtual Women’s Conference • register at national-farmers-union-womens-conference.heysummit.com
Jan. 19-20 • Virtual MFU Lobby Days • register at bit.ly/MFULobby2021
Jan. 26 • Minnesota Cooks Virtual Demo: The Art of Hand Pies • 5 p.m. • register at bit.ly/MN Cooks Hand Pies
Jan. 29-30 • 16th Annual Emerging Farmers Conference • register at eventbrite.com/e/16th-annual-emerging-farmers-conference-tickets-128009898051
Feb. 3 • UMN Women in Ag Network Conference • 9 a.m. • register at extension.umn.edu/event/2021-women-ag-network-conference
Feb. 8-13 • Sustainable Farming Association of MN Annual Conference • register at sfa-mn.org/conference

Virtual Produce Safety Rule Trainings:
Tuesday, Feb. 9, 2021 8:45 a.m.-5 p.m.
Saturday, Mar. 13, 2021 8:45 a.m.-5 p.m.
Sign up two weeks prior to class at pspace.tix.com • Cost: $20

Feb. 22-27 • Growing Stronger Conference on Organic Farming • register at web.cvent.com/event/b1fcc89f-d903-4e65-9a18-c63297078800/summary

2021 National Farmers Union Women’s Conference: The Future is Female Farmers Virtual • Jan. 17-18

There are more women farmers and ranchers today than there ever have been before! It’s exciting to see better gender representation in agriculture, but because the vast majority of farm operators have often been men, women farmers still face unique barriers when it comes to accessing land, acquiring loans and finding appropriately sized tools and machinery.

To address these and other concerns, National Farmers Union hosts a conference for women and nonbinary farmers every year. This year’s conference, which will be held virtually on Jan. 17 and 18, will cover a variety of subjects including business management, marketing, cooperative development, succession planning, food safety and leadership. In addition to gaining relevant skills, attendees will also go home with a network of women farmers across the country who they can reach out to throughout the year.

The cost for registration is $25 for MFU members and $45 for non-members. MFU will help cover costs for members to attend – please consider it!

Register and learn more about the presenters here: nfu.org/womensconference.

The Art of Hand Pies
A Virtual Demonstration & Discussion • Jan. 26

Join us on Jan. 26 for The Art of Hand Pies, a virtual demonstration and discussion featuring Minnesota Cooks participants Chef Owner Gary Wahl of Stone’s Throw Cafe in Morris and Chef Owner Jessica Pettingill from Café Thyme in Chanhassen as they guide participants through the shaping and making of hand pies, as well as the cross-cultural composition and versatility of hand pies. They’ll demonstrate and discuss both meat-based and vegetarian fillings, savory versus sweet, shortcuts, and how to bring your own creativity to this universally loved pastry. From the empanada to the pasty, nearly every culture has a hand pie – and for good reason! They’re delicious and easy, even for beginner home cooks.

We’ll also introduce you to a couple of the farmers Chef Gary and Chef Jessica depend on for their local fare and learn how working directly with farmers guides both their menus and inspiration.

Chef Jessica is the owner of Café Thyme in Chanhassen, a globally inspired culinary oasis where Chef Jessica and her team pride themselves on offering fresh wholesome local ingredients from nearby farmers.

Chef Gary Wahl is the owner of Stone’s Throw Cafe in Morris, offering “farm to table, fine, casual, fusion, gourmet dining.” Chef Gary and his team work with guests to find food that fits both their dietary needs and tastes.

When: Tuesday, Jan. 26, 5 p.m.
Plan ahead: If interested, participants can make and shape their dough along with the demonstration. Recipes will be sent in a follow up email as the event draws closer.
Dennis Sjodin

Dennis C. Sjodin, age 91, of rural Cambridge, Isanti County, passed away peacefully on Dec. 18, 2020. Dennis was a lifelong farmer, long-time leader and former Vice President of the Minnesota Farmers Union and former chair of the Isanti County DFL. He was actively involved in many Isanti county organizations. In March 2020, he received a Meritorious Service Award to Agriculture from National Farmers Union in recognition of his dedication to the organization, which cannot be overstated. Many Minnesota agricultural leaders shared messages of thanks to Dennis via video when he accepted the award.

Dennis is survived by his loving wife of 65 years, Joanne; sisters Ruth Nelson, Phyllis Larson and Clarice Salstrom.

