



Volume 36

March 2013

No. 3

Rural Americans face unique health care issues

By *Billy R Senter*
KSC Strategies

As the new Congress begins, many issues are beginning to rear their ugly heads that will have a significant impact on rural communities and specifically rural health care. We all are very aware rural communities are increasingly becoming older and facing health issues associated with an aging population.

The National Rural Health Association best stated the problems facing rural American by saying, “The obstacles faced by health care providers and patients in rural areas are vastly different than those in urban areas. Rural Americans face a unique combination of factors that create disparities in health care not found in urban areas. Economic factors, cultural and social differences, educational shortcomings, lack of recognition by legislators and the sheer isolation of living in remote rural areas all conspire to impede rural Americans in their struggle to lead a normal, healthy life.”

As the American health care system evolves following changes under the Affordable Care Act (ACA) and changes that could come through additional reforms, it’s vitally important that patient access to doctors and treatments in rural communities isn’t jeopardized by reductions or limitations to Medicare and Medicaid, which many rely on for medical care. If federal and state elected officials aren’t careful as they go about implementing changes, rural care could be undermined, leaving countless patients without access to needed treatments and prescriptions.

There are many communities in this country well outside urban centers that

depend on just one or two doctors, –some without any primary care physicians and limited access to health care – pharmacists or health clinics to meet their needs. To access these health care treatments, patients may have to travel many miles. Studies have shown that patients in rural areas are more likely than their urban and suburban counterparts to suffer from one or more chronic health conditions, such as heart disease, cancer, and diabetes. For these illnesses, access to affordable prescription medicines is essential.

Hundreds of rules surrounding the ACA are now being released by the White House and the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS). One such rule is the “Essential Health Benefits” definition that was issued this February. This rule will dictate what minimum benefits, from dental care to prescription medicines, patients will receive from their insurance plans. On prescription medicines, for example, HHS’ new rule leaves it up to the insurance company, not your doctor, to decide which medicines will be covered. In your new insurance coverage policy, the basic benefit may or may not cover the medicines your doctor prescribes. As we know, a drug that helps one patient achieve better health may or may not help another patient with a similar illness. The decision makers on which therapy is appropriate for a patient should be none other than the patient and their doctor.

As Congress and the White House debate further budget cuts to public programs, such as Medicare – the health care insurance system for elderly and disabled individuals – patients in rural areas need to watch potential cuts to the Medicare Part B

and Part D programs. Currently, Medicare Part D (Prescription Drug Coverage) is the only government program that costs 45 percent less than originally estimated and has a satisfaction rate among beneficiaries above 90 percent. As we all like to say – “if it isn’t broke, don’t fix it!”

Medicare Part B covers physician services while Part D covers outpatient prescription medicines. Congress is looking to slash Part B’s reimbursement rates for a select group of doctors, chiefly oncologists, rheumatologists, and other specialists, who use medicines as a key component of treating diseases. For very serious diseases such as cancer, rheumatoid arthritis, and multiple sclerosis, doctors infuse or inject therapies. Unfortunately for rural patients, cutting payments to physicians for administering these medicines could mean that clinics in rural America are forced to close their doors. In Medicare Part D, changes are being considered to a popular and successful program by instituting a new tax on the companies who research and develop new breakthrough medicines. The problem is that this tax would likely increase your costs at the pharmacy counter or limit access to needed medicines.

As Congress and the Obama Administration continue to work through implementation of the ACA and tackle the looming fiscal pressures that our nation faces, rural Americans need to take an active role in protecting access to the high quality and affordable health care. Rural Americans have historically been hit first and worst on new regulations and simply cannot afford to be saddled with increased health care costs and reduced access to care moving forward.



By Ruth Larabee
New York

President's Report

Legislative conference highlights March activities

Women Involved in Farm Economics (WIFE) members from across the states will travel to Washington, D.C., March 16-21 to attend our annual Legislative Conference. A meeting will be held at the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) for briefings and an exchange of thoughts with the Farm Service Agency, Crop Insurance and other selected departments. The group then convenes at the Capitol Visitors Center for Senate briefings and later to the Longworth for House briefings. Information given and questions asked will be on some of WIFE's priority topics including:

The Farm Bill: WIFE believes that agriculture should not be subjected to disproportionate cuts, as compared to other government programs.

Energy: In order to grow food for Americans and other people around the world, agriculture must have an affordable and reliable energy supply from all sources.

Homeland Security: Our U.S. borders are not more secure than they have ever been. We have a WIFE member that has been affected severely.

Estate Taxes: Agricultural land prices are rising disproportionately to the income derived from the land.

The Equal Access to Justice Act (EAJA): The intent of the 1980 EAJA is to reimburse attorney's fees when ordinary citizens prevail in litigation where the government's position was not justified. At a huge expense to taxpayers, a few groups have abused the

original intent of the statute.

The information written above concerning the Farm Bill, Energy, Homeland Security, Estate Taxes and EAJA is in the WIFE Priority Brochure along with additional data.

Appointments for WIFE members to meet with their states' U.S. senators, representatives and/or legislative staff members have been made before the very long day trip to the

Hill. If a member can't get an appointment it is important to go to their office, leave off a simple brochure of information, and visit for a couple of minutes as it puts a face to a name. We find it is much easier when you need to call them in the future.

