

# 2023 Ag Times



**Feature: Gerloffs celebrate 106 years on family farm...page 2B**

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GASCONADE COUNTY

**Republican**



# Gerloffs celebrate 106 years — six generations — on family farm

BY ROXIE MURPHY  
ADVOCATE STAFF WRITER  
rmurphy@wardpub.com

BLAND — Family members have run Gerloff Century Farm near Bland for 106 years, but the journey has not been without its ups and downs according to its oldest living farmer Charlie Gerloff. “Gerloff Farm is run by generations three through five and is growing the sixth,” Gerloff said proudly. “My grandparents bought the farm in 1906, Richard and Lena Gerloff. My parents were Alfred and Esther. They were the backbone of me, and if it wouldn’t have been for them — I was a spoiled child but I had to work for it.” Richard and Lena Gerloff built the homestead in 1920 with bricks hauled in by horse and wagon from Bland. Their son Alfred, one of seven children, briefly left the farm but later returned with his wife Esther in 1947 to take up operations. The same year their

See **Gerloff farm**, Page 3B

PHOTOS BY DENNIS WARDEN

**Jeremy Helmig, owner/operator**



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**CHARLIE GERLOFF** looks over his herd (photo opposite page) and sitting in his truck with his dog Sadie.

### Gerloff farm • from page 2B

son, Charles (Charlie) Gerloff, was born. The Gerloff family worked the home-stead, and Charlie was showing interest in cattle.

“Mom and dad got me started in 4-H and I got a passion for cattle,” Gerloff said. “Dad took me to Gerald where the Youth Fair used to be. Down there, wasn’t much competition at all and I won down there. I was active in 4-H and FFA. I had a lot of ego I guess. More ego than I had brains.

That was the only way I could excel, is if I worked hard at it.”

Alfred Gerloff purchased Angus heifers in 1957 from East Central Angus. Charlie Gerloff’s knowledge of the animal and breeds continued to grow.

Gerloff’s being in 4-H and FFA are the reasons he has always been supportive of children showing calves and selling club calves.

See **Gerloff farm**, Page 5B

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**LAST FALL'S** annual Bull Fest brought in bidders from 150 miles away for the Gerloff Angus Bulls. Auctioneer Clint Hunter (cowboy hat on the dias) was accompanied by David "Chop" Kemp with the American Simmental Association and Tom Burke, Angus Hall of Fame sale manager.



**PHOTOS BY DENNIS WARDEN**



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## Gerloff farm • from page 3B

“My kin has been pretty successful,” he said. “My granddaughters are very successful through national showmanship. It is hard to believe how well she has done.”

Gerloff has often been at the show barns at the local fairs, standing behind the photographer whistling and snapping his fingers to make the animals stand tall and look their best.

Gerloff’s children Kimberly Huebler, Mindi Katsov and Lance Gerloff were well-known at the fair events.

Between 1957 and 1970, Angus bulls became a hard sell.

“It got to where we couldn’t sell an Angus bull in the early 70s,” Gerloff said. “They weren’t popular. People wanted taller cattle.”

The trick to longevity on a family farm is moving with the trends and knowing how to follow the market.

“I went to buying Chianina cows, bred ‘em with Pumpkin Seed/Belt Buckle bulls and they produced an attractive calf with a lot of leg, which at the time was very popular,” Gerloff explained.

It didn’t take long before the family was completely out of the Angus herd sales. By 1996, the Gerloff family was expanding the pole barn to accommodate sales. Gerloff himself offered club calf sales for kids who show at the fair.

“Maine-Anjou was pretty popular in the club calf sales at one time,” Gerloff said. “I pursued them for breeding but they had a lot of trouble.”

The Gerloff children were still highly involved in 4-H and FFA, and the trends were leaning back toward Angus beef.

“We showed the Angus, the kids did, and they did really good at the county and state fairs,” Gerloff said.