He was preceded in death by his loving wife of 65 years, Joanne; Dennis is survived by his sons Greg Sjodin, Brent (Kathy) Sjodin, Kevin Sjodin, Tim (Sue) Sjodin, Paul (Denise) Sjodin and Shawn (Evyn) Sjodin-Weston, Blake (Ashley) Sjodin, Chris Sjodin, Sanna (Delilah) Sjodin, Karlee and Holden Norring, Piper and Decker Brooks, Austin and Blake Kirchberg, and James (Trista) Kirchberg; great-grandchildren Clairabelle and Jake Usher, Shelby Sjodin, Dena (Jerred) Norring, Teri (Gio) Brooks and James (Trista) Kirchberg; great-grandchildren Clairabelle and Dellarah Sjodin, Karlee and Holden Norring, Piper and Decker Brooks, Austin and Blake Kirchberg, and James (Trista) Kirchberg; great-grandchildren Clairabelle and Jake Usher, Shelby Sjodin, Dena (Jerred) Norring, Teri (Gio) Brooks and James (Trista) Kirchberg; great-grandchildren Clairabelle and Dellarah Sjodin, Karlee and Holden Norring, Piper and Decker Brooks, Austin and Blake Kirchberg, and James (Trista) Kirchberg. He is also survived by two cousins, nieces and nephews. He was preceded in death by his parents.

Condolences can be shared at www.carlsonlillemoen.com.

Obituary courtesy of Carlson-Lillemoen Funeral Home

Bill Sorg

William Loren Sorg, age 72, of Hastings, passed away on Dec. 28, 2020. Bill was an active MFU member and farmer.

Bill was born in Hastings to Loren and Marion (Lambrecht) Sorg. He was raised on the Sorg Family Farm and graduated from Hastings High School in 1966. Bill attended the University of Minnesota College of Agriculture and graduated in 1970 with a B.S. in Agricultural Economics. In 1989 Bill married the love of his life Juanita Trout, and they raised three children.

Bill's vocation and avocation was farming. As a young man, he enjoyed his time in saddle club, was a member of the Klovver Klub 4-H club (40+ years before his children) and was active in Hastings FFA, ultimately becoming a Minnesota State FFA officer. For over 40 years, Bill was a dedicated dairy farmer. Yet, he always made time to attend his children's important events. He contributed to the agricultural community by serving on cooperative boards and advocating for agriculture through Minnesota Farmers Union as Dakota County Vice President. In his "retirement", his favorite activities included making hay, tending his beef cows and trapping gophers with his children and grandchildren.

He is survived by his wife of 31 years, Juanita; his children, Karl (Kayla) Sorg, Janna (Eric) Bauer, and Gabriella (fiancé, Eric Houdek) Sorg all of Hastings; grandchildren, Levi and Liam Sorg and Henry Bauer. He is also survived by two of his siblings, Mary Lou (Roger) Foster and Randy (Kelly) Sorg; and many cousins, nieces and nephews. He was preceded in death by his parents and brother, Gary.

A memorial gathering was held in early January.

Obituary courtesy of Starkson Family Life Celebration Chapel

Farm Advocates

Farm Advocates provide one-on-one assistance for Minnesota farmers who face crisis caused by either a natural disaster or financial problems. They understand the needs of agricultural families and communities. They are trained and experienced in agricultural lending practices, mediation, lender negotiation, farm programs, crisis counseling, disaster programs and recognize the need for legal and/or social services. Plus, most of the Farm Advocates are MFU members.

The Farm Advocate Program has been supported by the Minnesota Department of Agriculture since 1984. There is no charge or fee for Farm Advocate assistance.

Farm Advocates:

Wayne Pike
Rochester (507) 251-1937

Bruce Lubitz
Perham (218) 346-4866

Connie Dykes
Lake City (651) 345-5149

David Elliasson
Isle (320) 676-3559

David Hesse
Comfrey (507) 877-3012

Dan Hunz
Monticello (763) 772-6687

Ruth Ann Karty
Clarkfield (320) 669-7135

George Bosselman
Fosston (218) 200-9432

Steve Zenk
Danube (320) 894-2517

Bob Stommes
St. Cloud (320) 443-5355

www.mda.state.mn.us/about/commissionersoffice/farmadvocates

Minnesota Farmers Union  Standing for Agriculture, Working for Farmers
FARMERS UNION INSURANCE AGENCY ANNOUNCES NAME CHANGE, REBRANDING

Minnesota Farmers Union Insurance Agency is changing its name to Farmers Union Agency. In conjunction with this name change, the company has developed a new logo and has launched a new website, www.fuainsurance.com. The new logo, which represents a shield of protection and a check mark of assurance, communicates our ongoing commitment to protecting what matters most to our insureds and providing unprecedented personal service.