This is just part of the busy schedule of WIFE in Washington working for our farmers, ranchers and consumers.



By Jacquelyn Sistrunk
Alabama

Specialty Crops Report

Jeans maker recommends less washing of pants

Your favorite pair of blue jeans began when cotton farmers grew the cotton used to make denim. Cotton plants require a lot of water to grow. Jeans maker Levi Strauss is working to reduce the amount of water needed to make and care for your jeans.

After the jeans are made from cotton yarn dyed with an indigo dye, they get washed over and over in washing machines that absolutely guzzle water. Levis is recommending that jeans be washed less often.

In Australia, 30 volunteers wore jeans five days a week for three months without washing them. Researchers then put the jeans to a small

test resulting in jeans not smelling too awful. In fact, if you are worried about stinky jeans, just throw them into a freezer. A quick blast of cold will kill the germs that cause them to smell. Please let jeans thaw and reach room temperature before putting them back on.

The amount of water used to produce something is called its water footprint. It takes about 500 gallons to make one pair of jeans. One cotton shirt takes 700 gallons. The average pair of jeans goes through 919 gallons of water from the time they are made until they are worn out. That water would fill 18 bathtubs. To help your jeans "go green", just freeze 'em!!!



**By Kay Zeosky
New York**

Dairy Report

Feed costs remain top concern

Feed costs seem to be the biggest concern of dairy farmers this coming year. With the drought last summer, shortages of corn and other needed grain supplies will raise prices. The farmers who can plant an early crop to feed their livestock will have a definite advantage in avoiding those high feed costs. The only positive note for our dairy farmers is that milk supplies all over the world are tighter than most years. No one foresees a huge growth of imported dairy products because the supplies are not there. Milk prices have been well above support levels since the 1980s.

Quoting retired Penn State economist Lou Moore, "Forty-seven million people are now on food stamps which represents three quarters of the budget of the Department of Agriculture. To put the numbers in perspective, the entire USDA budget is \$20 billion dollars, which is one-third of the money Congress appropriated for Hurricane Sandy relief.

The Cooperatives Working Together (CWT) program continues to pay its way by offering export assistance to milk cooperatives. In 2012 they accepted 676 bids from 11 member cooperatives. Sales were 125 million pounds of cheese, 73 million pounds of butter, 127,868 pounds of anhydrous milk fat, and 171,961 pounds of whole milk powder to 42 countries, adding an average of 45 cents per hundred-weight to farmers' milk checks.

The Senate has passed their version of the dairy portion of the new farm bill (S.3240) and the House also passed their version (H.R.6083). These differences will have to be resolved in a conference agreement.

The House bill has a slight difference in its fee structure for Basis Margin Pro-

tection that lowers the cost to larger farms. Their bill has a slightly different premium structure for Supplemental Margin Protection that, in general, charges lower fees on larger farms and raises fees on smaller farms. No one designates what number of cows constitute a small farm or a large farm.

Although there are varying opinions, it doesn't seem reasonable that covering

all milk produced on all farms could be cheaper than covering only one million pounds for every farm. Logically, smaller farms would have to lose a lot to enhance prices on all the milk produced on large farms.

For more information, locate the Congressional Research Service report on "Dairy Policy Proposals in the 2012 Farm Bill", by Randy Schnepf.



**By Deb Dressler
North Dakota**

Legislative Report

Congressional Ag Committee has new members

by House Agriculture Committee Ranking Member Collin Peterson (D-MN) who has voiced his opinion since the extension was granted that rural America deserves a new Farm Bill.

When you search both the House and Senate for active legislation you see sequestration, assault weapons, balanced budget amendment, and the violence against women act.

The U.S. Department of Agriculture's Wildlife Services' National Wildlife Research Center announced that the EPA has granted regulatory approval for the use of GonaCon Equine immunocontraceptive vaccine in adult female wild or feral horses and burros.

Hopefully by next month some positive action on the new Farm Bill will come to fruition.

March 16-19, 2013, WIFE members will be in Washington, D.C., for the legislative board of directors meeting, USDA and Hill visits.

There are several new members of Congress that have been named to the Congressional Agriculture Committee. I urge WIFE members to contact these congressmen if from your individual state.

Currently the Farm Bill is in a nine month extension. The bill that was passed by the Senate and House Agriculture Committees is on hold after two years of meetings, discussions and compromises. Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid (D-NV) introduced last years Farm Bill as one of the "top priority bills" on the Senate legislative calendar. Senate Agriculture Committee Chairman Debbie Stabenow (D-MI) immediately issued her intent to hold mark-up of the bill as soon as possible.

The Senate is joined in their fight

Homeland Security Report



**By Marlene Kouba
North Dakota**

Arizona key in immigration debate

It has been reported that along the southern border of Texas, “the oil companies keep bull-dozing new ranch roads all over west Texas. Then the coyotes take them over to run more illegals across the river and up those roads. They have taken to painting their own trucks to look like the oil company’s trucks and adding their logos to sneak in more illegals! The ecosystem is so delicate that all that truck travel over those dirt roads is causing long-term and perhaps permanent damage to the eco-systems. When the oil glut is over, the oil companies will pull out and leave big messes of rotting junk behind but meantime, some locals are making good fortunes to supplement their ranching incomes. That’s commerce, so they say.”

