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Breaking News

Breaking News

3rd place

"Illinois FFA elects 6 new officers"
Ava Splear
Farm Progress/Prairie Farmer



Illinois FFA elects 6 new officers

TEAM: The 2025-26 Illinois FFA officers are (from left) Natalie Pratt, president; Koben Tate, vice president; Ethan Bremmer, reporter; Kyle Bradshaw, secretary; Kaydance Wooton, treasurer; and Paige Sierens, sentinel.

BY AVA SPLEAR

IN JUNE, FFA members from all over Illinois gathered in Springfield for the 97th Illinois FFA Convention at the Bank of Springfield Center. On June 12, over 500 delegates elected new officers for the 2025-26 year.

Earlier in the week, delegates passed an amendment that allows the addition of the sentinel position to the officer team, which means there are six state officers this year instead of five. They are:

President Natalie Pratt, Amboy FFA. Pratt was named president after three rounds of voting and was emotional delivering her acceptance speech, stressing that God helped

noting that many people he looks up to have been in a state officer role before him. "Now I'm in their role, and there's going to be people after me, and I'm ready to be that inspiration for those people," he said.

Reporter Ethan Bremmer, Pearl City FFA. Bremmer grew up on his family's grain and dairy farm, and it deeply influenced his upbringing. Today, he helps care for cattle, tills fields and drives the semi.

"Ever since I could walk, I've been on the farm in a tractor," Bremmer said. "I love agriculture. It's in my blood."

Bremmer calls Pearl City in Section 1 home and says being involved in FFA is a family tradition. His grandfather was a member, his father was a section president

FFA chapter, Blue Ridge, in Section 16.

"Ever since my freshman year, I had him to look up to," Wooton said.

Wooton said she hopes to create an inclusive environment during her term on the officer team. "I hope to make everyone feel like they belong here," she said, adding that she wants to provide a "place where they feel like they're at home no matter where they're at."

Sentinel Paige Sierens, Annawan FFA. Sierens will serve as the sentinel for this upcoming year, the first one in Illinois FFA history. How does that feel?

"It's a surreal experience to know that you even got a major state office, let alone this historic one," Sierens said. "I'm just so excited for the opportunity."

During the selection process, Sierens gave multiple speeches and said that her nerves subsided as she gave more speeches. While speaking, she said seeing members' faces whom she would serve if elected was an incredible feeling.

Sierens grew up on her family's farm near Annawan. She decided to run for a state office during chapter visits as Section 3 president.



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Breaking News

2nd place

"Grain Dealer Fails to Pay Nebraska Farmers"
Todd Neeley
DTN/Progressive Farmer

2/26, 3:43 AM Nebraska Grain Dealer License Suspended After 38 Farmers Not Paid $2M for Grain

Progressive FARMER powered by DTN

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Grain Dealer Fails to Pay Nebraska Farmers

Nebraska Grain Dealer License Suspended After 38 Farmers Not Paid $2M for Grain

10/27/2025 | 2:09 PM CDT



By Todd Neeley, DTN Environmental Editor

Connect with Todd:

@DTNeeley



The state of Nebraska suspended the grain dealer license for Hansen-Mueller Co. after 38 farmers reported they were not paid by the company for delivering grain. (DTN file photo)

LINCOLN, Neb. (DTN) -- The Nebraska Public Service Commission suspended the grain dealer license of a Nebraska firm after the company failed to pay nearly $2 million to about 38 farmers for deliveries of grain to the Omaha-based business. Investigations are underway in some of the nine other states where the company operates.

Nebraska regulators at the end of last week filed a complaint against Hansen-Mueller Co., after receiving a complaint from a farmer who told them the company failed to pay for a grain delivery.

"In response to the producer's complaint on Oct. 23, 2025, an inspector with the grain department conducted an on-site examination at the respondent's facility," the complaint said.

"During the examination respondent provided a file identifying all Nebraska producers with unpaid grain obligations."

The PSC said the unpaid deliveries occurred between Aug. 30, 2025, and Oct. 21, 2025.

During an emergency meeting of the Nebraska Public Service Commission on Oct. 24, 2025, Terri Fritz, director of the Nebraska Grain Warehouse and Dealer Department, said officials in all states where Hansen-Mueller operates are "looking into the allegations of non-payment to producers" as it pertains to their states.

HANSEN-MUELLER LOCATIONS

The company is headquartered in Omaha and operates a grain merchandising office in Grand Island.

In addition, Hansen-Mueller operates elevators and merchandising offices in Council Bluffs, Iowa; Duluth, Minnesota; Houston, Texas; Salina and Kansas City, Kansas; Kansas City, Missouri; Sioux City, Iowa; Superior, Wisconsin; Tallulah, Louisiana; a merchandising office in Alabaster, Alabama; as well as a processing mill in Toledo, Ohio.

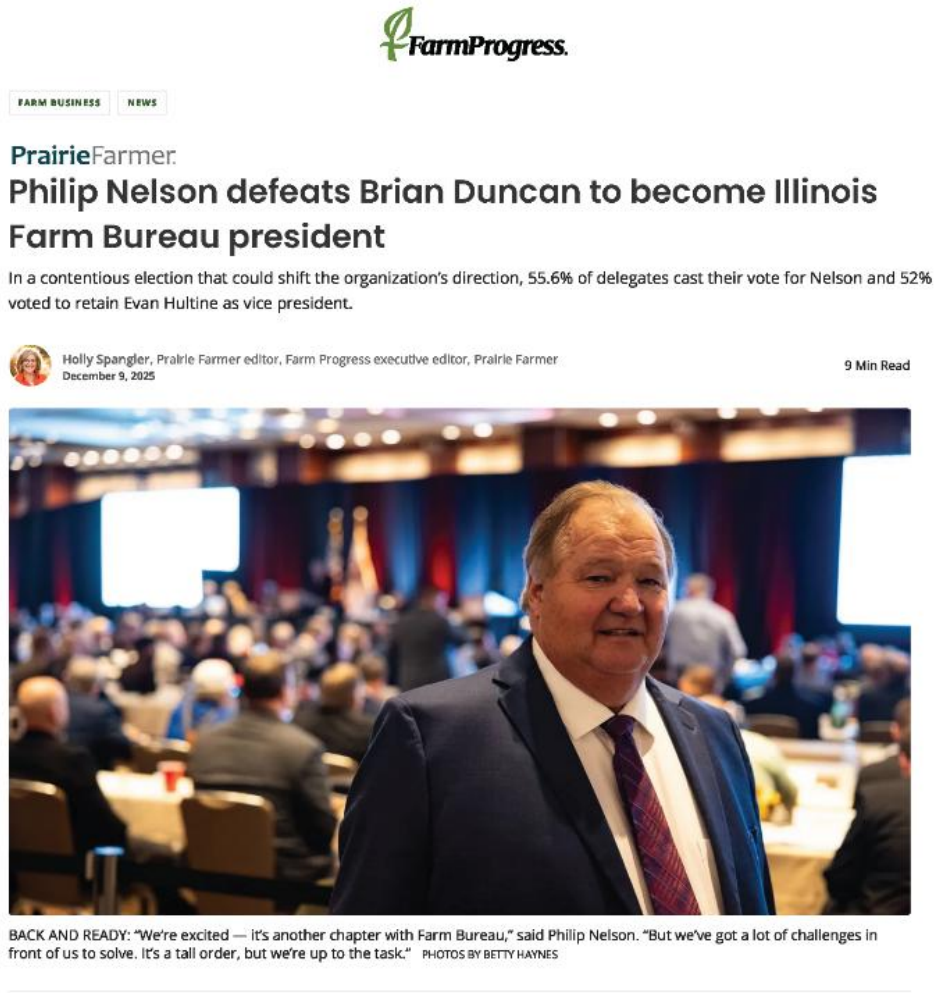
A spokesperson with the Louisiana Department of Agriculture and Forestry confirmed with DTN on Monday that "the Louisiana Agricultural Commodities Commission is

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Breaking News

1st place

"Philip Nelson defeats Brian Duncan to become Illinois Farm Bureau President"
Holly Spangler
Prairie Farmer/Farm Progress



FarmProgress.

FARM BUSINESS | NEWS

PrairieFarmer

Philip Nelson defeats Brian Duncan to become Illinois Farm Bureau president

In a contentious election that could shift the organization's direction, 55.6% of delegates cast their vote for Nelson and 52% voted to retain Evan Hultine as vice president.

Holly Spangler, Prairie Farmer editor, Farm Progress executive editor, Prairie Farmer
December 9, 2025

9 Min Read

BACK AND READY: "We're excited — it's another chapter with Farm Bureau," said Philip Nelson. "But we've got a lot of challenges in front of us to solve. It's a tall order, but we're up to the task." PHOTOS BY BETTY HAYNES

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Economics and Management

Economics and Management

3rd place

"On Their Terms"
Martha Mintz
The Furrow, John Deere



STORY AND PHOTOS BY MARTHA MINTZ

ON THEIR TERMS

Selling the cow herd a mark of success, not failure.

Validation was one of an array of strong feelings washing over Jeff Okerman as he, his wife Nancy, and father-in-law David Branger watched 90 of their prime 3-year-old cows move through the ring at Miles City Livestock Commission. It was the first lot of their 475-head herd dispersal.

Seats around them were filled with friends, family, and neighbors there to support and celebrate. The sale wasn't driven by duress. It was a carefully planned strategic business move. A well-earned soft retirement.

"When it became obvious our kids weren't coming back to ranch, we started discussing what to do," Nancy says. Talk went on for years. Urgency built as they felt themselves incrementally getting a little older and moving a little slower.

They had three enterprises: the ranch, farming, and a commercial cow herd. Something had to go and it wasn't going to be the land.

"Once you sell a ranch in Montana, you'll never have another," Jeff says. That left the cows.

They knew cattle prices peaked in roughly 10-year cycles. The next time prices went high, which they soon did, they put their plan into action. A year was spent planning with advisors. They kept the herd well fed and in top shape for the February sale.

Yearling heifers were retained. They had the feed resources to further develop them and it would spread income. They will be sold as bred heifers, officially closing a chapter for the Okermans.

"People always talk about selling when prices get high, but rarely do. We realized if we didn't act it would be another 10 years before we had the chance," Nancy says. "We had to be honest with ourselves about if we could still be doing a good job with the cattle on our own at 80."

They bought their place south of Miles City in 1992. It was a permanent home for the 200-head herd they'd built on leased ground. There was room to graze and grow on the 33 sections.

It was advertised as having a 400-head carrying capacity. It wasn't quite up to that. The rough gumbo buttes and highly erodible cheatgrass-infested acres had been heavily used.

"We worked for the last 30 years to develop water and a deferred rotational grazing system. Today I think we could run 400 cows year in and year out and even weather at least one dry year without making too many changes," Okerman says.

The herd also transformed. They selected cows that thrived in their environment, carefully managing genetics and health.

"These are blue-collar cows. They're not perfect, but they're solid," Jeff said, icicles twinkling on his mustache as he, Nancy, and their friends loaded the herd one windy, -21°F February day.

The sale. Despite the lingering and brutal Montana cold snap, the uniform group of 3-year-olds was a hot commodity on sale day. They brought $3,085 each, a facility record for commercial cattle and possible state record.

"I was able to relax a little after the first bunch," Nancy says.

More of the same followed. The balance of their mature herd was auctioned off in age-based lots. The uniformity of the groups was a point of pride for the family, a testament to what they had built.

"We were sold out in less than 30 minutes. Every winning bidder took every single cow in each cut with no sorting," Okerman says.

Selling a herd is often read as failure in the industry. For the Okermans, it was a high point.

The stress of ever-looming failure in the form of hail, grasshoppers, and markets was wiped away. In the months since they've found new purpose.

They visit their grandkids in Colorado more regularly. During calving season, Jeff was in Mexico, making his dream of catching a tarpon a reality.

"I had some pangs of survivor guilt, but they seemed to go away with a margarita," he says.

Time and money became available to make ranch improvements, like developing water and repairing roads. The work will benefit the young family leasing their land, creating opportunity for their kids to continue in the industry. The Okermans have found it all to be very rewarding.

"In agriculture, it's hard to judge success because you're so close to failing all the time. We've all had our backs against the wall at one time or another and been forced to make hard decisions. To be able to sell our cows on our terms means a lot to us," he says. Their business was a success.









Above. Extreme temperatures complicated the sale. Worried about their cows, the Okermans offered to pay the feed bill to keep them in place after the sale until the weather broke. **Opposite.** The last gather had poignant moments. When a range cow approaches Nancy looking to be hand fed, she admits she lost her composure a bit.

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Economics and Management

2nd place

"The Woven Path"
Martha Mintz
The Furrow, John Deere



Mark Yeager sneaks a peek at his phone with a grin. He was quick, but not fast enough to avoid being called out by his wife Cassandra and kids, Joe, Anna Brakefield, and Mark Jr. from their seats around the table.

"He sets his alarm so he can check that app every 30 minutes all night," Joe goads.

It isn't social media or the weather bringing him such delight, it's an app tracking online orders for their family's Red Land Cotton linens business.

The numbers are evidence of a realized dream and a decade of work. Sheets, blankets, towels and other textiles made in the United States from cotton grown on the family's North Alabama farm are headed out to more happy customers.

The journey from commodity price taker to value-added product price-maker started in 1994 when the Yeagers built their own cotton gin.

"I wanted control of processing and marketing, and to collect more of the profits being made on my crop," Mark says.

In 2015, the family took the next step with Red Land Cotton, producing textiles for direct sale to consumers.