Alfred Gerloff passed away on Oct. 4, 2006, and the farm officially passed to Charlie Gerloff, with assistance from the fourth generation and upcoming fifth generation. They also became a Century Farm Family

— marking five generations living off the land — while growing the sixth.

“The big thing is there is a lot that has to be done and you all have to work together to make that go,” Kim Huebler said. “With every additional generation, there are changes that happen and things that have to be worked through to make the family farm continue.”

Gerloff said the next generation wants a lot more equipment than he ever had and cautions them to live within the means of farming. The addition of the Bull Fest and Female Sale in 2008 helped boost revenue and recognition of the farm.

It was the return of the Angus market that birthed Gerloff Farm’s Annual Bull Fest and Female Sale.

“If I can’t raise money at something, I have to do something else,” Gerloff said. “I have a pretty good niche for what kind of cattle it takes.”

The family’s Angus beef herds by 1996 had been dissipated, according to Gerloff.

“A couple of partners went in with me and we bought the Angus cows back,” Gerloff said.

As the family worked to build the new herd it was also expanding. Gerloff’s children married and brought their families to the farm.

New ideas were born. By 2008 the Bull Fest Sale was on its way to an annual event.

“We sell bulls, commercial steers, females or replacement heifers for other people,” Gerloff said.

Kim Huebler said adding the Bull Fest and Female Sale didn’t mean it was the only time the animals could be sold. The private treaty agreement is available year-round.

“We started having the Bull Fest as one big event with a customer appreciation dinner to thank them for their support,” Kim Huebler said. “It started as a private event and if you wanted to buy a bull you could. It evolved more into a sale and we added females as well.”

See **Gerloff farm**, Page 6B

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## Gerloff farm • from page 5B

Farmers come from a 150-mile radius each fall to attend the October event.

“We try to have a meal with it,” Gerloff said. “We have something for them to eat and fellowship and everyone seems to have a good time. We sell about 85 bulls and 120 females.”

Gerloff spoke of Expected Prodigy Difference (EPD) intricacies and the way the system has improved with blood draws and tissue samples. He estimated 50 percent of the herd born each year is sent to the meat markets. The remaining heifers will be bred for the following year and bulls sold for breeding.

Gerloff said he leaves the EPD paperwork to his daughter, Kim Huebler.

“I have always managed the paperwork side of things,” Kim Huebler said. “But people want more info about their cattle, data entry, and tracking. It does get to be a challenge. We want the best for our customers and that is a lot of extra. People don’t think about paperwork with farming; there is more data and tracking. That is extra hours and labor and commitment that takes place to keep this going as well.”

Gerloff said the system and techniques of farming cattle is always changing and in more recent years he has left the running of the farm more and more to the next generation, including his daughter and her husband Scott Huebler, son Lance Gerloff, and grandson Dakota.

Both Gerloff and his daughter acknowledge that is a lot of opinions.

“At least four different opinions on how things should go,” Kim Huebler said. “We are mostly on the same page about what needs to happen, what changes and additions,



what extra testing, adding the SimAngus and Maine-Anjou (breeds).”

The biggest struggle isn’t in making the decisions on how to move forward but in running out of space.

“Honestly, the biggest struggle at this point is trying to grow and expand,” Kim Huebler said. “Land is expensive.

To try to expand your operation without land is impossible. Out here if there is land the city folks can afford it a lot easier than we can and it makes it harder to make a living because there is no land to grow with. That is where the struggle gets challenging, because of adding more generations to keep it going.”

Without the ability to expand the land, production is limited and so is profit. The farm takes commitment from everyone in the family, including the spouses because they will take a job off the farm to supplement the family income. Gerloff said that has so far fallen to the wives to seek other employment, and Kim Huebler agrees.

“Someone else in the family has to work outside of the farm,” she said. “It is something we (she and her husband) talked about when we got married.”

Gerloff said he hopes Gerloff Farms will move forward with positivity long after him. The group operating the farm after him include Lance and Becky Gerloff, Scott and Kimberly Huebler and Mindi Katsov and Jeff Blankenship.