What has airport security found in cell phones? Cell phone GUNS have arrived. Beneath the digital phone face is a .22 caliber handgun capable of firing four rounds in rapid succession, using the standard telephone keypad. European officials are stunned by the discovery of these deadly decoys. They are heavier than a regular cell phone. If security asks to look at your cell phone OR turn it on to show that it works, they have a good reason! (Associated Press)

A leaked Department of Justice “white paper” makes the case for the legal killing of U.S. citizens abroad who the government defines as imminent threats to national security and it states that actual evidence or intelligence showing that the target is actually involved in a plot or a plan to

attack the U.S. isn’t necessary. A target can be an imminent threat just because the president deems it so. And, according to the White House press secretary, that’s “legal, ethical and wise.”

Meanwhile, he also couldn’t come up with anything in the Constitution that might prohibit a U.S. citizen from being assassinated. He also could not identify a constitutional principle that would prevent the president from carrying out a drone strike on an American citizen in the United States. Not only is that an affront to due process rights enshrined in the Fifth Amendment, but it sets a dangerous precedent for future presidents.

Border Patrol agents have established outposts along the New Mexico border to monitor the area. They contain bunk beds, a kitchen, have TV and cell phone service, their own well plus storage tanks for diesel fuel for their vehicles. They are modeled after similar bases in Afghanistan. The nearest Border Patrol station is 60 miles away. The number of incoming illegals is decreasing but drug seizures are constant in dope country. (Houston Chronicle)

Arizona has the nation’s eighth-highest population of illegal immigrants. In 2010, illegal immigrants represented roughly 6 percent of the state’s population. Many illegal immigrants are demanding more rights. Recently some college students rallied outside Arizona Gov. Jan Brewer’s office for driver’s licenses for illegal immigrants.

A January report showed the U.S. Border Patrol’s Tucson sector remains the busiest along the U.S.-Mexico border. The Tucson sector accounted for 38 percent of all drug seizures and 37 percent of all apprehensions along the border. Brewer said the border cannot be declared safe until the people living

near it feel secure from drug and human trafficking.

Democratic Rep. Kyrsten Sinema (D-AZ) told Latino and black leaders that Arizonians need to spread the word on how much more secure the border has become. Napolitano said that border crossings are down 50 percent since 2008 and 78 percent since their peak in 2000. (Associated Press)

Homeland Security Secretary Janet Napolitano toured the Arizona state/Mexico border on February 19 with Sen. John McCain where he defended his proposed immigration overhaul to an angry crowd in suburban Phoenix.

Arizona will play a prominent role in the immigration debate as the president tries to make it a signature issue of his second term. Arizona is the only state with both of its senators working on immigration reform in Congress, a sign of the state’s widely debated border security issues. McCain said the border near Yuma is largely secure but he said smugglers are using the border near Tucson to pump drugs into Phoenix. He said immigration reform should be contingent on better border security that must rely largely on technology able to detect border crossings. McCain said a tamper-proof Social Security card would help combat identity fraud and noted any path to citizenship must require immigrants to learn English.

“There are 11 million people living here illegally and we are not going to get enough buses to deport them.” Arizona gained international attention when it passed its tough anti-immigrant law in 2010. A handful of other states — including Georgia, Indiana, South Carolina and Utah — have since adopted variations of Arizona’s law. (Associated Press)



By Pam Potthoff
Nebraska

Trade Report

Dependence on China continues

A Reuters Digital Edition author estimates 15 to 20 percent of jobs lost in the U.S. were due to the negative impact of globalization.

Russia's economy ministry has proposed suspending import duties on grain until Aug. 1 (as of 2-1) in an effort to help bolster the supply used in grain intervention sales that have tried to stabilize domestic prices. The agriculture ministry has already sold more than 1.5 million tons of intervention grain worth about \$434 million dating back to late October, after widespread drought caused domestic prices to shoot up.

On Feb. 1, Russia began to ban imports of all beef and pork products from the U.S. unless USDA agreed to test the meat before it leaves US shores and certified that the products were free of traces of the feed additive ractopamine. Some competitor nations, such as Canada, Mexico and Brazil, have said they will comply with Russia's request. So far, USDA has declined to provide such assurances. I have located no information that would suggest the meat industry is planning steps to provide ractopamine-free meat to this important export market. Combined shipments of beef and pork to Russia were more than \$500 million last year.

The U.S. and China have reached an agreement on a new import dairy certificate. Negotiations have been on-going since China revised their dairy import requirements in 2010. U.S. dairy sales to China have more than doubled in that time reaching an estimated \$400 million in 2012.

Our dependency on China continues: China (with no regard to environment or human rights) has the global monopoly on mining Neodymium which is

used in electric motors and wind turbines. The amount of neodymium in electric vehicles is estimated to be five times greater than that in wind turbines. China produces more than 95 percent of rare earth elements and produces 76 percent of the world's total rare earth magnets.