"I could buy a pair of pants for $40 that only took a couple pounds of cotton to make. I was getting maybe $.50 per pound for the cotton," Mark says. The realization inspired him to enter the textile industry. "After 20 years, I now know a lot more goes into making and marketing a textile than just cotton."

The family navigated the process of finding U.S. businesses to spin bales of lint into yarn, weave fabric, and cut and sew the sheets into bedding. Simple sheet sets provided a straightforward entry to the market.

"Our first order was 50 bales of cotton that made 20,000 yards of fabric," says Anna, who manages marketing and operations for Red Land Cotton. At 7 yards per sheet, that run made 3,000 sheet sets. "It was a big investment for us, but small potatoes for the processors."

Anna was a graphic designer before returning to help make Red Land Cotton a reality.

"I knew nothing, but the internet is an amazing tool," she says. While her brothers focused on farming, Anna, Mark and Cassandra worked on growing the textile business. In 2024, they made 350,000 yards of fabric just for sheets. They have expanded to include more linen options, and are venturing into more prints and colors.

The supply chain has presented significant challenges. The biggest bottleneck was the cut-and-sew process. To remedy the situation, they leased and restarted an abandoned Mississippi cut-and-sew facility.

"There's a rich history of textile manufacturing in the area," Anna says. There was equipment and a community of skilled sewers. They also used a local Moulton, Alabama, cut-and-sew business. They've since purchased the business and brought it into their warehouse and store facility.

Organic tee. About 300 miles to the east, Texas Panhandle cotton farmer, Gary Oldham, also found himself frustrated with cotton market instability.

Oldham left a career in aerospace engineering to help his mother on the farm after she





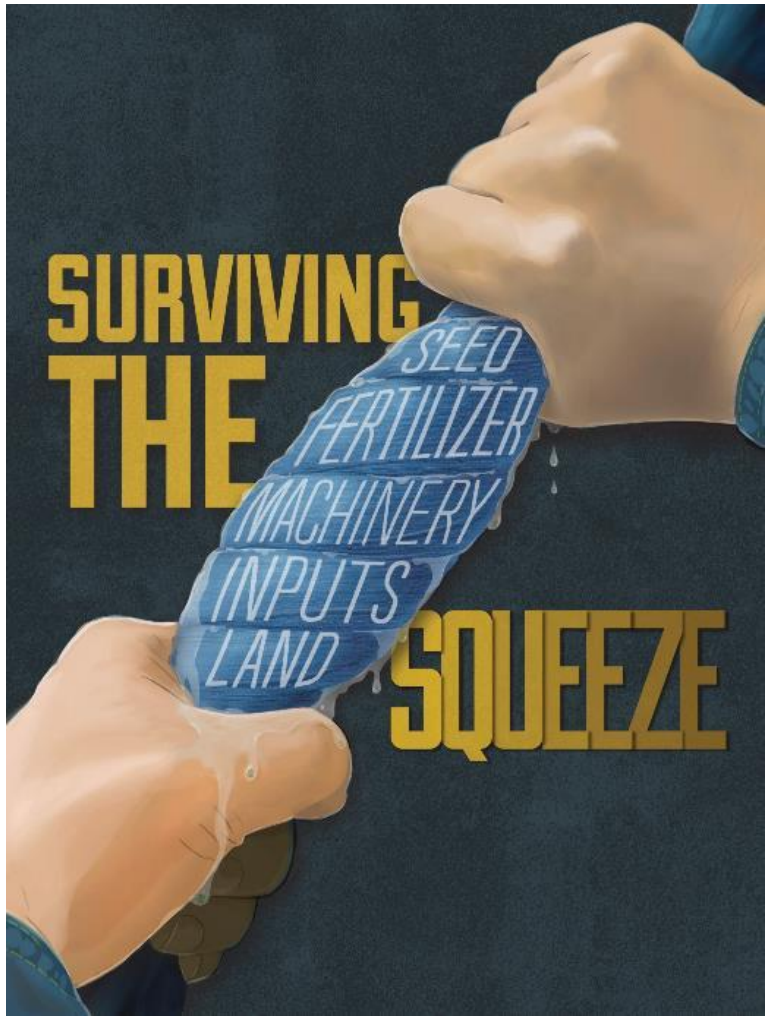
Above. When the market for organic cotton t-shirt materials... Gary Oldham went the value-added route making simple organic t-shirts and eventually other apparel with his crop. **Opposite.** Cozy blankets are one of many items made from cotton grown on the Yeager's Alabama farm and marketed through their retail store, Red Land Cotton.

THE FURROW • 11

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Economics and Management

1st place



"Surviving the Squeeze"
Adrienne Held
Successful Farming

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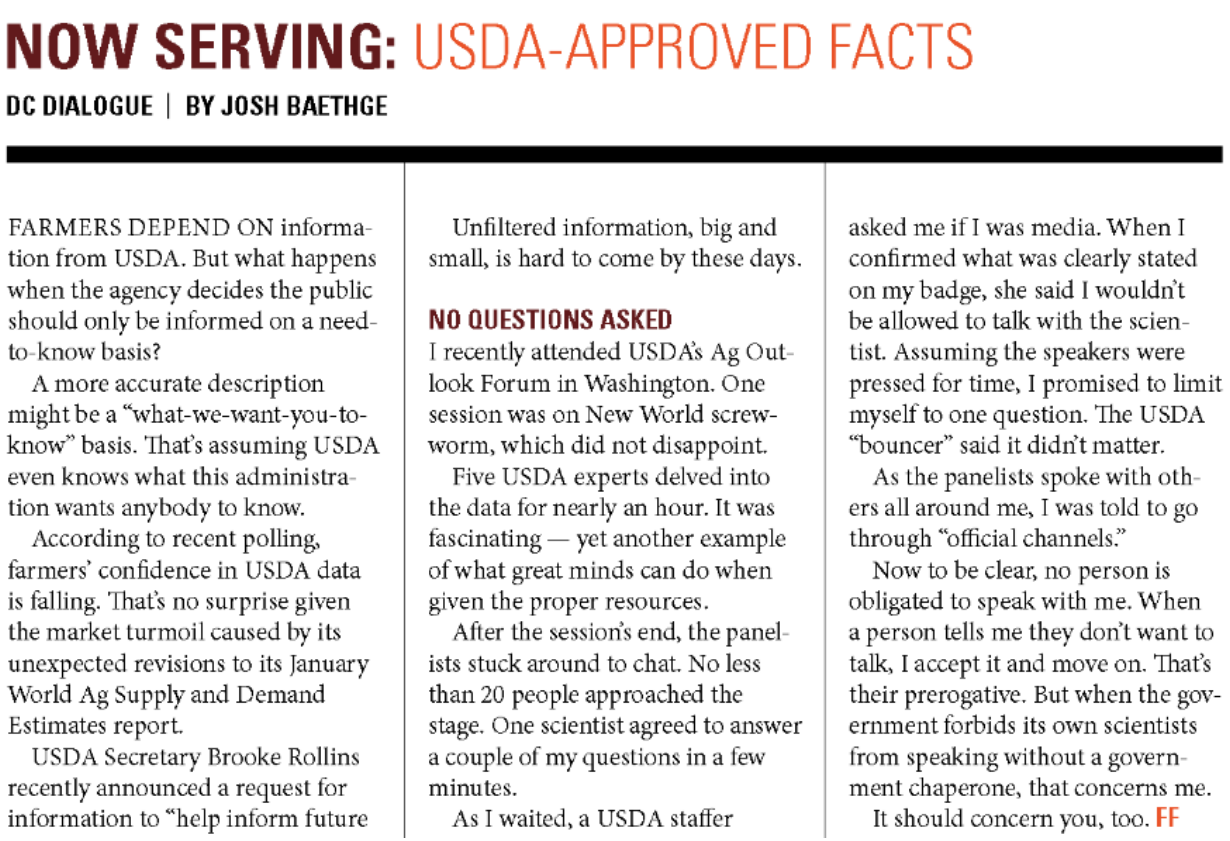
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Editorial Opinion

Editorial Opinion

3rd place

"Now Serving: USDA Approved Facts"
Joshua Baethge
DTN/Progressive Farmer



NOW SERVING: USDA-APPROVED FACTS

DC DIALOGUE | BY JOSH BAETHGE

FARMERS DEPEND ON information from USDA. But what happens when the agency decides the public should only be informed on a need-to-know basis?

A more accurate description might be a "what-we-want-you-to-know" basis. That's assuming USDA even knows what this administration wants anybody to know.

According to recent polling, farmers' confidence in USDA data is falling. That's no surprise given the market turmoil caused by its unexpected revisions to its January World Ag Supply and Demand Estimates report.

USDA Secretary Brooke Rollins recently announced a request for information to "help inform future

Unfiltered information, big and small, is hard to come by these days.

NO QUESTIONS ASKED

I recently attended USDA's Ag Outlook Forum in Washington. One session was on New World screwworm, which did not disappoint.

Five USDA experts delved into the data for nearly an hour. It was fascinating — yet another example of what great minds can do when given the proper resources.

After the session's end, the panelists stuck around to chat. No less than 20 people approached the stage. One scientist agreed to answer a couple of my questions in a few minutes.

As I waited, a USDA staffer asked me if I was media. When I confirmed what was clearly stated on my badge, she said I wouldn't be allowed to talk with the scientist. Assuming the speakers were pressed for time, I promised to limit myself to one question. The USDA "bouncer" said it didn't matter.

As the panelists spoke with others all around me, I was told to go through "official channels."

Now to be clear, no person is obligated to speak with me. When a person tells me they don't want to talk, I accept it and move on. That's their prerogative. But when the government forbids its own scientists from speaking without a government chaperone, that concerns me.

It should concern you, too. FF

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Editorial Opinion

2nd place Tie

"U.S. Soybean Farmers pay price of Trade War with China"
Gil Gullickson
Wallaces Farmer

U.S. soybean farmers pay price of trade war with China

As Things Look to Me: Tariffs may help get a better trade deal from China, but Trump administration risks losing a market that annually buys 25% of U.S. soybeans.

At a Glance

Headed into fall, the U.S. had not sold one soybean to historically its largest customer, China.

Long term, tariffs don't work. At their most severe, they worsened the Great Depression.

If the U.S. loses China as its largest soybean customer, there will be a reckoning in what to do with unneeded soybean acres.

By Gil Gullickson

Editor, Wallaces Farmer

October 22, 2025

ACN Agricultural Communicators Network

Editorial Opinion

2nd place Tie

"Steer Carcass Weights Hit New All-Time High of 983 Pounds"
ShayLe Stewart
DTN/Progressive Farmer

Progressive FARMER powered by DTN

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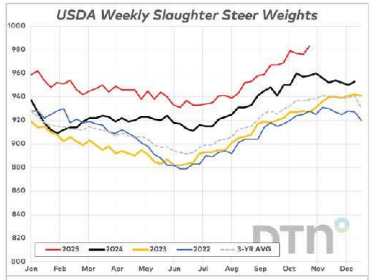
Call the Market

Steer Carcass Weights Hit New All-Time High of 983 Pounds

11/19/2025 | 11:00 AM CST



By ShayLe Stewart, DTN Livestock Analyst



There's no doubt, we need cattle that yield, grade and produce high quality meat. But the industry can't continue to push the growth envelope and not expect catastrophic problems to arise. (DTN ProphetX chart)

I hate to be the bearer of bad news given that the market has had plenty to digest lately. But sitting quietly behind the scenes and getting forgotten about among all the headlines, another unfavorable story is playing out: The ever-increasing weight of fed cattle carcasses.

With the government back online, the weekly actual slaughter under federal inspection data was released and shared some concerning numbers. For the week ended Nov. 1 (as the report runs two weeks behind schedule) dressed steers averaged 983 pounds -- a new all-time high for the industry, surpassing the weights of 2020 during the COVID shutdown by a long mile.

To put this new milestone into perspective, for the same week a year ago steers were averaging 958 pounds (25 pounds less than today). Compared to two years ago, steers were averaging 927 pounds (56 pounds less than today). And compared to 2020 -- when fed cattle supplies were backed up because of the COVID packing plant shutdown -- fed steers were averaging 924 pounds (59 pounds less than today).

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Editorial Opinion

1st place

“The 4-Alarm Fire in Farm Country”
Holly Spangler
Prairie Farmer/Farm Progress



4 | OCT 2025
PrairieFarmer.com

MY GENERATION
OPINION

The 4-alarm fire in farm country

When I texted Kenny Hartman Jr. the other night, he stood in Reagan National Airport, about to board a plane home from Washington, D.C.

It's harvest in Illinois, but the Master Farmer from Waterloo is also the National Corn Growers Association president, and he'd been to D.C. to deliver a message to federal policymakers: Grain prices are abysmal, inputs are too high, and you need to create more markets.

"The only way we're going to get out of this is to grind more corn," Hartman says. "The big thing is demand."

"This" is a farm economy that's getting bleaker every day. That explains Hartman's dedication, especially as he and his daughter Amanda harvest southern Illinois fields that are 10 to 20 bushels below average. He predicts their corn farther south might not break 100 bushels an acre.

That won't break even, not even close. That's an exceptional loss.

Nearly every farmer I've talked to this summer has plans to cut fertilizer application this fall, and hardly anybody is planning to trade equipment unless they have to. Plenty are preparing for

HOLLY SPANGLER

And the average 2024 farm operating income ratio was negative for the first time in 30 years, and well below the five-year average of 18.2%.

"The farm economy is getting tougher by the hour," says Sean Arians, a Morrison farmer who also works as NCGA vice president of sustainable production. "Some say a repeat of the '80s farm crisis. Others say worse."

Sure, interest rates aren't nearly as high as in the 1980s. But every other number is so much bigger now, farmers can get themselves in deeper trouble faster.