“Dakota, my grandson, went to college for two years and has a pretty good eye for cattle,” Gerloff said. “A love and a passion. Scotty, my son-in-law, keeps things going and is very conscious of his work. He will hang in there until the job is done.”

As for himself, Gerloff says he works every day towards his goal.

“My mission, my passion, and my desire is to see it go forward and to be an asset to society,” he said. “We have the sale in the spring, on the show list now, for the bull yearlings and the older bulls that haven’t sold from last fall still available. They are ready to go.”

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# Farming with a drone



**BY H.B. DODDS**  
**UD STAFF WRITER**  
hbdodds@wardpub.com

**BONNOTS MILL** — Nathan Troesser of Bonnots Mill founded Missouri Valley Drone, LLC, in 2022. In so doing, he answered a call for solutions which has grown louder with time. How?

For more than 100 years — from the dawn of manned flight early in the 20th century — farmers have looked to the sky for an advantage. In 1906, an Australian farmer used a tethered hot air balloon to seed a rugged stretch of land; and the stewards of the soil haven't been kept down since.

A couple of decades later, manufacturers were building planes, especially for agricultural applications. Companies formed to sell farmers their services. Seeding, fertilizing, and pest or weed control were revolutionized. The benefits of agriculture aviation, though, come at a price. Farmers continue to be willing to pay that price, and pilots continue to answer the call in return for their dollars. Nevertheless, some seek answers to agriculture aviation's persistent questions.

Most first answers to tough queries, however, form even more questions.

Earth-bound machines like tractors can only cover ground at a certain pace, limited by fric-

See **Drone**, Page 9B



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**Drone** • from page 8B

tion and obstruction. They spend hours in the field, plowing through soil that is only occasionally ideal for tilling. Farmers often work under a hot sun while racing the sunset. That's after jumping into the seat long before entirely awake, shortly after sunrise. The hours seem to fly while the tractor crawls across the acres, and it's easy to let the mind wander to the sky.

Meanwhile, a field not far away is being worked by an airplane, done in a fraction of the time.

Friction? That machine only needs enough air density to let lift overcome the drag on its wings. Soil moisture and quality? Not in play. Weather? Well, it can be too windy, but heat and cold don't bother a pilot as much. Coverage is a lot wider and faster. It's no surprise the industry has grown in significance.

Almost every aviation manufacturer offers multiple crop dusting planes; almost every agricultural area worldwide has numerous companies providing aerial application services. Most travelers on flat highways far from cities have watched agrarian aviation. A small but sturdy plane is flying close to the ground with a cloud of something in its wake — seed, pesticide, insecticide, or fertilizer. The ground underneath is getting a head start that tractors can't match.

There are, though, those "even more questions."

Crop-dusting is dangerous for pilots. Flying close enough to the ground to get the payload delivered accurately is not what pilots like to do. Remember that problem of obstructions in the soil? Well, it turns out there are a few in the sky as well. When a plane hits one of those, it causes more problems than a tractor or implements hitting one hidden in the dirt. Plus, what about wind or a misunderstanding of the geography beneath the plane? Seed and chemicals can be wasted or sent where they're not wanted or even tolerated.

How serious are these problems? Consider a few facts. Fatal accidents for agriculture pilots occur more than 10 times as often as in general aviation. Nor is that a reduction of any kind compared to a few decades ago. Commercial aviation is now 80% safer than at the turn of the century, but agricultural aviation is as dangerous as ever.

Nor have operators gained ground addressing the difficulty of the job. It's physically challenging. It demands climbs, drops, and turns, often creating a lot of gravitational stress on a pilot's body. Plus, conditions can require that flights meet tough schedules. This is due to weather, planting and fertilizing optimal conditions, and seasonal demands. Agriculture pilots can't just fly when they feel like it, skipping days when they'd rather stay on the ground. If a plane can go up, pilots need to take it up when a farmer is willing to pay for it.