The competition: China has emerged as an exciting new market for Australian export beef with total exports for 2012 reaching 32,906 tons. That's up a colossal 324 percent compared to 2011. China is now Australia's sixth largest beef market - bigger than both Indonesia and Russia, and not far behind Taiwan. Compared with some other export rivals, Australia has relatively liberal access to the Chinese market, with 49 beef and sheep meat processors approved for export.

The U.S. launched a trade dispute against Indonesia over import restrictions on a wide range of agricultural products - including fruits, vegetables, plants and meats - arguing that the measures by the Southeast Asian nation were damaging U.S. exporters. The U.S. is targeting steps taken starting at the end of 2011 and revised further last year by Indonesia to establish strict import licensing requirements on plant-based products and reductions in import quotas for beef and animal products. These restrictions are designed to protect domestic agriculture.

Coming home: In January, Wal-Mart, the retail leader in outsourcing American jobs, announced a "jump start" plan that promises it will buy more American goods - \$50 billion over 10 years. Wal-Mart also proposed to hire 100,000 veterans and move more part time employees to full time positions. Apple CEO, Tim Cook, announced some Macintosh production would be moved back to the U.S. this year.

The promises unfulfilled: Newly-released government data reveals that U.S. exports to Korea continue to plummet after eight months of implementation of the U.S.-Korea "free trade" agreement (FTA). Under the FTA, U.S. goods exports to Korea have declined by nine percent (a decrease of more than \$2.5 billion) in

comparison to 2011 levels for the same months.

Here's the FTA's legacy thus far in these key sectors:

- U.S. auto exports have declined by 1 percent (\$11.7 million) while imports of cars and auto parts from Korea have soared 17 percent (\$1.8 billion) resulting in a 19 percent increase in the U.S. automotive trade deficit with Korea.
- U.S. beef exports have fallen by 13 percent under the FTA, a \$50 million loss.
- U.S. pork exports have dropped by 20 percent under the FTA, a \$52 million loss.
- U.S. poultry exports have plummeted by 40 percent under the FTA, a \$36 million loss.

Using the same ratio employed by the Obama administration, this trade deficit expansion implies the net loss of over 16,000 U.S. jobs under the pact's first several months.

Currently some 99.8 percent of the beef products in Taiwan are clearly labeled with their country of origin. The U.S. still struggles with COOL under a WTO complaint from Canada and Mexico.

Despite Brazilian government assurance over the safety of their beef, Jordan and Chile have joined China, Japan, South Africa, Saudi Arabia and others in imposing a ban on Brazilian beef due to the recent BSE scare.

The U.S. Census Bureau reported in February that the U.S. trade deficit in goods and services declined from \$559.9 billion in 2011 to \$540.4 billion in 2012, an improvement of \$19.5 billion (3.5 percent). This reflected a \$16.8 billion (9.4 percent) improvement in the services trade surplus and a \$2.7 billion (0.4 percent) improvement in the goods trade deficit. The trade deficit in manufactured goods increased \$44.7 billion in 2012.

WIFE believes in fair world-wide export-import regulations and the same strict standards imposed on all imported food products as on U.S. food products and that inspection procedures be no less strict. (WIFE Policy, Trade, P. 33 #13)

Feed Grains Report



By Janell Roe
Nebraska

Corn producers should brace for possible decrease in prices

The United States is the largest corn grower and exporter in the world. As we continue to hold this top spot, many believe that the price of new crop corn is going to decrease for several reasons.

First, surveys show that farmers are going to continue to increase the amount of corn acres planted along with increasing corn yields. Second, last year's drought cost was offset by crop insurance and higher corn prices, meaning farmers have more income available to them to boost corn production. Third, the drought monitor is showing that the drought pattern should subside by the end of April. Finally, other countries are increasing their corn production as well (Bloomberg, 2013).

The U.S. is expected to be planting 96.5 million acres of corn for 2013-14 which is down 0.7 million acres from last year's 75-year high. The USDA is predicting that output will rise 35 percent from last year to a record production of 14,530 million bushels. The increase in production is expected to increase the 2013-14 corn supply by 28 percent or the all-time high of 15,187 million bushels. In addition, the corn yield is expected to be 163.6 bushels per acre this year in comparison to last year where yields were at 123.4 (USDA Grains and Oilseeds Outlook, 2013).

During February alone, corn futures have dropped 7.4 percent on the

CBOT. Compare this to the all-time high that was reached in September of \$8.49 per bushel. The Federal Reserve data shows that financially U.S. agricultural is at its best. Farmers are expected to receive \$128.2 billion this year. Moreover, land values have never been higher and farmer's debt to equity ratio is the lowest it's ever been at 11.3 percent.

Even though the drought affected many farmers, their losses were partially offset by crop insurance. Crop insurance payments were the highest on record at \$14.7 billion and counting. This all adds up to more money being available for farmers to put back into their operations for higher quality seed, more efficient equipment, and increasing their acreages, both owned and rented (Bloomberg, 2013).

The drought monitor is showing that the weather patterns are changing with trade winds shifting and warming equatorial waters in the Pacific Ocean. This leads experts to believe that the weather pattern is changing to one with greater rain potential (Bloomberg, 2013).