Solutions-oriented

So, what do you do? Increase demand, for one.

On the corn side, Congress needs to pass the Nationwide Consumer and Fuel Retailer Choice Act of 2025, which would remove summertime E15 sales restrictions. That would help.

Lesly Weber McNitt, NCGA vice president of public policy, is tired of messing around. "Farmers are tired of excuses, tired of procedural hurdles, and they're tired of political finger-pointing," she says. "If

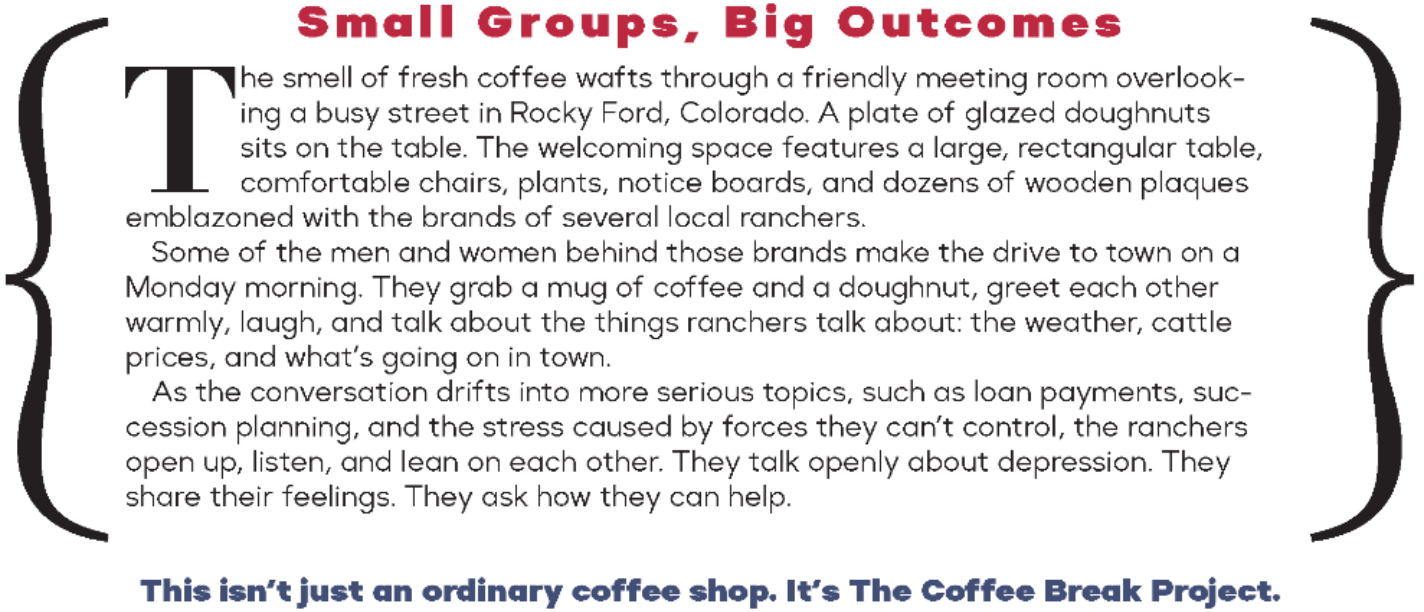
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Human Interest

Human Interest

3rd place

"Small Groups, Big Outcomes"
Lisa Foust Prater
Successful Farming



Small Groups, Big Outcomes

The smell of fresh coffee wafts through a friendly meeting room overlooking a busy street in Rocky Ford, Colorado. A plate of glazed doughnuts sits on the table. The welcoming space features a large, rectangular table, comfortable chairs, plants, notice boards, and dozens of wooden plaques emblazoned with the brands of several local ranchers.

Some of the men and women behind those brands make the drive to town on a Monday morning. They grab a mug of coffee and a doughnut, greet each other warmly, laugh, and talk about the things ranchers talk about: the weather, cattle prices, and what's going on in town.

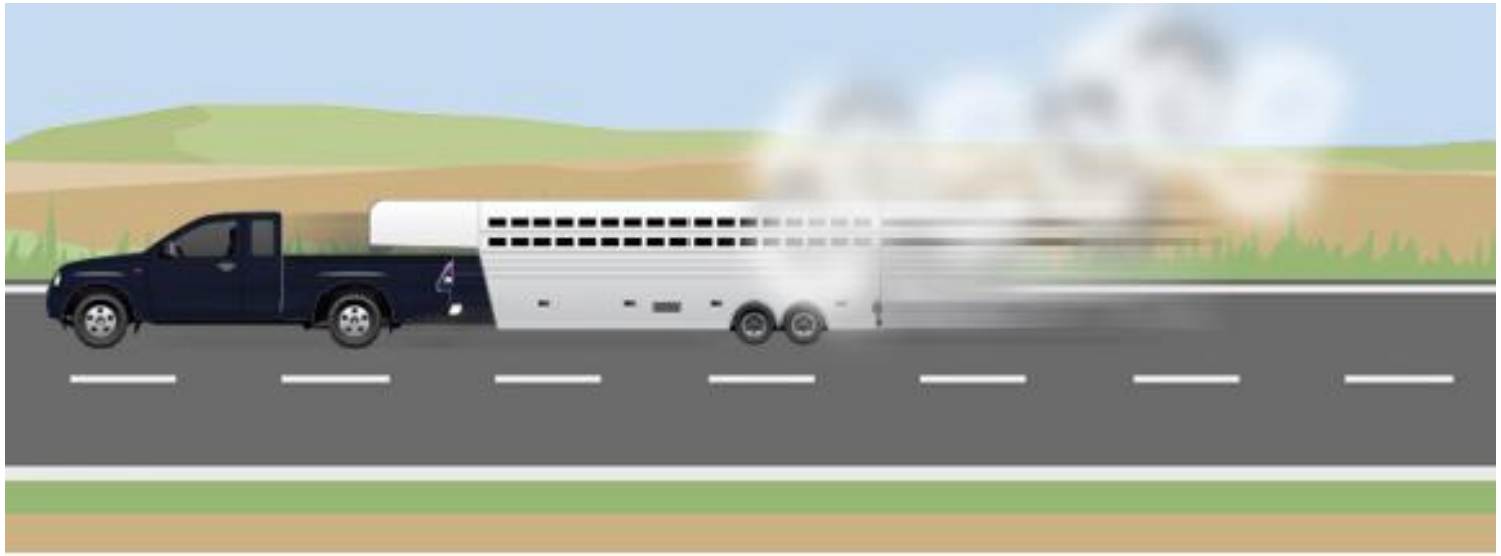
As the conversation drifts into more serious topics, such as loan payments, succession planning, and the stress caused by forces they can't control, the ranchers open up, listen, and lean on each other. They talk openly about depression. They share their feelings. They ask how they can help.

This isn't just an ordinary coffee shop. It's The Coffee Break Project.

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Human Interest

2nd place



"Unity Amid Tragedy"
Jennifer Shike
Farm Journal's PORK

Unity Amid Tragedy

Stock show competitors come to family's aid as pig trailer burst into flames on interstate

on the trailer," he says. "We got most of the flames down but didn't have enough to get the fire completely out."

When he opened the door, he found the banner-winning Poland China gilt dead and the other pigs clinging to life.

ROADSIDE RESCUE

The fire picked up as he thought of how to get the pigs off the trailer.

ACN Agricultural Communicators Network

Human Interest

1st place

"The Right Balance"
Susan Payne
DTN/Progressive Farmer



D.J. AND CHELSEA HLADKY
D.J. & Chelsea Hladky Farms
Ainsworth, Nebraska

By **Susan Payne**, @jpusan
Photos By **Joel Reichenberger**, @JReichPF

The Right Balance

Despite the challenges of row cropping in Nebraska's Sandhills, D.J. Hladky feels blessed to farm with his family at his side. Gus, 3, and D.J. (left) share time during the harvest.

Balancing a family and farm life in the Sandhills of north-central Nebraska doesn't come easy for farmers D.J. and Chelsea Hladky. Yet, they have created a family-oriented operation near Ainsworth in which every family member—down to the youngest—plays a part. "Together" is a word the family values as they navigate the restless pace of each season on their 5,000-plus-acre operation spread across Rock and Brown counties.

> EARLY DAYS

Coming from a long line of farmers, D.J. was introduced to farming when his father, Dan, who was born and raised in the Kansas City metropolitan area, thought the Sandhills would provide a better life for his growing family. They started farming near Long Pine, Nebraska, about 10 miles east of Ainsworth. Eventually, Dan was able to secure his own operation.

Throughout his childhood, D.J. saw his father pour everything into farming: long summers, constant management and countless hours of work. After high school, D.J. enrolled at Northeast Community College, in Norfolk, Nebraska, to study business and finance. In a first-semester English class, he met his future bride, Chelsea.

She eventually moved to Lincoln, Nebraska, to pursue a degree in nursing in 2006. A few months later, D.J. followed with his business degree and a job working for a financial institution. But, the momentum for a desk job was short-lived. "It didn't take me long to realize that a desk job was not for me," he says.

Instead, he joined the Burlington Northern Santa Fe Railway, working eight days on and six days off between Lincoln, Nebraska, and Gillette, Wyoming, a nearly 650-mile highway stretch.

While he enjoyed the railroad, D.J. began to change his outlook on the farm. A year later, he started farming on the side with his dad.

"The railroad made me realize that life on the farm wasn't so bad," he says. "I would work eight days in Wyoming, come back to the farm in Long Pine and go back to see Chelsea in Lincoln for two days."

> TIME TO FARM

D.J. rented his first acres in the spring of 2008 on a 130-acre tract shared 50-50 with his father. The more

This farming couple seeks symmetry between working the farm and nurturing their family.

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Humorous Article

Humorous Article

3rd place

"Folk Forecasting"
Katie Knapp
The Ag Photographer
The Furrow



FOLK FORECASTING

STORY AND PHOTOS BY KATIE KNAPP

Old wives' tales guide farmers through the seasons.

Why do we watch for woolly bear caterpillars and plant vegetables on certain holidays? Because sometimes folklore is right.

Carol Connare, editor-in-chief of The Old Farmer's Almanac, sees old wives' tales and the like as more than superstition.

"Weather lore is observations over time, which is what data is," she says. "People were sharing these things in sing-song ways because we remember things better when they're in that format."

Take woolly bear caterpillars that gardeners watch for winter predictions. "I love looking for them," Connare admits. "I take pictures every year to see if the band is bigger or smaller. According to the old saw, the wider that orange band, the milder the winter, and the wider the black bands, the tougher the winter."

Peter Goble, assistant state climatologist at Colorado State University, is skeptical about the woolly worms. "If there really was a bug that could reliably predict the weather, we would know more about it," he says with a laugh.

But, he's not opposed to all lore.

"My favorite is the red sky one," says Goble. "If you have a red sky at night, that probably indicates higher pressure conditions to your west. Storm systems tend to propagate from west to east, so that's a decent indicator that overnight and the next day you will have smooth sailing and clear conditions."

March coming in like a lion and out like a lamb or the opposite also makes sense to him.

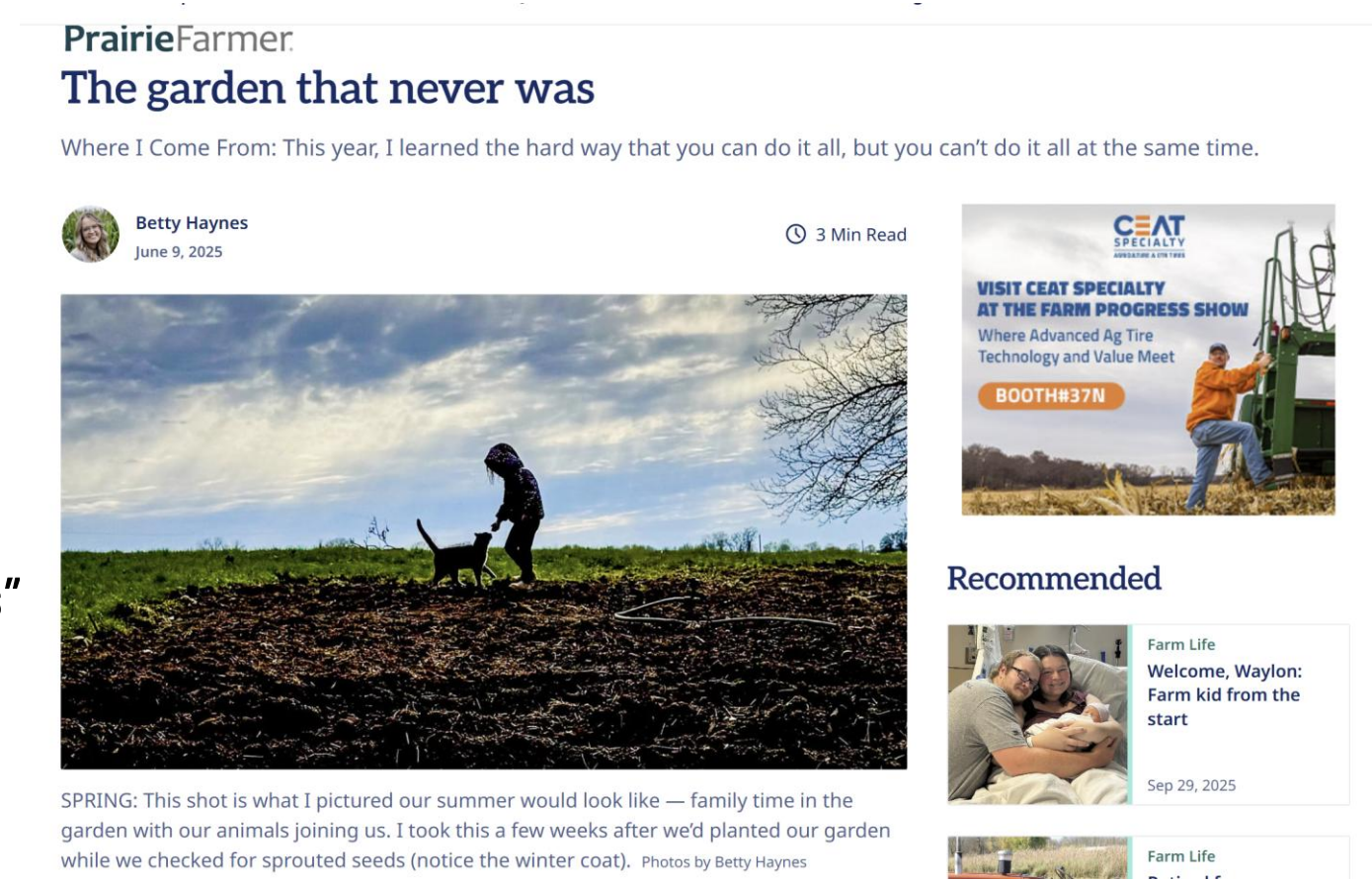
"There is at least a little bit of truth to it," Goble explains. "If you have a cooler timeframe,

ACN Agricultural Communicators Network

Humorous Article

2nd place

"The garden that never was"
Betty Haynes
Midwestern Lens



PrairieFarmer

The garden that never was

Where I Come From: This year, I learned the hard way that you can do it all, but you can't do it all at the same time.