"You have to be at peak physical performance to survive the busy season," says one, quoted by Victoria Bottomley, a pilot and an author who flies an Airbus A320 but has a heart for those who fly crop-dusters. "You also have to know when it is time to quit due to physical fatigue, mental fatigue, or sleep deprivation. The head game is a big part of safety."

Is there an answer to the dangers and difficulties faced by those crop dusters? Nathan Troesser has one; he actually has a few.

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See **Drone**, Page 11B

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# Advancements in livestock technology



Consumer demand drives changes in industry, and the agricultural sector is no exception. Consumer demands for improved animal welfare have led to changes in the livestock sector, and various technologies have been developed and are in development to help this particular segment of the agricultural industry thrive.

According to the Animal AgTech Innovation Summit, various startups have developed technologies that can make the livestock industry more sustainable and efficient.

### Treatment

The Israeli firm Armenta has developed a non-antibiotic treatment for bovine mastitis that utilizes acoustic pulse technology. The treatment has a 70 percent cure rate.

Another firm working to treat livestock is the United States-based General Probiotics. Animal AgTech reports that General Probiotics develops cellbots and antimicrobial probiotics that eliminate harmful pathogens in livestock. That can reduce dependency on antibiotics and make food production safer.

### Welfare

Faromatics, a firm based in Spain, has combined robotics, artificial intelligence and big data to improve animal welfare and farm productivity. One Faromatics product utilizes a robot suspended

from a ceiling to monitor certain variables, including equipment function and health and welfare, that affect broiler chickens.

The American firm Swinotech utilizes voice recognition and computer vision technology in its SmartGuard product to prevent piglet deaths from crushing and starvation. The product also makes it possible to track and facilitate obstetrical assistance.

### Operations

Based in Uganda, Jaguza Tech has developed a livestock management system that utilizes sensors, data science and machine learning to improve the efficiency, productivity and sustainability of modern farm operations. Farmers can utilize Jaguza to perform a host of functions, including monitoring their animals' health and identifying their livestock.

The Netherlands-based H2Oalert is a water control management system that checks the quality and quantity of cattle drinking water in real time. The management system also checks for pollution and malfunctions in the water supply.

Livestock technology continues to advance, and firms across the globe are developing new products and platforms to help livestock farmers make their operations more efficient, sustainable and productive.

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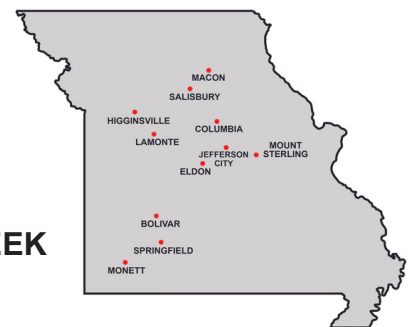
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## Drone • from page 9B

a tractor to distribute seed, chemicals, fertilizer, and some other solutions. Nor does he have to put his life in danger, dodging power lines, towers, and other low-flying aircraft. He flies drones, so his feet are always safely on the ground. Sure, he'd like to keep his drones safe. They cost money. However, keeping an operator safe is always a bigger deal.

Remember that thing about flying close to the ground? Drones can do that better than even the best-piloted aircraft. What can even a slight wind do to a stream of product from a low-flying airplane? It can do much less with a stream from a lower-flying drone. "Drones are more precise and have less product drift, making aerial application safer for neighboring farms," Troesser noted.

Troesser's skills have made a name for themselves in a short period.

"About 50 percent of our clients are from Osage County and surrounding areas," he said. "We enjoy working locally but are beginning to reach out to more areas around the state, even some out of state."

Those skills are magnified by some top-tier equipment. He flies a variety of crafts manufactured by the multinational company DJI. His favorite is a DJI Agras T40. It boasts a 10.5-gallon tank with a spray width of about 12 yards. "It is the most efficient

spray drone available," Troesser asserted. "We are very excited to get this new drone out in the field."