With four years of above average corn prices, other countries have also increased their corn production. Brazil and Argentina are the next largest corn exporters only second to the United States. The USDA is forecasting that their production will increase by 5.9 percent this year. A trend is starting to form where the typical U.S. buyers of corn such as Japan, South Korea, and Mexico are beginning to buy more corn from Brazil, Argentina, and Ukraine (Bloomberg, 2013).

Even though the drought is beginning to shrink, there is a chance that we could have another dry summer. The

largest corn producing states are still receiving less than average precipitation. The fourth largest corn producing state, Nebraska, is still dealing with severe drought. In addition, half of Iowa, the largest corn producing state, is dryer than average. Finally, 70 percent of Minnesota, the second largest corn producing state, is suffering from drought. The drought monitor says that these conditions will continue through April 30.

If the weather doesn't improve, then this year will be similar to last year in that supplies could be short and corn prices will remain high. Goldman Sachs believes that the dry weather will keep prices around \$6 for the next 12 months. If the Midwest does not receive 6 to 14 inches of precipitation, then it is hard to believe corn prices will be below \$5 this year. It will take several years to create a bumper crop and recover from last summer's drought.

Without another drought this year, farmers may be looking at lower corn prices. Increased acres planted, higher yields, and more moisture provide a lot of pressure for new crop corn prices. With more acres of corn planted and more money moving into corn planting, lower corn prices are to be expected.

The USDA estimates that corn prices will plummet 33 percent by the year ending in August 13, 2014; thereby, making the corn price average to \$4.80 per bushel. Speculators and hedge funds have decreased their long positions in the belief that prices are going to drop this year.

If we have normal yields, this year could help rebuild stocks which would also lower the corn price (Bloomberg,



By Barbara Broberg
Montana

Energy Report

Perspective is important

Out of all possible energy topics, I'm settled down to a comment a farmer made. He said, "a farmer used to grow half the crop for the horses; so, from a productivity viewpoint, it made a lot of sense to get a tractor."

That man died last week at age 97. His daughter spoke of holding his large (and gentle) hand near the end of his time on earth.

My father-in-law once insisted my husband try to start a Massey-Harris 50 tractor sitting in a "bone-yard" lineup on a new property. It WAS started and has continued working (mowing and running auger) on our farm. In the meantime, my father-in-law has described "what-an-improvement!" the Massey-Ferguson 30 tractor was. He had used a Massey-Ferguson 30 for years on his 120 acre farm in Michigan. The two Masseys are related (but I don't think Sheila Massey is related to them) and while the '50' had some extra features, it is based on the same design. They are 35-40 horsepower tractors. You can feel his excitement when he talks about the mechanical leap in farm productivity. He said it made SUCH a difference to have a dependable, engineered machine to work with.

An old matriarchal grandma who lived until 1992 and died in her nineties said that children used to make clippety-clop noises when they were playing, but that then there was a shift to "vroom,vrrroom" when kids were playing farm as gasoline and diesel engines started to power farm equipment.

A woman originally from Tennessee said her dad didn't get any cotton picking machines until the kids had all left home. The children WERE the cotton pickers.

The man we bought our original farm from spent two summers during high school breaking some new ground

out of short grass prairie. The plow kind of pulls up blocks of soil. Grass gets root bound and knee or thigh high in a good year around here. Harley used a six-foot plow and a kind of tracked dozer to pull with, I think. On the same farm, he said some grain got placed in a building, but then later it was nearly impossible to get it back out, so he and his brother made an auger to remove the grain from that particular storage. It was the first auger on the farm.

After the Korean War, coming home to farm with the electrical training from the military, he went on to create a pig barn with self feeders, lights, fans, the works. The farm shop had it all too (except the self feeders:).

Another Korean vet said there was a lot of see-the-world, do-new-stuff, and hear about other places, but being overseas as a serviceman wasn't a "real" life. He stated that coming home to farm allowed a person to have a focus again. As a soldier he had become a 'cuisine organizer' (among other things) because he was so disgusted watching the good ingredients being ruined by inept management. He wanted to create food like he had on the farm growing up.

An unpredictable aspect of farming is the different window-of-time WHEN a farm moves to do something new. Have to...need to...want to...

A farmer who is about age 60 now said "a young guy used to sit on an open tractor and think, 'Why, I wonder if I could put a windshield on this. Wouldn't that be something?' Try it. Try again. Finally success. You had a while to think while you were out in the open tractor. Then after a time you might have a cabbed over tractor. Then the radio came (not the two-way radio), and the young guy quit thinking of ways to innovate and started thinking of the ways of the world."

Another farmer told his version of that story. On their farm someone got

the idea to make some kind of shelter on the tractor. The cab got made fun of and laughed over during the whole evolution of the project. At final accomplishment, the creator hardly got to test drive it before it was absolutely some other driver's turf. The new equipment driver was the one who had ribbed the project most mercilessly.

The son of the clippety-clop matriarch said the two-way radio just revolutionized and synchronized the efforts of everyone on the farm.

"Imagine being able to see (through your hearing) all the work of what each person was doing." He said it was a dream come true. You could grow your farm but still manage it, you hoped you knew what the kids were doing, and you could be there in voice as each task was going on! And the others could "see" it all too -from the home base station wondering about dinner going out to the field - to the truck driver needing to know how much the combine driver had in the hopper so far.