Betty Haynes
June 9, 2025

3 Min Read

SPRING: This shot is what I pictured our summer would look like — family time in the garden with our animals joining us. I took this a few weeks after we'd planted our garden while we checked for sprouted seeds (notice the winter coat). Photos by Betty Haynes

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Farm Life
Welcome, Waylon: Farm kid from the start
Sep 29, 2025

Farm Life

ACN Agricultural Communicators Network

Humorous Article

1st place

"Forget the imperfections — take the pictures"
Betty Haynes
Midwestern Lens



ACN Agricultural Communicators Network

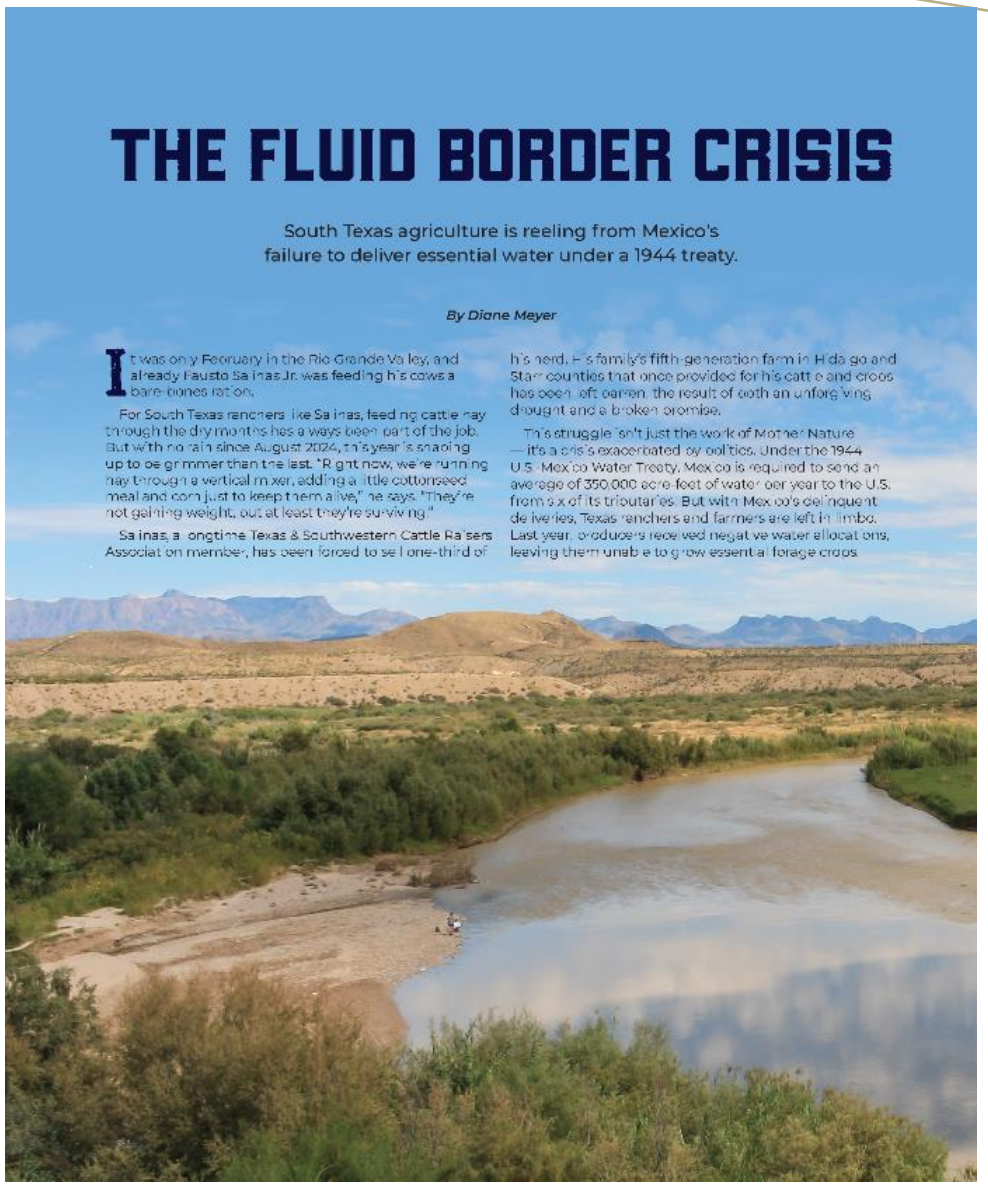
ACN
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Communicators
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Issues

Issues

3rd place

“The Fluid Border Crisis”
Diane Meyer
Grant Company LLC
Texas & Southwestern Cattle Raisers Association



THE FLUID BORDER CRISIS

South Texas agriculture is reeling from Mexico's failure to deliver essential water under a 1944 treaty.

By Diane Meyer

It was only February in the Rio Grande Valley, and already Fausto Salinas Jr. was feeding his cows a bare-bones ration.

For South Texas ranchers like Salinas, feeding cattle hay through the dry months has always been part of the job. But with no rain since August 2024, this year is shaping up to be grimmer than the last. "Right now, we're running hay through a vertical mixer, adding a little cottonseed meal and corn just to keep them alive," he says. "They're not gaining weight, but at least they're surviving."

Salinas, a longtime Texas & Southwestern Cattle Raisers Association member, has been forced to sell one-third of his herd. His family's fifth-generation farm in Hidalgo and Starr counties that once provided for his cattle and crops has been left barren, the result of both an unforgiving drought and a broken promise.

This struggle isn't just the work of Mother Nature — it's a crisis exacerbated by politics. Under the 1944 U.S.-Mexico Water Treaty, Mexico is required to send an average of 350,000 acre-feet of water per year to the U.S. from six of its tributaries. But with Mexico's delinquent deliveries, Texas ranchers and farmers are left in limbo. Last year, producers received negative water allocations, leaving them unable to grow essential forage crops

ACN Agricultural Communicators Network

Issues

2nd place



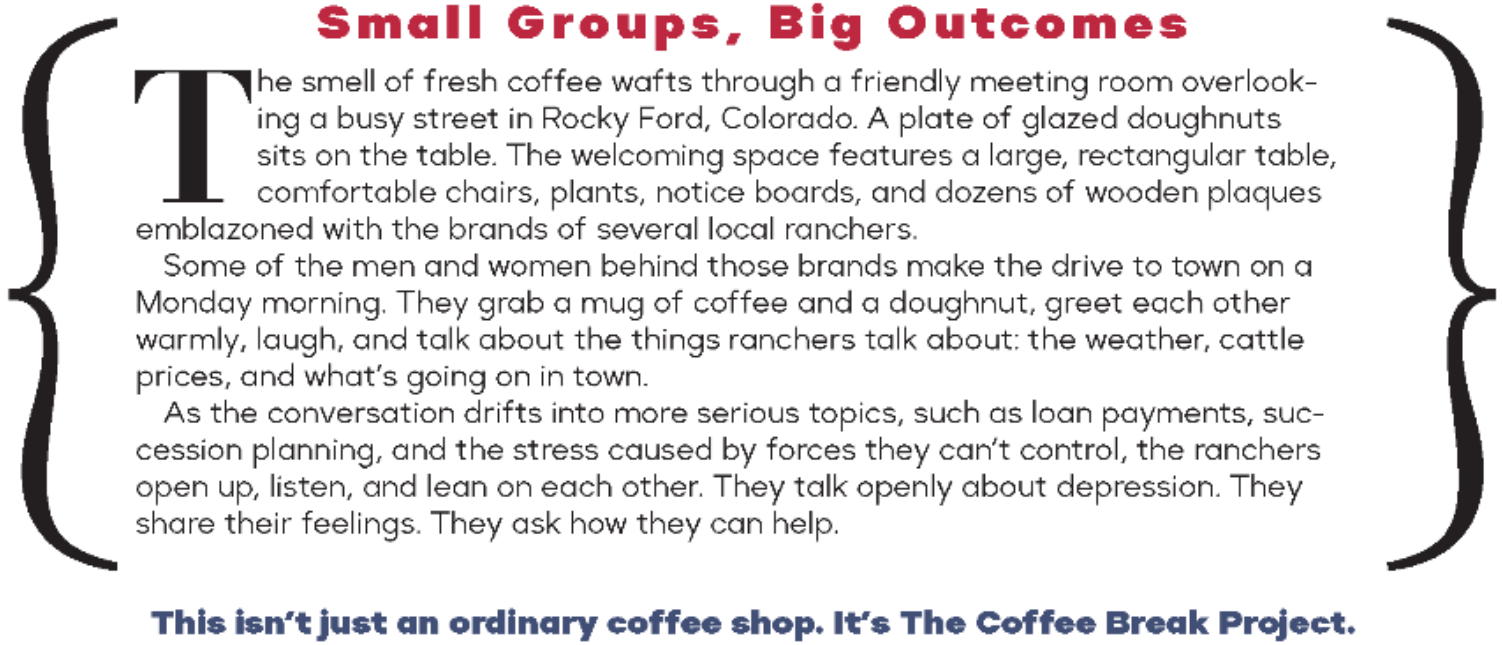
"The Pests Are Back in Town"
Adrienne Held
Successful Farming

ACN Agricultural Communicators Network

Issues

1st place

"Small Groups, Big Outcomes"
Lisa Foust Prater
Successful Farming



Small Groups, Big Outcomes

The smell of fresh coffee wafts through a friendly meeting room overlooking a busy street in Rocky Ford, Colorado. A plate of glazed doughnuts sits on the table. The welcoming space features a large, rectangular table, comfortable chairs, plants, notice boards, and dozens of wooden plaques emblazoned with the brands of several local ranchers.

Some of the men and women behind those brands make the drive to town on a Monday morning. They grab a mug of coffee and a doughnut, greet each other warmly, laugh, and talk about the things ranchers talk about: the weather, cattle prices, and what's going on in town.

As the conversation drifts into more serious topics, such as loan payments, succession planning, and the stress caused by forces they can't control, the ranchers open up, listen, and lean on each other. They talk openly about depression. They share their feelings. They ask how they can help.

This isn't just an ordinary coffee shop. It's The Coffee Break Project.

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On-Farm Production

On-Farm Production

3rd place

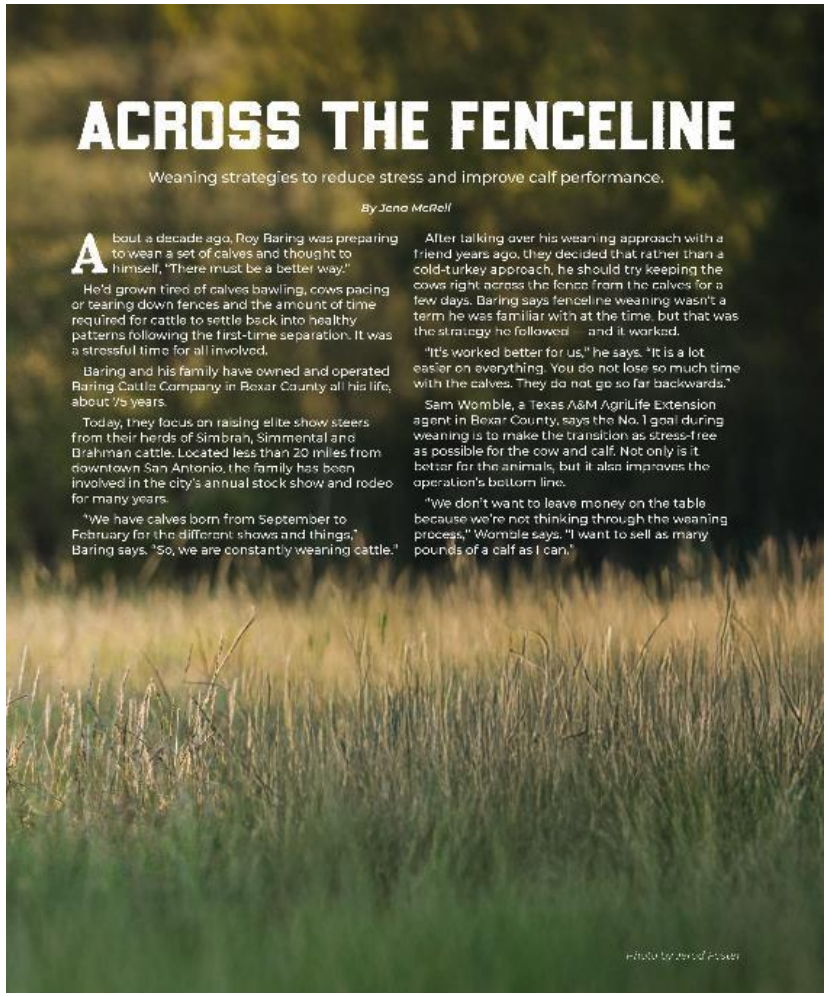
“Spring Moves that Pay”
Kriss Nelson
Iowa Soybean Association





On-Farm Production

2nd place



ACROSS THE FENCELINE

Weaning strategies to reduce stress and improve calf performance.