Troesser's T40 recently seeded a remote pasture for Steve Smyth of Seven Thunder Bison Ranch near Chamois. "We have some pasture we just can't reach with our equipment," said Smyth. "Nathan got it done in a couple of hours."

Smyth's herd will soon enjoy increasingly rare native prairie grass, the kind buffalo like to eat. Planted in early February, it should save him a lot of hay before winter. Missouri Valley Drone may be there again if that pasture stays off-limits for machines but not animals.

Troesser's services may be obtained by calling 573-418-7103 or logging on to [www.movalleydrone.com](http://www.movalleydrone.com). "We rely on quality work and building relationships with clients," said Troesser.

He's also become a DJI dealer. "We provide others with agricultural drones and training on how to operate them safely and efficiently," said Troesser.

Aviation has been getting more people together since flight began. Farmers now have more of it available to form relationships. It can now be done in a safer, more efficient way than ever. Troesser can perform that service without even flying to, let alone over, the field.

## Celebrate agriculture: Thank a Farmer Week

OWENSVILLE — Our changing economy illustrates how agriculture impacts our lives now more than ever. Thanks to Missouri farmers, consumers have many choices for the locally sourced food and goods they enjoy. Around the world, consumers value what our farmers and ranchers produce. Missouri Farm Bureau and county Farm Bureau's across the state are joining forces to celebrate the importance of agriculture, March 5–11, during Celebrate Agriculture: Thank a Farmer Week!

According to the 2017 Census of Agriculture, the number of farms in Missouri declined 3,851 from 2012 to 95,320. Acreage also declined by just over a half-million acres. Despite the drop in farms and farm acreage, Missouri continues to rank among the top 10 states in production of major commodities and provides an \$88.4 billion economic impact.

America's farms and farmers continue to be the most productive in the world. Each farm annually produces enough food and fiber for 172 people, 106 in the U.S. and 66 abroad. American consumers benefit from this bounty, yet spend less than 9 percent of their disposable income on food. By 2050, the global population is expected to increase by 9.1 billion people. Farmers will have to grow about 49 percent more food than is now produced.

With all that they produce, it is remarkable that farm and ranch families account for less than 2 percent of the U.S. population. Across the United States, there are 2 million farms with 3.4 million farm operators. This number includes owners, their families, hired workers, tenants and renters or sharecroppers. Many farms today find multiple generations working together to produce food and fiber.

So, join Farm Bureau as we Celebrate agriculture and Thank a Farmer.

"Agriculture is important to our daily lives and our community. Because 98 percent of the population doesn't farm, it is easy to take for granted the importance of our farmers," Chery Fricke, Promotion and Education Chairperson says. "Celebrate Agriculture: Thank a Farmer Week is a great time to recognize the important contribution made by farmers!"



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# Career paths in agriculture



As the world population grows, the role of the agricultural sector will become even more prominent. There should be significant demand for agricultural professionals capable of meeting the challenges facing the world as it confronts climate change and food shortages. That makes now a perfect time for students to explore potential career paths in the agricultural sector.

- **Agricultural engineer:** Agricultural engineers employ engineering principles to solve issues related to agricultural production. An agricultural engineer may design facilities or machinery or develop solutions to address problems related to irrigation and soil conservation, among other projects. Students interested in a career as an agricultural engineer can expect to study mathematics, physics, chemistry, computer engineering, and, of course, engineering analysis and design as they pursue their degrees.

- **Agronomist:** Agronomists work with crops and soil management and may work as analysts, environmentalists or forecasters.

See **Career**, Page 13B

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## Heroes • from page 12B

Agronomists may be tasked with analyzing soil structure and chemistry and study how water is moving within soil. Students will study agriculture, biology, chemistry, and physics en route to earning a degree that will help them become an agronomist. Mathematics also will be part of their studies, and statistics courses will be part of those studies.

• **Biochemist:** Biochemists study the chemical and physical principles of living things and biological processes. Within the agricultural sector, biochemists will contribute to the development of agricultural products, including those that will serve a medicinal function. Biochemistry, chemistry, biology, calculus, and physics will be part of students' coursework as they pursue degrees that prepare them for a career as a biochemist.