So what does the horse needing half the crop to create horse power and "the farmer said" have to do with energy? The answer is a perspective on "where WERE we." It helps to see if we have progressed. We see we have come a distance in our own life. We feel the pull-through of the life-work that other farmers, and that the other mothers-of-invention have given to us today.

There has been a transfer of how we get our horsepower, how we move product, how we communicate, and how we learn. The whole realm of farming has seemingly ratcheted itself to a different plane of technology and reality. And that part gets power from energy sources off farm. Our need for energy on the farm connects us (more completely than the Internet!) to the world out there. Farms and ranches continue to produce feed, fuel ingredients, food and fiber: farming as usual.



By Klodette Stroh
Wyoming

Sugar Report

National Ag Day is time to celebrate the American farmer

Ag Day will be celebrated on March 19, 2013. This year will mark 40th year of recognizing agriculture's role in American life.

My husband Rick and I started our farming operation in 1989 from scratch. Love of land and farming is very contagious because I caught it from him. For over two decades since we started, we have worked hard to improve our farming practices so that we can improve crop production and improve management of our farm finances. New technology such as the tractor's satellite guidance system directs tractors in a straight line down the row and consequently is more accurate and efficient with less operator fatigue. We practice crop rotation and Rick has modified fertilizer application to his crops which has resulted in healthier soil and better crops.

The cost of fuel, fertilizer, seed and parts for equipment repair have been steadily climbing. Farmers must live a frugal life in order to balance finances. President John F. Kennedy said it all: "The farmer is the only man in our economy who buys everything at retail, sells everything at wholesale, and pays the freight both ways."

American farmers and ranchers provide food and habitat for 75 percent of this nation's wildlife. According to the U.S. Department of Agriculture, each U.S. farmer is the picture of efficiency, producing enough food to feed 144 people each day. Please keep in mind less than two percent of America's population are farmers.

American sugar cane, beet and corn farmers contribute tremendously in reducing U.S. budget deficit because United States' sugar policy is designed to operate at no cost to the American taxpayer. Sugar farmers don't receive a red cent from Washington, D. C. As our nation struggles with huge budget deficits, the sugar industry is one of the only ones that is helping reduce this deficit.

Factories borrow huge amounts of money from the CCC (Commodity Credit Corporation) and pay interest to operate their annual business; at the end of each year sugar factories pay off their loans back to the CCC and the interest paid back assists to reduce our enormous budget deficit.

Over 22 million jobs are related directly to agriculture. Agricultural is America's number one in export. Commodity exports are at \$43.5 billion and product imports at \$26.4 billion, equaling a positive net trade balance of \$17.1 billion. America's economy is in red.

When President Abraham Lincoln took office, the value of agriculture exports and economic benefit to America had moved up to \$182 million dollars. He founded U.S. Department of Agriculture in 1862 and he named it the "people's department." U.S. farms have been here to provide, food, and jobs and to bring our country back to its feet and there is no better example of that than the sugar industry. U.S. Sweetener creates over 372,000 direct and indirect jobs in 42 states, and contributes \$21.1 billion in positive economic activity each year.

Farmers and their lands have always protected our nation's security.

America needs to protect her first industry, which is agriculture. A strong Farm Bill should address the vitality of this industry and the welfare of American consumer. We have to make sure to continue the no-cost sugar program in a new Farm Bill to benefit consumers and guard a fair level of foreign sugar trade on behalf of U.S. sugar farmers. Happy Ag Day America and may God continue to bless you!

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Rural Life Report



By Donna Bolz
Nebraska

Farm safety is a priority

ago didn't work in confinement barns and they didn't spend all day with the pigs. Components from dust in the swine barn slows down the cilia, the tiny hairlike projections that protect nasal passages and other parts of the respiratory system.

Working in confined settings on steep terrain, with augers, agricultural chemicals and unpredictable livestock, on top of and inside grain bins are risk factors that aren't overcome easily.

Farmers are responsible for more acres than in the past. When you have more to do, you are sometimes in a bigger hurry. This can lead to more accidents.

Roger Hoy, director of the tractor testing lab at the University of Nebraska Lincoln said there is a new problem to contend with also: boredom. Before we had all these computers, farmers would actually drive the tractors. Now, because of global positioning system, a good portion of the time, a farmer is only there in case something goes wrong or to turn the tractor around at the end of a row.

Part of the injury evidence accumulated in the agricultural safety center in Omaha points to the absence on farms and ranches of safety standards enforced in an ag business setting. Farmers work alone and nobody likes someone telling them what to do. Many times they take a risk.

Another hazard is driving farm machinery on public roads. Thousands of highway accidents involving farm machinery occur each year even though farm equipment is marked with a slow moving vehicle emblem. Drivers often grow impatient with farm equipment operators or have difficulty anticipating the intentions of operators driving farm machinery on rural highways

Researchers also have documented an increase of skin cancer among farmers who work in the sun for prolonged periods without the benefit of protective clothing or sun screen

Farm children are at special risk from farm-related accidents. Most of the 200 plus deaths among children on farms

result from being innocent bystanders or passengers on farm equipment. Starting to work early on the farm many times without adequate training can lead to more injuries.

Farm safety is something we all need to think about as we go about our day to day activities.