By Jena McRell

About a decade ago, Roy Baring was preparing to wean a set of calves and thought to himself, "There must be a better way."

He'd grown tired of calves bawling, cows pacing or tearing down fences and the amount of time required for cattle to settle back into healthy patterns following the first-time separation. It was a stressful time for all involved.

Baring and his family have owned and operated Baring Cattle Company in Bexar County all his life, about 75 years.

Today, they focus on raising elite show steers from their herds of Simbran, Simmental and Brahman cattle. Located less than 20 miles from downtown San Antonio, the family has been involved in the city's annual stock show and rodeo for many years.

"We have calves born from September to February for the different shows and things," Baring says. "So, we are constantly weaning cattle."

After talking over his weaning approach with a friend years ago, they decided that rather than a cold-turkey approach, he should try keeping the cows right across the fence from the calves for a few days. Baring says fenceline weaning wasn't a term he was familiar with at the time, but that was the strategy he followed — and it worked.

"It's worked better for us," he says. "It is a lot easier on everything. You do not lose so much time with the calves. They do not go so far backwards."

Sam Womble, a Texas A&M AgriLife Extension agent in Bexar County, says the No. 1 goal during weaning is to make the transition as stress-free as possible for the cow and calf. Not only is it better for the animals, but it also improves the operation's bottom line.

"We don't want to leave money on the table because we're not thinking through the weaning process," Womble says. "I want to sell as many pounds of a calf as I can."

"Across the Fenceline"
Jena McRell
Grant Company / The Cattleman, Texas & Southwestern Cattle Raisers Association

ACN Agricultural Communicators Network

On-Farm Production

1st place

"Mapping the Future"
Allison Jenkins
MFA

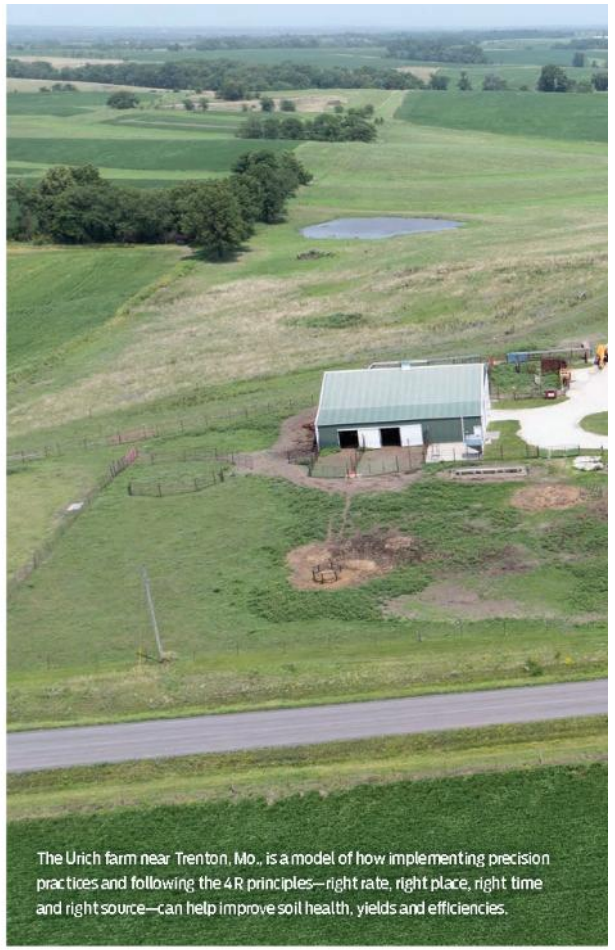
Mapping the future

Tradition meets technology at Urich Farms, where Nutri-Track, 4R strategies and data-driven decisions boost yields and soil health

For five generations now, the Urich family has farmed in north-central Missouri, raising crops and cattle with stewardship of both the land and their legacy in mind. Over the past decade, that stewardship has intensified with the help of precision agriculture technologies, from variable-rate applications and prescription planting to advanced yield mapping and drone spraying.

Today, the Urichs are not just farming the land—they're decoding it.

"The biggest thing that I hear from the partners that we work with is that we're one of the few that really takes the data that we get and puts it to work," said Kristi Urich, who joined



The Urich farm near Trenton, Mo., is a model of how implementing precision practices and following the 4R principles—right rate, right place, right time and right source—can help improve soil health, yields and efficiencies.

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Personality Profile

Personality Profile

3rd place



"Life by the Season"
Megan Silveira
Angus Journal

Personality Profile

2nd place

"Turning tragedy into rodeo triumph"
Andy Castillo
Farm Progress

Turning tragedy into rodeo triumph



BY ANDY CASTILLO

IT'S EARLY. RYLEIGH Farson, 14, zips along a dirt road 7 miles west of Abilene on a UTV. Behind her, a cloud of dust obscures the rodeo arena.

Ryleigh heads to a pasture to turn on water after feeding the bucking horses and bulls with her father, Matt. Cornfields stretch into a pastel sky. Birdsong floats above the rustling stalks. It's a perfect summer morning — until it isn't.

There's a rock ahead. She swerves. The vehicle flips.

Seconds later, Ryleigh finds herself pinned by the 2023 Can Am. She has a broken tibia, fibula and severe nerve damage. Her beloved dog, Tank, a mix of red heeler and Jack Russell terrier, senses the accident and panics. He barks incessantly to alert Ryleigh's mother, DeLynn.

Connor Hasenbank, a deputy with the Dickinson County Sheriff's Office, is the first emergency responder on the scene. He applies a tourniquet. Then, paramedics airlift Farson to Wesley Medical Center in Wichita, where she is rushed into emergency surgery.

"I thought it was a dream," Ryleigh recalls. "I told myself to wake up, but then I realized I was already awake. It felt like forever when I was lying there by myself. It felt like 10 years."

— but the infection prevailed. Eventually, she faced a life-altering decision: keep her right leg, which would require additional surgeries and skin grafts, or undergo amputation.

She chose the latter.

Two years later, Ryleigh is a picture of resilience. Her youthful appearance and demeanor mask her strength that's been forged in hardship. Now almost 16, she has endured more pain than some experience in a lifetime.

"Before my accident, I was always so focused on sports and popularity. That was a big thing. But after, I find myself looking for the people who truly believe in me and want good for me," she says.

Seeing her daughter lying helpless beneath the UTV was "pretty tough," DeLynn recalls. "As a parent, you don't ever want to see your kid in that position," she says. "I would have switched spots with her in a heartbeat."

Ryleigh says she spent months coming to grips with the accident and wondered if she'd ever get back on a horse, let alone continue her passion for rodeo competition.

"You hear about bad things happening to somebody else, but you're like, 'Oh, that's never going to happen to me.' When it does, it's just hard to believe," she says. "After the amputation, I didn't want to look down. I was scared to."

ACN Agricultural Communicators Network

Personality Profile

1st place

"The Lasting Legacy"
Jessica Hartman
American Angus Association



YOUR ASSOCIATION

The Lasting Legacy

Harlan Ritchie's indelible impact on the U.S. beef industry.

by Jessica Hartman, American Angus Association

A hush falls over the crowded stands. Those in their seats lean forward, bracing their elbows on their knees. Cowboy hats shade the glare of the lights as their eyes narrow in on the lineup before them. Eagerly, they await a decision that will influence the choices they'll make on their operations in the next year.

In the arena, the lineup of cattle begin to fidget. The showmen on the halters work to keep their animals calm, splitting their attention between the restless bull at their side and thousands of people and slap an animal that you deem champion, that nobody else deems champion, requires tremendous courage," reflects Jason Rowntree, a current MSU professor of animal science. "It is that courage that pushed our industry forward."

Ritchie would stand in an uncomfortable moment, in that criticism, time and time again. In fact, his long-time business partner and family friend, Ken Geuns, remembers many stories Ritchie told about people berating him as he left the ring or picking up his house phone to get an earful about his selections.

"Harlan was a man of action, and he was not about to buckle under somebody else's pressure on

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Regular Column

Regular Column

3rd place

“What happens to farms when politics drive markets?”
Holly Spangler
Prairie Farmer/Farm Progress



MY GENERATION
OPINION

What happens to farms when politics drive markets?

I sat around a table with a group of farmers the other night, lamenting markets and slowly making our way through a basket of chips and salsa.

Specifically: the cattle market, which had just plummeted based on President Donald Trump's plan to import Argentinian beef, and the soybean market, which had just jumped 20 cents on news of Trump's meeting with China.

"How are we supposed to market when the fundamentals don't apply anymore?" one farmer asked.

That's the million-dollar question.

Gary Schnitkey, longtime University of Illinois ag economist and my favorite sage, believes fundamentals still apply, but they're layered with another dimension: government policies.

Pass the chip basket to Gary.

HOLLY SPANGLER

The administrative state

Schnitkey recalls five times since 2017 that markets have swung wildly due to government policy changes:

is reality. So how do we sell corn around it?

Bruce Blythe covers commodity markets for Farm Progress and says the unusually volatile markets we've seen this fall are due to Trump himself. The moves in grain and cattle markets have been driven by funds and other high-speed traders using algorithms that trigger buy-sell orders based on social posts and headlines.

Those soybean futures we discussed over salsa actually doubled in volatility from Halloween through late the next week, when the U.S. and China struck a trade truce. It was "good" volatility because January beans are up over $1 since mid-October.

"We haven't seen $11 soybean futures in about 16 months, so take advantage of situations like that when you can because these rallies may be short-lived with massive crops in the U.S. and South America," Blythe tells me. "Don't fall into the trap of thinking, 'Well, we got to $11. I'm going to wait for $12.' "

ACN Agricultural Communicators Network

Regular Column

2nd place

"FFA Probe Triggers a Popeye Moment"
Greg D. Horstmeier
DTN/Progressive Farmer



4/30/26, 2:38 PM FFA Probe Triggers a Popeye Moment

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Editors' Notebook

FFA Probe Triggers a Popeye Moment

2/9/2026 | 2:22 PM CST

By Greg D Horstmeier , DTN Editor-in-Chief

Connect with Greg:

@greghorstmeier

Pics, or it didn't happen. The author, about to turn as blue as the 47-year-old jacket he managed to pry on. (DTN photo courtesy of Greg D. Horstmeier)

My apologies to Pastor Martin Niemoller, but:

First, they came for the press, with lawsuits and arrests, and the people said nothing, because, well, reporters are obnoxious, and most folks get their infotainment from Faux News.

Then they came for the corporations, and the people didn't have to say anything because the CEOs brought gifts ar crypto coin and extremely flexible knees.

Then they came for the immigrants, and some people spoke up, and those people were summarily arrested, beaten in the face and called vicious names.

And then they came for the FFA, and this guy, at least, had his Popeye moment. Because "it's all I can stands, and I c stands no more."

Last week, a group of Republican congressmen started an investigation of The National FFA Organization. You kno those youngsters in blue jackets.

You can read our coverage of the announcement of that investigation here: https://www.dtnpf.com/....

The investigators, Reps. Jason Smith, R-Mo., David Schweikert, R-Ariz., and Tracey Mann, R-Kansas, claim that the National FFA's tax-exempt status needs to be questioned because of the organization's ties to Syngenta, the seed a

ACN Agricultural Communicators Network

Regular Column

1st place

"Can we treat each other better?"
Pam Caraway
Farm Progress

CAN WE TREAT EACH OTHER BETTER?

THIS BUSINESS OF FARMING | BY PAM CARAWAY

AT A PICNIC table just outside the chain-link fence around his house, Julius Davis paged through a scrapbook of bittersweet memories.

The pages are not filled with smiling faces and happy times. Instead, the three-ring binder is a record of the Mississippi farm his grandfather lost, and Davis, the fourth generation in this family of farmers, regained.

It's a record of the farm he once worked, and USDA officials destroyed when they wrongly claimed a loan default



out-of-commission hay rake nearby. The quiet of a silenced farm heavier than the humidity.

The story of his unrelenting pursuit of restitution is all in that 2-inch binder. A plain white

his story stayed in my notebook that traveled the country with me before landing in a stack under my printer. Only recently did I figure out that perhaps I didn't share this story because I desperately want my country to be better than this.

MAKING AMENDS

One year after that picnic table conversation, Davis received restitution in the form of a $200,000 payment from the Inflation Reduction Act's Discrimination Financial Assistance Program, a historic

given the extent of the loss compounded by the delayed restitution. And yet, Davis was jubilant when he called to tell me.

"I've got another hard job now: Getting this place back to where it was. Getting it back so maybe one of my grandbabies will farm," he says.

Turns out he's faith-filled. He held onto hope. Perhaps granted forgiveness to the real trespassers. And he still somehow dreams of a future where his grandchildren can farm outside the shadow of discrimination.