Josh Vickerman, President of Farmers Union Agency, shared the reasons for this change. “Our new name better reflects the breadth of our services, and the symbolism behind our new logo is what we’re all about.”

Farmers Union Agency (FUA) is headquartered in the Minnesota Farmers Union building in St. Paul and has 37 agents in 38 offices located throughout the state of Minnesota. Our independent agents work through multiple insurance companies to find clients the best coverage at the right price. FUA agents provide insurance for businesses, crops and farms, as well as personal lines coverage for homes, autos, boats and other recreational vehicles. In addition, FUA offers health and life insurance for businesses and individuals and has recently added a Director of Health and Life Insurance at its corporate office to support its agents in these growing areas.

Thank you for entrusting us with what matters most to you, and for your continued patronage! Here’s to a safe and happy 2021!

Our Agents are located in offices across MN to better serve our communities:

- **ADA** Rodney Mathsen (218) 784-4813
- **ALEXANDRIA** Daylon Faber (320) 763-9455
- **ARGYLE** Jay Swanson (218) 437-8512
- **BEMIDJI** Ben Caron (218) 751-7761
- **CANBY** Mike Panka (507) 223-5527
- **CROOKSTON** Chris Swanson (218) 281-6724
- **DAWSON** Deborah Breberg (320) 769-2088
- **DETOUR LAKES** Joe McCollum (218) 844-5970
- **DULUTH** Brad Anderson (218) 481-0812
- **ELK RIVER** Rob Pampusch (763) 441-4250
- **FARMINGTON** Jerry Theisen (651) 463-7667
- **FERGUS FALLS** Grand Davenport (218) 736-5697
- **FOSTER** Barb Sweep (218) 435-2063
- **FRANKLIN** Joel Harmoning (507) 557-7000
- **GOODHUE** Alison Peters (651) 923-4433
- **HALLOCK** Jay Swanson (218) 853-2468
- **IVANHOE** Mike Panka (507) 694-1750
- **LAKE CRYSTAL** Matt Peterson (507) 726-2961
- **LUVERNE** Barb Anderson (507) 283-8383
- **LUVERNE** Steve Cattanach (507) 283-8383
- **MAHNOVNA** David McCollum (218) 935-2175
- **MAPLE GROVE** Brandon Hummel (612) 710-3074
- **MARSHALL** Dennis Klocow, Jr. (507) 532-0418
- **MENAHGA** Kristine Hendrickson (218) 564-5300
- **MONTEVIDEO** Ivan Anderson (320) 269-9463
- **MOORHEAD** Matt Bahr (701) 929-0877
- **MOORHEAD** Dennis Fjeld (218) 236-1966
- **MOORHEAD** Aaron Schenck (701) 371-7599
- **MOORHEAD** Robin Swanson (218) 512-3003
- **MOOSE LAKE** Mark Sagvold (218) 485-8144
- **MORRIS** Debbie Anderson (320) 589-3245
- **NEW YORK MILLS** Lisa Preuss (218) 385-3344
- **NORWOOD YA** Lisa Valiant (952) 467-2922
- **OLIVIA** Paul Johannes (320) 523-1150
- **OWATONNA** Ben Flemke (507) 413-6116
- **ROCHESTER** Chris Sanders (507) 282-4411
- **ROSEAU** Steve Dostal (218) 463-2369
- **ST. LOUIS PARK** Cary Sundlof (651) 288-4069
- **THIEF RIVER FALLS** Jay Swanson (218) 681-6443
- **WILLMAR** Paul Johannes (320) 235-2540
- **WINDOM** NEW! Jessica Krick (507) 831-3541

(800) 229-1064 toll-free or (651) 639-1064 in the Twin Cities Metro
Check out our newly-redesigned website! www.fuainsurance.com