The headline in a recent *Lincoln Journal Star* tells it like it is: "The most Dangerous Job, farming. The NU Med Center works to make farming safer."

Most of us probably know someone who has been injured while farming. My grandfather got his hand caught in a corn picker and lost all his fingers. Risto Rautainen, director of the Central States Center for Agricultural Safety and Health at the NU Med Center in Omaha, Nebraska, says that the statistics show a decrease in fatalities nationally from 3,300 in the 1960s to 550 in 2011. Risto states that he isn't happy with the decrease.

"No, I think we need to make a lot more progress." Omaha is the newest of nine regional centers that recently earned praise from an independent review that cited them as a low-budget, high-impact way to make the lives of farm and ranch families safer. In Nebraska, 15 to 20 people die in farm accidents every year. Not only does this include farm machinery but can include other reasons.

A guy name Rod had an unpleasant encounter with an Angus cow.

"Just last spring, I was tagging a baby calf," Rod says, "and the cow got behind me and knocked me through a barbed wire fence."

Tractors with rollover protection, shields on moving machinery parts and growing safety awareness are among the reasons the number of deaths and injuries is declining. While many tractors now have roll over protection, there are still a lot of tractors older than that; some are from as far back as the 1930s and 1940s and still being used.

Inhaling dust is a big environmental hazard. Hog producers of a generation

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Cereal Grains Report



By Jean Wach
Nebraska

The condition of the hard winter wheat crop in the Plains will be a major concern once weather begins to warm up and the crop breaks dormancy. With the dry weather at seeding time, and the continued drought into winter, crop conditions were very poor and tiller formation was limited in many areas.

The snow last week was appreciated by the wheat farmers in parts of Nebraska and Kansas. Since it's a waiting game on wheat production and what prices will be, I decided to review some of the benefits of another cereal grain.

Oats have been around for quite some time, dating back to around 2000 B.C. in the Middle East. Oats date back in Germany to 1000 B.C., and because oats contain little gluten, they were considered not good for much more than animal feed. However because oats can grow in conditions where wheat and barley won't produce, they made a place for themselves through history during harsh years and were considered a grain for the poor. Today, about 95 percent of all oats grown are used as animal feed. Oats, like barley, have a hard outer hull that must be removed before it's ready for human consumption. Even though the outer hull of an oat kernel comes off easier than a barley kernel's hull, it's still not within reach of the average consumer to accomplish this.

Steel-cut oats are whole grain groats (the inner portion of the oat kernel) which have been cut into pieces. They are commonly used in Scotland and Ireland to make porridge, whereas rolled oats are used in England, other English-speaking countries, and Scandinavia. Steel-cut oats take longer to cook than instant or rolled oats due to their minimal processing, typ-

Oats have many health benefits

ically 15-30 minutes.

The flavor of the cooked oats is described as being nuttier than other types of oats, and they are also chewier. Oats are considered a cleansing grain. They not only cleanse your intestinal tract but your blood as well. Oats contain an excellent balance of amino acids. Its proteins are almost in perfect proportion to the body's needs. High in lysine, which is often low in other cereal grains, oats bring a real balance to your protein needs without the

need of mixing foods.

Oats contain high levels of complex carbohydrates which have been linked to reducing the risk of cancer and the better control of diabetes. Oat bran contains glucans, a cholesterol lowering chemical through a mechanism still unclear to the scientific community. This soluble fiber in oat bran may also aid in regulating blood sugar levels by forming gels that slow the absorption of glucose sugar in the intestinal tract.



By Pat Torgerson
Montana

Transportation Report

Grocery prices rising

ing the shuttle origin locations. The spread went from just over \$200/car in January of 2006 to over \$900/car in August, 2012.

"With the adjustments in late summer 2012 and the current increase, the BNSF has reduced the spread to around \$517/car. The effect of raising the non-shuttle rates by more than shuttle rates is to put ever increasing economic pressure on the non-shuttle elevator locations to remain competitive in the market place, in essence, over the long term, driving the less-than-shuttle facilities from the market place. This rate action is going on all over the country."

How does this affect your pocketbook, you say? Well, non-shuttle elevators are the small local elevators within driving distance of small grain trucks. Local farmers have smaller investments in their fuel costs, driver wages, and cost of trucks. Thus you have cheaper grain prices and groceries at lower costs.

This year is proving to be a challenging year to city dwellers as well as agriculture producers.

Are you a good multi-tasker? If you are a consumer of food, you had better become a high level multi-tasker to survive the economic climate of 2013.

Gas is soon \$4 a gallon nationwide and seems to be creeping up to \$5 per gallon in some states. This will have a domino effect on everyone's pocketbook. High gas prices may be the straw that breaks the backs of many households.

Freight rate levels have escalated to their highest levels ever on grains. This will have a trickle down effect on the price paid on grain products. Here is an example. Bear with me. Terry Whiteside gave me this information.

"Starting in 2006, the BNSF initiated tariff rate adjustments raising the less-than-shuttle elevator locations by greater amounts than it was adjust-

Water, Private Property, Natural Resources, and Endangered Species Report



By Alice Parker
Washington

The Family Farm Alliance Annual Conference on February 21-23 was held at the Monte Carlo in Las Vegas with approximately 200 attendees. The theme was “Aligning Enhanced Western Irrigated Agriculture with an Improved Environment.” Alice Parker, Natural Resource Chairman attended as a representative of WIFE at the conference.