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Technical Feature

Technical Feature

3rd place

“Corn pollination revolution in motion”
Gil Gullickson,
Wallaces Farmer/Farm Progress



Corn pollination revolution in motion

BY GIL GULLICKSON

THE SCENE MIMICS the urgency of a patient wheeled into a hospital emergency room. Any treatment delay will be fatal. Fortunately, technicians work to quickly defeat death on this day.

In this case, though, the "patient" is corn pollen. The emergency room is a air-conditioned mobile shed located at the edge of a central Iowa cornfield. Inside, technicians for PowerPollen, an Ames-based firm, clean and condition corn pollen before refrigerating it for future use.

Just as in a hospital emergency room, time is of the essence. If pollen is not refrigerated 30 to 45 minutes after it falls from a corn tassel, it dies.

All of this is part of an effort by PowerPollen to improve nature's impact on corn pollination. Pollen shed from a tassel's anthers often occurs in a "here and there, maybe once in awhile" fashion during a 10- to 14-day period. Cool, cloudy or humid weather delays pollen shed. Rainy conditions halt it, notes Mark Tidd, Iowa State University Extension agronomist.

Conversely, Bob Nielsen, a retired Purdue University Extension agronomist, found that during the silking and pollen-shed period, severe moisture stress may reduce yield up to 8% per day.

"We provide the ability to de-risk and control the pollination process," says Jason Kelsick, PowerPollen senior director of engineering. "We can put pollen on the silks at the right time and conditions to create kernels that produce the highest yield."

PowerPollen is first aiming to improve seed corn pollination.

"[Pollination] changes within a field can have a huge impact on [seed companies'] bottom line," Kelsick says. "There may be males shedding pollen, but the silks on the females have not emerged for pollination to occur. Sometimes, male plants may not be producing enough pollen."

BOOSTING SEED CORN PRODUCTION

PowerPollen's short-term strategy is to fill such pollination gaps. It uses a pollen harvester to glean pollen from tassels during pollination. Pollen is quickly drained, processed and refrigerated within the 30- to 45-minute survival window.

The company supplements seed corn fields with pollination problems with the gleaned pollen in several days during an optimum pollination window. PowerPollen uses an automated guidance pollen applicator with tubes that ferry the pollen onto silks.

PowerPollen also is developing a long-term strategy to boost seed corn pollination efficiency. Seed companies often use a ratio of one male plant to provide pollen to four female plants in seed cornfields, says Jake Klocke, PowerPollen engineering manager.

"The closer female plants are to a male row, the better the pollination," he says.

PowerPollen's strategy to increase seed yields is by using viable pollen stored up to five years to pollinate female plants farther away from male plants. For example, a 12-1 female-to-male ratio boosts 11% more kernel producing rows compared with a 4-1 ratio, Klocke says.

Eventually, the company aims to mix male plants (that are currently destroyed prior to kernels maturing) and apply pollen

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Technical Feature

2nd place



Sharp Eye on Precision

Sense and act technology brings targeted application, speed and more to the art of crop production.

"Sharp Eye On Precision" Dan Miller, DTN/Progressive Farmer

ACN Agricultural Communicators Network

Technical Feature

1st place



FROM THE FIELD TO FIFTH AVENUE

Soy powers New York City's hardest-working vehicles

STORY AND PHOTOGRAPHY BY KRISS NELSON

(Field photo by Joseph Rudolph)

In New York City, soybeans power ferries crossing the harbor, snowplows clearing streets, garbage trucks and emergency vehicles that keep the city running.

For farmers on the Big Apple Tour held in December, it was a reminder that soybeans do not simply "be grain-dealers, hog farms up in places you aren't" [illegible], doing real work in one of the world's biggest cities.

"The Big Apple Tour gives soybean farmers a firsthand look at how their crops are working to power the farm economy," says Tom Verry, director of outreach and development at Clean Fuels Alliance America. "New York City is proving that biodiesel and renewable diesel can fully replace fossil diesel at scale, from more than 2,000 city vehicles to inland assets like the Staten Island Ferry. Seeing the nation's largest city achieve nearly a 50 percent reduction in fleet greenhouse gas emissions underscores the real, growing demand for soybean-based clean fuels and the role farmers play in delivering practical, low-carbon solutions today."

Jason Kenner, a farmer from Kilmore and a United Soybean Board (USB) director, says it was low-key exciting to see ICBAs new mobile diesel pump blend pumpkin, the fuel in one of the nation's largest municipalities.

"Touring meetings with city leaders responsible for fleet and infrastructure decisions, officials walked through how they have steadily increased the percentage of biodiesel and renewable diesel in their fleets and emphasized that reliability has not been an issue. In fact, Kenner says the message to soybean leaders was a direct one: "Don't be afraid to be proactive and don't hesitate to take the story to other cities.

"They basically challenged us to keep pushing this to more municipalities," Kenner says, noting that if policymakers, New York would not be relying on fossil fuels the way it does today. "If they were seeing issues, we'd be hearing about it."

That confidence was reinforced with a firsthand look at renewable diesel in action aboard the Staten Island Ferry. Kenner says seeing the newer ferries, ICBAs new mobile diesel pump blend pumpkin, the fuel in one of New Yorkers who depend on it every day.

Beyond performance, Kenner said city staff shared an unexpected but telling benefit. Operators and maintenance workers have noticed a difference at the end of the day, with fewer harsh odors compared to traditional diesel.

"They joked that they come home smelling more like French fries instead of exhaust smoke," Kenner says. "It's a small thing, but it says a lot about the fuel and the experience for the people who work with it every day."

FUELING THE CITY

Soybeans grown on Midwest farms are helping keep New York City moving as the city expands its use of renewable diesel.

Keith Kerman, deputy commissioner and chief fleet officer for New York City's Department of Citywide Administrative Services (DCAS), remembers the city's first biodiesel trial in 2005, when it was tested in sanitation trucks on Staten Island.

"Our technical staff saw that it ran well, and met our operational needs," Kerman says. "That's what opened the door."

Two decades later, that early trial has evolved into a full-scale transition. Renewable diesel has replaced traditional diesel across New York City's fleet of more than 30,000 assets, the largest municipal fleet in the nation.

"This is not a B5 or B20 story," Kerman says. "It's 100 percent renewable diesel as a complete replacement."

Continued on Pg. 16

ERIC RENNER
USB director and farmer from Kilmore

TOM VERRY
Clean Fuels Alliance America director of outreach and development

KEITH KERMAN
NYC DCAS deputy commissioner and chief fleet officer

"From the Field to Fifth Avenue" Kriss Nelson, Iowa Soybean Association

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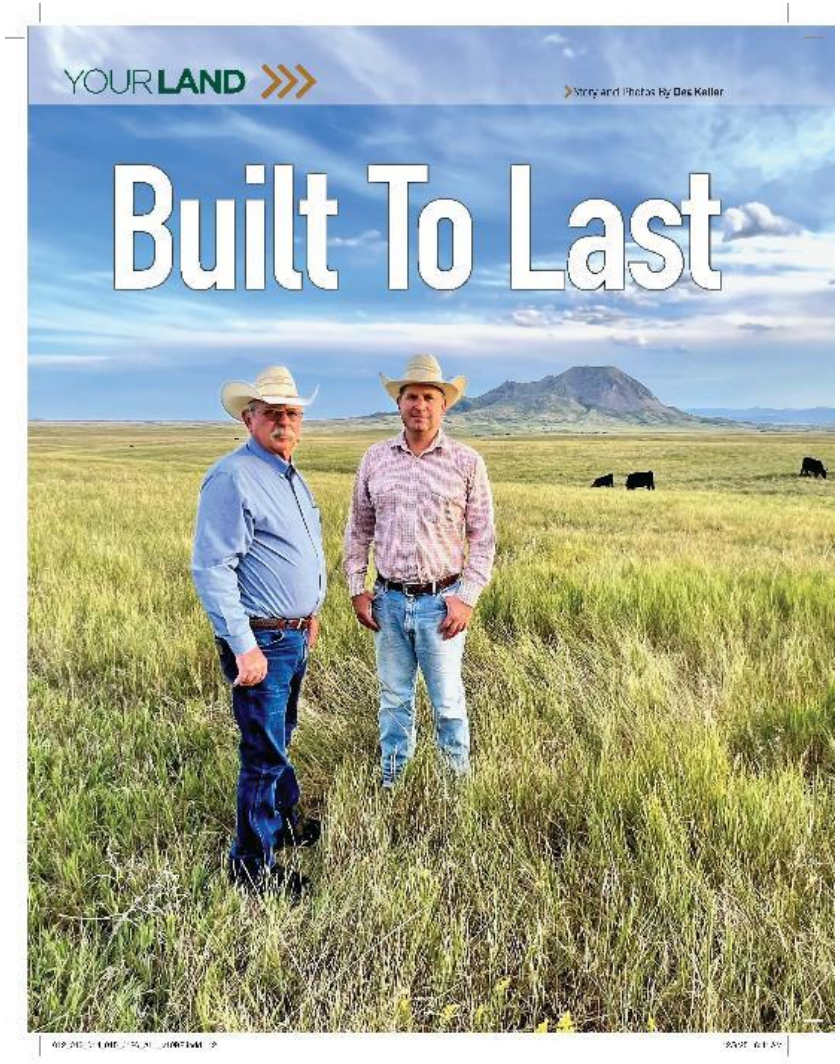
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Farm Feature

Farm Feature

3rd place

"Built To Last"
Des Keller
DTN/Progressive Farmer



Farm Feature

2nd place

"Finding the right farmer-landowner fit"
Betty Haynes
Midwestern Lens



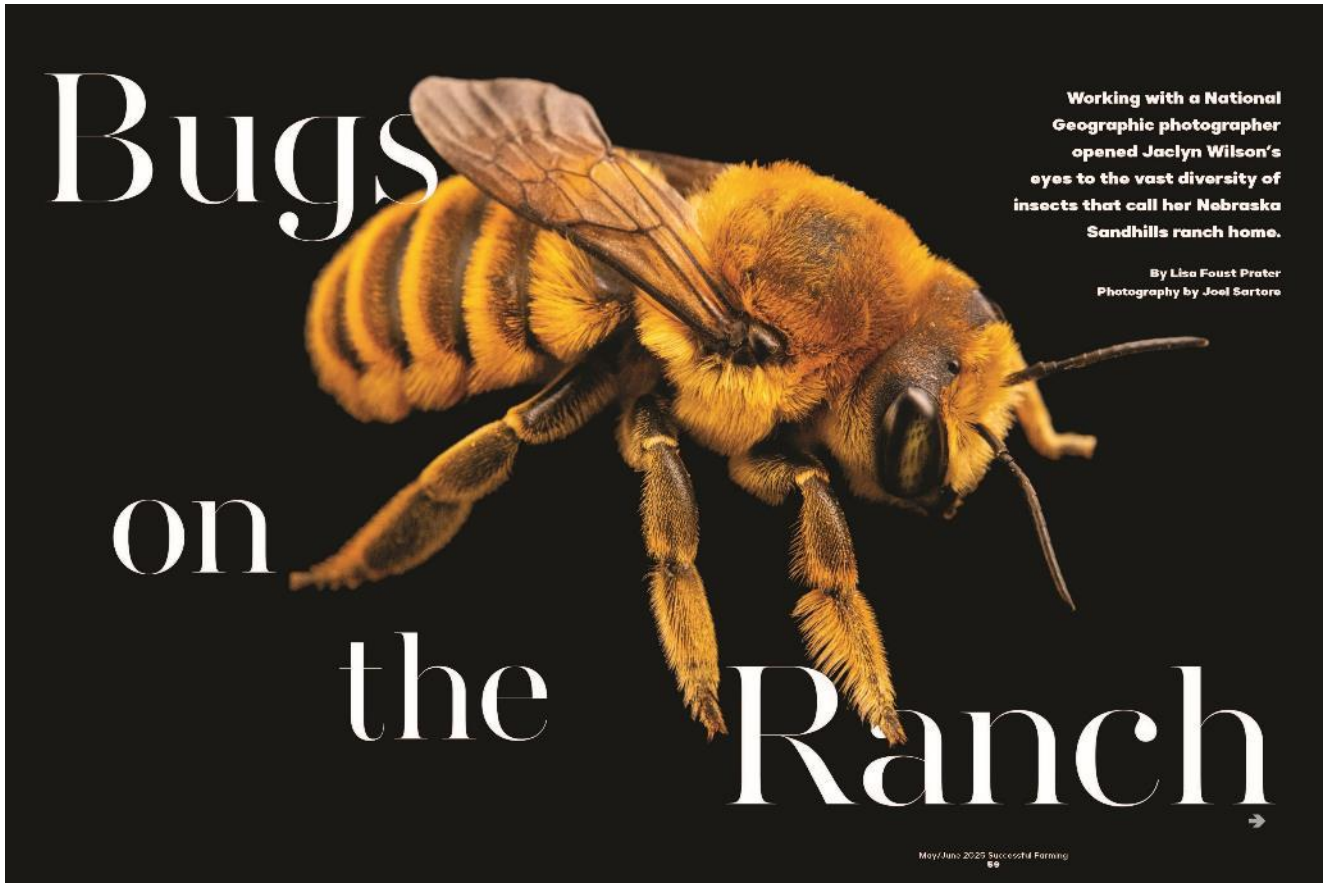
FARMING TOGETHER: The Vermeersch family formed a farming fit with Maggie McQuown and Steve Turman on a farm in Red Oak.