• **Climatologist:** Climatologists will figure prominently in the agricultural sector as the effects of climate change manifest themselves more readily over the next several decades. Climatologists study climate change, variability and the biosphere. Climatologists offer insight about the effects of climate change on the growth and development of agricultural products, including fruits, grains and vegetables. The natural sciences feature prominently in climatologists' educations, and students also will study meteorology as part of their coursework.

• **Food scientist:** Food scientists study chemistry, biochemistry, microbiology, and engineering so they can assist in the development of new food products. Food scientists may manage processing plants and some serve as researchers in an effort to solve problems related to food production.

• **Plant pathologist:** Plant pathologists specialize in analyzing issues related to plant diseases. Research features prominently in plant pathologists' work, and many work in university settings. Some plant pathologists work for companies attempting to develop pest-resistant plants. Advanced degrees are necessary to work as a plant pathologist, and students will study mycology, bacteriology, virology, and physiology, among other subjects, as they pursue their degrees.

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# Heroes to Hives and other MU Extension programs help veterans

**BY LINDA GEIST**  
Missouri University Extension

POTOSI — Beginning farmer and 25-year Army veteran Eric Work’s calendar is full of educational programs offered by University of Missouri Extension.

“MU Extension programs are a godsend,” Work says. “I benefit from the amazing, high-quality learning opportunities that University of Missouri Extension continually provides, not only to veterans but many other diverse groups that are interested in learning and potentially pursuing new careers.”

A favorite of Work’s is the Heroes to Hives program, which trains veterans in beekeeping. MU Extension agronomist Travis Harper teaches the hands-on portion of the program in Missouri. Army veteran Adam Ingrao of Michigan State University Extension, who developed the program, presents the online portion.

Students receive two to six hours of prerecorded

lecture content from March to November so that they can learn at their own pace. On-ground training is April to October at the Heroes to Hives apiaries at the University of Central Missouri’s Mitchell Street Farm in Warrensburg and the MU Southwest Center at Mount Vernon. Participants learn ways to earn income through the sale of honey as well as value-added products such as candles, lip balms and mead.

More important than the technical knowledge is the opportunity to connect with other veterans, says Work. Missouri has more than 440,000 veterans making the transition from military to civilian life. “A lot of veterans come right out of the service and may feel disconnected and may be struggling with finding job opportunities or facing other issues,” he says. “The Heroes to Hives program offers a diversion as well as opportunities.”

Work grew up in a military family. His father retired

See **Heroes**, Page 15B

**ERIC WORK** maintains beehives at his farm in Potosi, Mo. Work, a 25-year Army veteran, says the Heroes to Hives program offered through University of Missouri Extension and Michigan State University Extension gives veterans and their families an opportunity to learn about beekeeping.

PHOTO COURTESY OF ERIC WORK

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## Heroes • from page 14B

from the military, his brother, Richard, served for 20 years, and one of his sons is in the U.S. Air Force in Okinawa.

Work says Heroes to Hives served as a gateway to other MU Extension programs, such as Missouri Beginning Farmers and Ranchers, which helps him learn about business plans, government programs and grants for farmers and ranchers, financing and how to grow and market specialty crops. He works full-time as a business continuity/disaster preparedness professional but is preparing for another career as a farmer.

Bees are not Work's only passion. He is on the advisory board for Peaceful Pastures Donkey Rescue in Lincoln, Missouri. The nonprofit rescues donkeys that are abused, neglected or at risk for slaughter. Work's 35-acre farm in Potosi includes eight horses, 13 dogs, 14 cats and a house pig named Mojo. Most are rescue animals.

To learn more about Heroes to Hives, call 800-995-8503 or visit [mizzou.us/heroestohives](http://mizzou.us/heroestohives).



**IN ADDITION** to tending bees, U.S. Army veteran Eric Work is on the advisory board of Peaceful Pastures Donkey Rescue, a Missouri nonprofit that rescues donkeys that are abused, neglected or at risk of slaughter.