“Protecting irrigated agriculture” is the primary mission of a group of farmers, ranchers, and irrigation organizations called the Family Farm Alliance.” The Family Farm Alliance (FFA) was founded in the mid-80’s by a small group of family farmers in the Central San Joaquin Valley in California who were concerned about acreage reform proposals. Their belief was that farmers could best explain to policy makers the impact of regulations on their own operations.

The “Farmer Lobbyist” concept began and is still a core program of the FFA organization over 25 years later. It now includes members with irrigated farming and ranching interests in the 17 Western States where irrigated farming is prevalent. FFA continues to build coalitions and create alliances to advocate for irrigated agriculture. The FFA has developed targeted core programs which includes Farmer Lobby Trips to Washington D.C.; Congressional Outreach; “Monthly Briefing , Water Review, Issue Alerts” publications; and Educate members and supporters through the Annual Meeting.

Conference speakers and panelists included a panel of AGree including the FFA President Patrick O’Toole; AGree Executive Director Deb Attwood; Hal Hamilton, Founder of Sustainable Food Lab and Jim Moseley, USDA Deputy

Family farm conference well attended

Secretary. The Regional Directors from Reclamation gave an update on their regions including projects underway and the current water conditions. Tony Richardson, Executive Director of the Western States Water Council gave a presentation on “Water Transfers in the West”, a report from the Western Governors Council. A panel of Staff members from the Senate Water and Power committee and the House Natural Resource committee gave an overview of what is happening in D.C and took questions from attendees.

The panel discussion on the Colorado River watershed gave an update on what is happening in the watershed. Dr. Darryl Olsen’s presentation was on the Economic Value of Western Irrigated Agriculture. Representative “Doc” Hastings, Chairman of the House Natural Resource Committee was the Keynote Speaker and was presented the 2013 Water Warrior Award from the FFA organization. The panel of Jeff Eisenberg (Western Agriculture and Conservation Coalition); Craig Jagger (Legis, former Chief Economist, U.S. House Agriculture Committee); Josh Maxwell (professional staff, U.S. House Agriculture Committee), and Russ Schnitzer (Trout Unlimited) discussed the 2013 Farm Bill. Speakers Dr. David Zoldoske, Director of the Center for Irrigation Technology at Fresno State University and Dr. James Phillip King, Associate Head and Associate Professor of the Civil Engineering Department at New Mexico State Uni-

versity discussed “Western Agricultural Water Use Efficiency: How Much Water Really Can Be Saved?”

Deb Attwood on the AGree panel listed the three top issues as #1- Immigration; #2- Production Ag (need to increase production)and #3- Research and Extension (need to explore how to feed 9 million people; how to prioritize and how do we attract new people). Jim Moseley stated that Western Ag is different than other areas in agriculture. Irrigated Ag is 40 percent of agriculture production with 5.5 million acres being irrigated which is 7.5 percent of all land. Three fourths of these lands are in the West and 40 percent of the total of agriculture production with a total value of \$50 billion.

The ability to apply water when needed is the key to the efficiency and value of irrigated farming and ranching. Mr. Moseley stated “no water no production.” The panel said “there are less that 2 percent in agriculture. How do we produce unless we have people to produce?” (I asked 2 percent of the people are in Ag but aren’t the other 98 percent very dependent on the 2 percent?) Mr. Hamilton commented that water storage needs to be part of the equation for the future of Ag production.

The program gave much food for thought and attendees were provided the opportunity to ask questions and make comments and give input into the topics being discussed. Presentations will be posted on the Family Farm Alliance website.

Hastings releases statement

WASHINGTON, D.C., February 28, 2013 - House Natural Resources Committee Chairman Doc Hastings (WA-04) today released the following statement after receiving a partial response from U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Director Dan Ashe to his February 7th request for

an extended public comment period for Lesser Prairie Chicken designation under the Endangered Species Act and to approve state and local plans to protect the Lesser Prairie Chicken:

Continued on Page 12

Natural Resources Report

Hastings addresses Fish and Wildlife Service

Continued from Page 11

“Considering the sweeping impact that listing the prairie chicken would have on agricultural and energy-producing areas in five states, it only makes sense that the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service would allow affected communities more time for public input before final decisions are made.

“What is concerning, however, is that Service’s response today does nothing to address the underlying and continual problem of closed-door deals with litigious environmental groups that arbitrarily set deadlines for ESA-listings.

“These secretive settlements don’t allow full consideration of sound science and data, analyses of the economic impacts or whether a listing of this kind is even warranted to begin with.”

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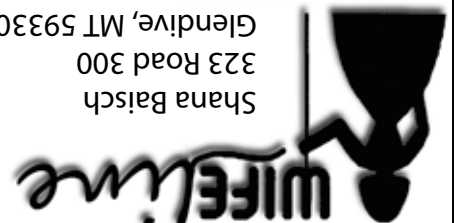


WIFeline
a publication of
WOMEN INVOLVED
IN FARM ECONOMICS
Published monthly except June and November

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