Finding the right farmer-landowner fit

ACN Agricultural Communicators Network

Farm Feature

1st place



"Bugs On the Ranch"
Lisa Foust Prater
Successful Farming

ACN Agricultural Communicators Network

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Emerging Writer

Emerging Writer

3rd place

"'Just Pause, Think'
A survivor's message"
Kriss Nelson
Iowa Soybean Association



INVESTING CHECKOFF DOLLARS

'Just Pause. Think.'

A survivor's message and expert tips for safer grain handling

Patrick Baker was 23 when an ordinary June morning on his family's farm near New Providence nearly became his last.

On June 26, 2013, he was doing what he had been doing for two days straight: climbing to the top of a grain bin to break loose a crust of moldy corn.

"My job, as the youngest on the farm, was to go up over the top of the bin and stand in the very center and try to poke the moldy corn down from the sting," says Baker, an Iowa Soybean Association (ISA) farmer-contributor. "I did this all day Monday, Tuesday and then again on Wednesday."

The bin was a standard 48-foot diameter, 90-foot high dry storage bin holding roughly 60,000 bushels. In a flash, things went wrong.

"My dad came up over the manhole on top of the bin, whistled that the truck was full," Baker says. "I poked it one more time and broke the wall of the crusted corn. I instantly fell through."

A hidden cavity of rotten grain swallowed him almost instantly.

"I literally fell down into the corn, about to my waist, and the auger was still running, so I kept going down," he says. "I had enough time to look right, look left, get my right hand up on a rope I had around me. I was trying to help lift myself out of the bin, and then I was under corn."

Four hours under

At 10:32 a.m., his dad called his cellphone. Baker never answered.

"At 10:32, I was fully submerged," he says.

When the first rescuers arrived at 11:02 a.m., they assumed they were at a site for a recovery, not a rescue.

Baker drifted in and out of consciousness.

"I woke up to one of their radios saying, 'If this kid's in here, he's dead and gone,'" he says. "I just started screaming as loud as I could.

His voice was muffled, firefighters say it sounded like a baby crying under a blanket. All the while, they were standing directly on top of him. Rescuers began digging through the corn. Although they unintentionally buried him two to three feet deeper as they moved around the bin, they stayed at it. They found his hand at 12:42 p.m., then uncovered his face at 1:17 p.m., and finally freed him around 3 p.m.

A complicated rescue

Inside the bin, it was 137 degrees. Baker's right foot, which was pinned near the gearbox, took the brunt of the force.

"They're guessing my right foot was under about 950 psi of pressure. My right was under about 860," he says.

Rescuers used a grain rescue tube, called a cofferdam, to isolate him from the flowing grain, and even set milk crates upside down to keep themselves from sinking as they worked. With only his hand exposed, Baker used finger signals to show rescue crews where his head and feet were.

More than 140 volunteers from departments within 50 miles responded. At one point, a roadblock stopped an oversized load hauling a bulldozer — a moment Baker now considers a miracle. The machine was brought in to push corn away from the bin that was flowing out from holes cut into the sides.

Continued on Pg. 16

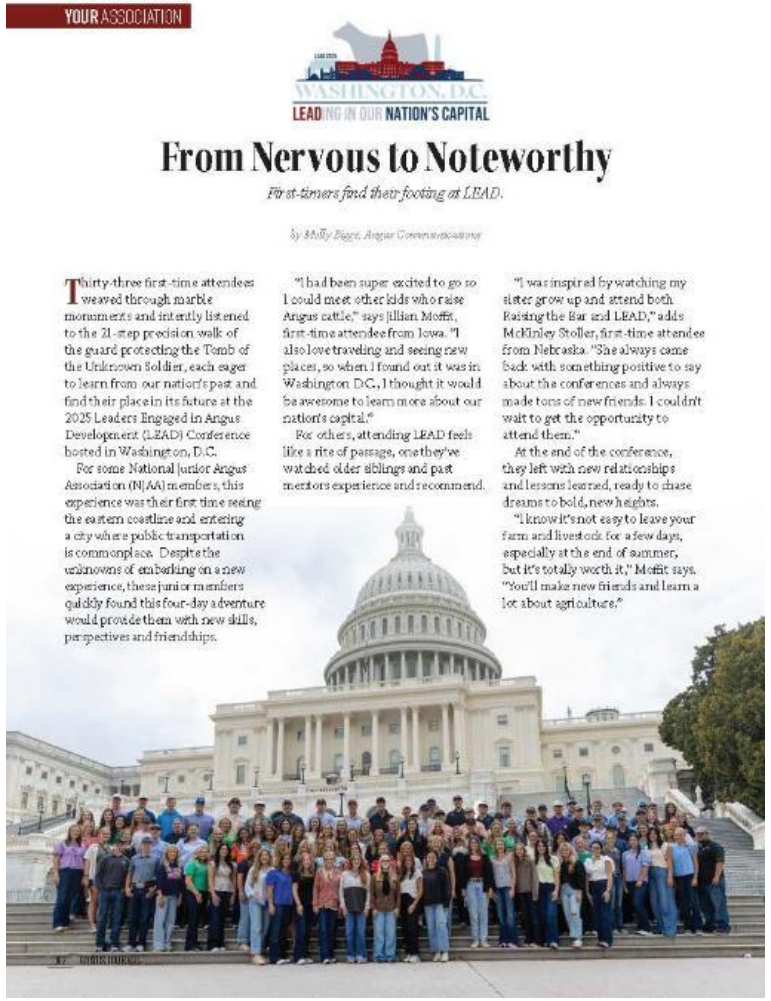
According to the Central States Center for Agricultural Safety and Health, there have been 24 grain bin–related fatalities in Iowa between 2012 and 2024. These cases reflect only those identified through public reporting, underscoring both the severity of grain entrapment incidents and the ongoing need for awareness and prevention efforts in farm country.

STORY BY KRISS NELSON PHOTOGRAPHY BY JOCLYN KUBOUSHEK

Emerging Writer

2nd place

"From Nervous to Noteworthy"
Molly Biggs
American Angus Association



YOUR ASSOCIATION

WASHINGTON, D.C.
LEADING IN OUR NATION'S CAPITAL

From Nervous to Noteworthy

First-timers find their footing at LEAD.

by Molly Biggs, Angus Communications

Thirty-three first-time attendees weaved through marble monuments and intently listened to the 21-step precision walk of the guard protecting the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier, each eager to learn from our nation's past and find their place in its future at the 2025 Leaders Engaged in Angus Development (LEAD) Conference hosted in Washington, D.C.

For some National Junior Angus Association (NJAA) members, this experience was their first time seeing the eastern coastline and entering a city where public transportation is commonplace. Despite the unknowns of embarking on a new experience, these junior members quickly found this four-day adventure would provide them with new skills, perspectives and friendships.

"I had been super excited to go so I could meet other kids who raise Angus cattle," says Jillian Moffit, first-time attendee from Iowa. "I also love traveling and seeing new places, so when I found out it was in Washington D.C., I thought it would be awesome to learn more about our nation's capital."

For others, attending LEAD feels like a rite of passage, one they've watched older siblings and past mentors experience and recommend.

"I was inspired by watching my sister grow up and attend both Raising the Bar and LEAD," adds McKinley Stoller, first-time attendee from Nebraska. "She always came back with something positive to say about the conferences and always made tons of new friends. I couldn't wait to get the opportunity to attend them."

At the end of the conference, they left with new relationships and lessons learned, ready to chase dreams to bold, new heights.

"I know it's not easy to leave your farm and livestock for a few days, especially at the end of summer, but it's totally worth it," Moffit says. "You'll make new friends and learn a lot about agriculture."

Emerging Writer

1st place

"Prayer Over Pivots"
Joy Crosby
Southeastern Peanut Farmer



PRAYER OVER PIVOTS

Billy Senkbeil's Faith-Fueled Farm Life

by Joy Crosby

Billy Senkbeil, Sylvester, Ga., started farming in 1961 and his operation includes strip tilling and planting cover crops to help save the soil. Senkbeil also collects vintage toy pedal tractors.

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Team Story

Team Story

3rd place

"Corn and Soybeans' Most Unwanted"
Chelsea Dinterman and Adrienne Held
Successful Farming



Disease Playbook

CORN AND SOYBEANS' MOST UNWANTED:

The Diseases Hit List

TAKE ACTION TO KEEP DISEASES AT BAY.

Lurking beneath the soil, in residue, and adrift on the wind currents, a band of disease desperados waits to rob your yields.

The prevalence of these diseases varies annually, as many factors influence which may have the biggest impact on yield. Staying informed, scouting fields regularly, and adjusting management strategies accordingly can help you stay ahead of these yield-robbing villains.

Let's look at the most wanted culprits in corn and soybean fields — along with their rap sheets, and how you can bring them to justice. →

Chelsea Dinterman
Agronomy & Livestock Editor

Adrianne Held
Agronomy Executive Editor

ACN Agricultural Communicators Network

Team Story

2nd place

"The ugly truth about trade wars"
Holly Spangler and Ava Splear
Prairie Farmer/Farm Progress



Farmers face down a trade war

BY AVA SPLEAR AND HOLLY SPANGLER

ASK ISRAEL HOLST who his top five concerns are for the 2025 crop year, and he's thoughtful but decisive.

"Tariffs would be No. 17," says the Augusta farmer, as his prairie-hills across his last field. "The other four? I don't know, tariffs might be one through five."

Holst may have more insight into tariffs and markets than the average farmer, thanks to his position as market development chair for the Illinois Soybean Association board. He knows the work that's underway to open new markets while simultaneously understanding how much is at stake if trade doesn't open back up.

Holst is one of thousands of Illinois farmers who planted an estimated 10.5 million acres of soybeans this spring. Last year, Illinois farmers exported $2.4 billion worth of soybeans. China was their largest customer, buying $500 million worth, according to the USDA Economic Research Service.

"Right now, I don't know where everything would go if that isn't used quickly," Holst says. "That's the biggest thing — just making sure exports are able to go out without any kind of cost to all on them."

Earlier this year, President Donald Trump enacted 145% tariffs on Chinese imports, and China responded with 125% retaliatory tariffs. The president announced a 90-day pause in early April that would temporarily reduce tariffs to 10% for most countries, except for China.

On May 12, the U.S. and China called back tariffs to 30% and 10%, respectively, with a 90-day pause on additional duties as they continue negotiations.

"Those changes are welcome developments in the ongoing trade war, but hefty tariffs remain in place, and the uncertainty has undoubtedly cost U.S. farmers in the global marketplace.

IMPACTS TO ILLINOIS

The Trump trade war is a big deal for Illinois farmers, who export 50% of their soybeans and 15% of their corn annually. On the livestock side, Illinois producers export over $500 million of pork and 20% of beef produced. Dairy farmers export about $150 million in dairy products every year.

"In Illinois, tariffs will have a pretty big impact for soybeans," Holst says.

Illinois is the largest exporting state in the Midwest, with agriculture exports in 2023 valued at $13.7 billion.

Looking back to the 2018 trade war with China, Todd Main, ISA market development director, says the U.S. lost 30% of its market share with China. "We haven't come back to the same volume we had before that," he says.

Still, Holst says the good news so far in 2025 is that prices haven't dropped as significantly as they did in 2018. During the trade war, soybean prices dropped by $2.50, from $10.34 in March 2018 to $7.84 in July 2018, according to University of Illinois ag economists.

In addition to price, Holst says the difference between this trade war and the last one is that this one is not solely focused on China, which bought $12.84 billion worth of U.S. soybeans last year. The U.S. has other markets for soybeans, but there's small consolation to a global trade war.

"If basically every country in the world has a tariff on the U.S., then we really don't have anywhere to go with our products," Holst says.

Other top buyers of soybeans and their 2024 purchases include:

- European Union, $2.43 billion
- Mexico, $2.3 billion
- Indonesia, $1.25 billion
- Egypt, $1.01 billion
- Japan, $1 billion



WHAT CAN FARMERS DO?

Overall, Holst believes farmers are more optimistic about the trade war than one might think.

"I think there's a lot more patience from farmers to work on something with China hopefully to buy more ag products. There's a lot to gain there," he says. "But with other countries, you don't see a lot of gain in farming there."

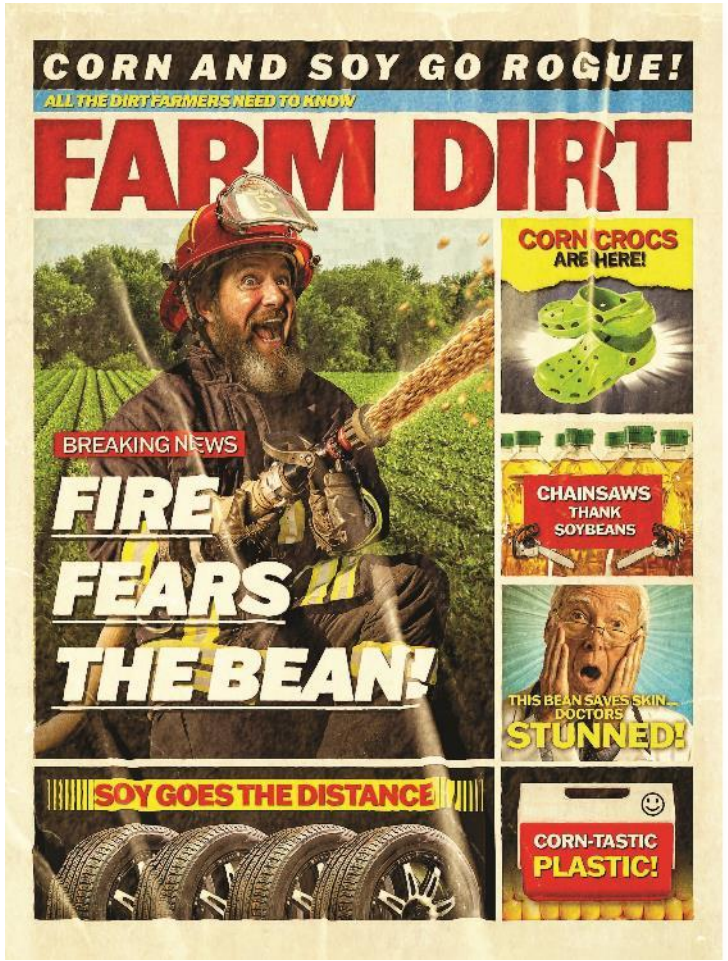
Holst himself has worked to develop markets over the years, and he'll travel to Indonesia later this summer to pro-

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Team Story

1st place

"Corn and Soy Go Rogue"
Adrienne Held, Cassidy Walter, and Chelsea Dinterman
Successful Farming






By **Adrienne Held, Cassidy Walter,** and **Chelsea Dinterman** • Illustrations by **Eddie Guy**

U.S. corn and soybeans have been feeding and fueling the world for decades, but their impact doesn't stop at the table or tank.

New innovations aim to boost demand for these crops by using them to help revolutionize industries and deliver sustainable solutions for everyday life.

Animal agriculture is still the top market for soybeans, consuming 35 million metric tons annually. Corn also plays a leading role in livestock feed, as well as ethanol production. But in addition to these mainstays, corn and soy are now showing up in unexpected places such as textiles, tires, plastics, and even as a skin substitute for burn victims.

Carla Schultz farms in Michigan's Thumb and sees the benefits of soybean meal to her farm's pork and poultry rations. She also sees the potential of biofuels and soy-based products. "Obviously, feed is a big piece of the puzzle," she said. "But it's important to stay diversified in your portfolio, because you never know where potential might break out."

More Than a Bean

"Soy is a really versatile feedstock," said Brian Pierce, senior vice president of strategic investment processes for the United Soybean Board (USB), which administers farmers' soybean checkoff investments. "There's a lot of interest in a readily available, sustainable crop that can be used as a raw material in the supply chain."

Healing With Soy

Perhaps one of the most groundbreaking uses of soy comes from NeoKtye, a biotech company that created a human skin substitute made from soy proteins.

OmegaSkin is a scaffold dressing for patients who have sufferer wounds, burns, skin-disrupting ulcers, and other skin/epidermal injuries, said Joe Connell, founder and CEO. He explained that unlike other treatments made from cadavers, pigs, or cows, soy skin integrates into the body, helping patients regenerate real skin, complete with functioning hair follicles and sweat glands.

"The way skin becomes your body," Connell explained, "it never comes out. You don't face rejection, a scab or because the technique adhered to what

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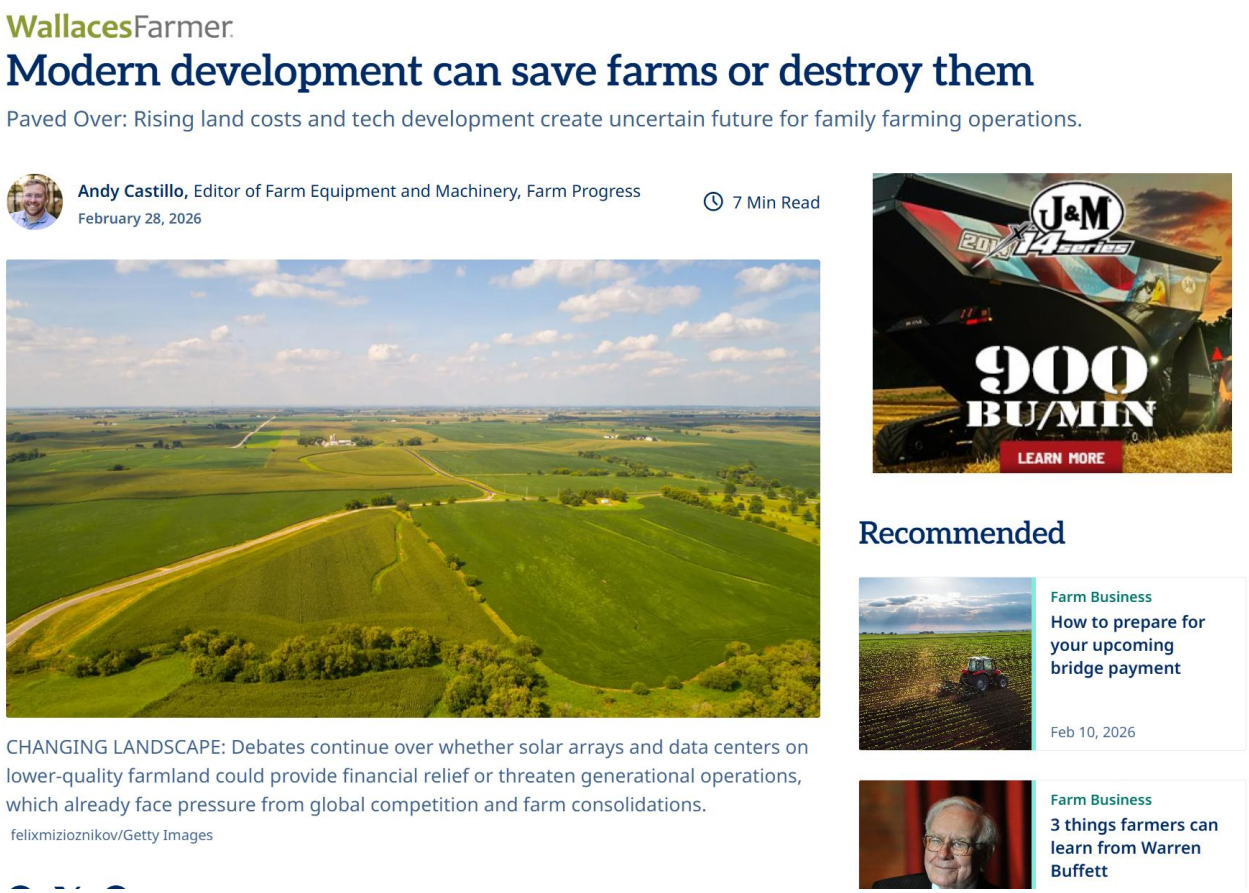
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Series or Special Issue

Series or Special Issue

3rd place

"Paved Over: How Technology is Reshaping American Farmland"
Andrew Castillo, Farm Progress



WallacesFarmer

Modern development can save farms or destroy them

Paved Over: Rising land costs and tech development create uncertain future for family farming operations.

Andy Castillo, Editor of Farm Equipment and Machinery, Farm Progress
February 28, 2026

7 Min Read

CHANGING LANDSCAPE: Debates continue over whether solar arrays and data centers on lower-quality farmland could provide financial relief or threaten generational operations, which already face pressure from global competition and farm consolidations.

felixmizioznikov/Getty Images

Recommended

Farm Business
How to prepare for your upcoming bridge payment
Feb 10, 2026

Farm Business
3 things farmers can learn from Warren Buffett

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Series or Special Issue

2nd place

"Farm Labor"
Claire Kelloway, Lisa Foust Prater,
Cassidy Walter
Successful Farming

Is Farm Labor at Risk?

In **Part 1** of our labor series, we detail agriculture's immigrant workforce, and how policy changes may impact that labor's availability.

By **Claire Kelloway**

LABOR part 2



By **Lisa Foust Prater**
Executive Editor, Family & Rural Issues
lisa.foustprater@agriculture.com



Where Are the Workers?

Hiring farm labor is easier said than done, for many reasons. Here are some ways to find — and keep — your next employee.

nearby trucking company. Workers are paid the same wage to drive an air-conditioned, heated truck as they are to work in the elements at the feedlot. "That makes it hard," Sand said. "Where's the competitive advantage?"

Even with competitive wages, manual labor in the heat of summer and the cold of winter makes farmwork a tough sell. Blake Kerns grows sweet corn, green beans, and berries at Kerns Homegrown in northwest Iowa. He said high school and college students on summer break are the most logical seasonal labor pool for his operation.

"I'll pay really good workers a lot more than they can make at their local supermarket, but it's still difficult to find them," Kerns said. "They need to be willing to work long hours, and they

and hours. "Good job descriptions aid in recruitment, interviewing, selection, and hiring of better employees," said retired Iowa State University Extension Specialist Melissa O'Rourke. "Once those employees are on your farm, employee training and development are enhanced because you know what needs to be done."

Think about your ideal employee, and the skills or attributes they would possess, O'Rourke advised. Would they need a CDL? Would customer service skills be required? How much experience would you like them to have?

While certain jobs on the farm require training or experience in specific fields, that's not always the case. For those roles, Lilli K[illegible] dairy herd manager

LABOR part 3



By **Cassidy Walter**
Business Management Editor
cassidy.walter@agriculture.com



The Solix autonomous sprayer is solar powered. It continuously roams the field looking for weeds while also producing a scouting map.

The Robots Are Here: Should You Hire One?

Technology and machinery can reduce labor needs on the farm. When is it right for you?

the technology's precision saves him from spraying the whole field, reducing herbicide injury to the soybeans.

"If you've got a special situation, like we do with the non-GMO [soybeans], then you can pencil a little bit more value in it from that standpoint," he said.

Time Is Money

Hart said it's important to consider the value of your time.

"If I'm allowed to do something else, it's like there's two of me," he said. "And so, I should reflect that additional cost savings. If I don't have to have two of me, I don't have to hire another person."

According to Dinen Subramaniam, product launch manager with OutRun by PTx Trimble, lost time could cost you tens of thousands of dollars. He said his company estimates 33% of Midwest crop acres see a 10% yield loss due to

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Series or Special Issue

1st place







"Finding Financing for Farming"
Elaine Shein, Chris Clayton, Katie Dehlinger, Gregg Hillyer, Rhett Montgomery, Susan Payne, DTN/Progressive Farmer







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Joshua Baethge
Rhiannon Branch
Adrienne Held
Mary Kennedy
Allison Lynch
Ava Splear

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Story of the Year

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“Small Groups, Big Outcomes”
Lisa Foust Prater
Successful Farming

Small Groups, Big Outcomes

The smell of fresh coffee wafts through a friendly meeting room overlooking a busy street in Rocky Ford, Colorado. A plate of glazed doughnuts sits on the table. The welcoming space features a large, rectangular table, comfortable chairs, plants, notice boards, and dozens of wooden plaques emblazoned with the brands of several local ranchers.

Some of the men and women behind those brands make the drive to town on a Monday morning. They grab a mug of coffee and a doughnut, greet each other warmly, laugh, and talk about the things ranchers talk about: the weather, cattle prices, and what’s going on in town.

As the conversation drifts into more serious topics, such as loan payments, succession planning, and the stress caused by forces they can’t control, the ranchers open up, listen, and lean on each other. They talk openly about depression. They share their feelings. They ask how they can help.

This isn’t just an ordinary coffee shop. It’s The Coffee Break Project.

Response to a Tragic Situation

In the High Plains around Rocky Ford, cattle outnumber people 7-to-1. Ranchers often live miles from their nearest neighbors. That isolation contributes to a suicide rate among American farmers and ranchers that is 3.5 times higher than the general population, according to the nonprofit National Rural Health Association.

In 2018, four men with ties to Kiowa County, just northeast of Rocky Ford, died by suicide. Three of the deaths occurred within two weeks. A local journalist asked J.C. Carrica what he planned to do about it. Carrica is vice president of Valley-Wide Health Systems, a nonprofit providing physical and behavioral health care services to rural communities across southeastern Colorado.

Carrica developed an ag advisory committee to address rural stress in the area. Jennifer Pollmiller, director of public affairs and community outreach for Valley-Wide, is a member. She said the committee acknowledged the stigma surrounding mental health. “We knew we probably weren’t going to get farmers and ranchers to walk through the doors of the mental health center,” she said.

The committee decided to implement the Changing Our Mental and Emotional Trajectory (COMET) method, developed by the High Plains Research Network, a project of the University of Colorado School of Medicine. It teaches people how to reach out to someone having a difficult time and help them shift toward wellness and away from a mental health crisis. COMET was created with rural communities in mind.

In a two-hour session, COMET trainees learn how to observe others and notice early when something isn’t right. It demonstrates how to start a conversation in a supportive way, with a seven-question guide, and offers resources to share if someone needs additional help.

Promoting Firearm Safety

Partnering with the Colorado Gun Shop Project from the state’s department of public health gave the committee another way to help farmers and ranchers.

In 2021, 56.7% of male and 30.7% of female suicide deaths in Colorado occurred by discharge of a firearm, according to the state health department. Still, many gun owners are hesitant to call the authorities if they’re suicidal because of laws that allow the court to remove firearms from those considered a danger to themselves or others.

The Gun Shop Project puts time and distance between a suicidal person and their firearms

Photography: Rabbi Jeffs Hunleans Rotterdaking, Getty Images

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2026 Writer of the Year Honorable Mention



Andy Castillo
Farm Progress



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HOW TO TAKE ADVANTAGE OF TAX CHANGES 16



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LEGISLATIVE SESSION GIVES AGRICULTURE SOME WINS 8
PREP FOR GRAIN HANDLING BEFORE HARVEST COMES 20



Daredevil becomes drone pilot

Aerial spraying with drones is a little low-key for Alex Peterson, compared to his decades-long career in extreme sports, which included rock climbing, kite skiing, paragliding and wingsuit jumping. While he now co-owns a paragliding school and has an ice boating business, Peterson also founded Minnesota Drone Spray, where he offers farmers a wide array of spraying applications. Turn to Page 26 to see his transition from extreme sports to agriculture.

PHOTO BY ANDY CASTILLO

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