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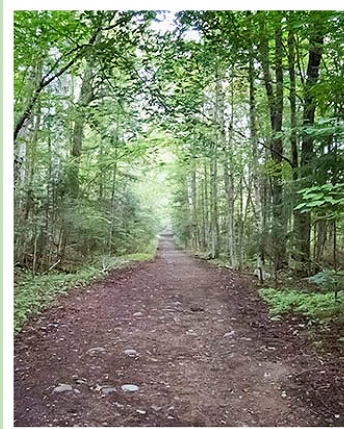


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# Tight labor market challenges farm employers to rethink compensation

**BY LINDA GEIST**  
Missouri University Extension

PARIS — Today's tight labor market makes it harder for farm employers to compete for workers, says Ryan Milhollin, University of Missouri Extension agricultural economist.

Farm laborers work long hours, sometimes in inclement weather. Workers may need diverse skills to fill roles such as truck driver, mechanic, nutritionist, forage specialist, veterinarian, babysitter and weather forecaster. For this demanding work, farmworkers often receive pay and benefits below those offered in other industries.

To help farms attract and retain workers in this environment, Milhollin recommends considering nonmonetary

compensation.

"Farm employers can use nonmonetary compensation to tap into what makes working on a farm unique and provide an inexpensive yet meaningful benefit to farm employment," says Milhollin, an author of MU Extension's Missouri Farm Labor Guide.

Benefits could include free housing, hunting privileges on farmer-owned land and continuing education opportunities. Milhollin says the key is getting to know your employees and what they enjoy. Choosing benefits you know the farm team will value will have a greater impact on retaining team members.

Lynn Fodge, of Hopewell Farms in Monroe County, says she, her husband

See **Labor**, Page 19B





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## Labor • from page 18B

and their two sons and their spouses try to show their deep appreciation for their two farm employees, Trevor Cockrell and Dakota Beckfield. The Fodges farm about 5,000 acres of row crops and pasture and have 550 head of fall- and spring-calving Angus cows.

The Fodges communicate their appreciation by thanking the workers for their many efforts, giving bonuses when sales are good and offering meat and other products of the farm. They also provide some insurance benefits and a retirement plan.

Other perks include being able to borrow farm equipment, trucks and tools for personal use. The farm allows flexibility in work hours to accommodate family time, school schedules and community events.

Hopewell Farms' two employees came to them by chance meeting and word of mouth. Neither had extensive agricultural backgrounds, so the Fodges trained them. Cockrell has worked on the farm for 12 years, and Beckfield joined the team eight months ago.

"We know there is too much work for the family without them," says Lynn Fodge. "We depend on them, and we are grateful for them."

Farmhands once were a fixture of farmsteads. Now, like farmers, they are a vanishing breed, she says. Fewer young people want to return to the farm, and there are financial obstacles to entering the industry.

Wages for farmworkers are rising at a slower pace than nonfarm wages, according to the USDA Economic Research Service. In 2020, the average farm wage was \$14.62 per hour, just 59 percent of the nonfarm wage (\$24.68). And the hired farm workforce is aging — another obstacle for those seeking employees.

For more information on how to attract and retain farmworkers, download the free "Missouri Farm Labor Guide" at [extension.missouri.edu/m199](http://extension.missouri.edu/m199).

**TREVOR COCKRELL**, (photo opposite page) a 12-year employee of Hopewell Farms in Monroe County, feeds cattle as part of his work to keep the beef and grain operation running smoothly. The owners, the Fodge family, rely on their employees to keep the 5,000-acre operation going.

PHOTO COURTESY OF LYNN FODGE

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# Not every weed is bad

BY COLIN WILLARD  
ADVOCATE STAFF WRITER  
cwillard@wardpub.com

VIENNA — Many farmers and agriculture workers made their way to the Knights of Columbus Hall in Vienna on March 3 to attend the Central Missouri Forage & Beef Conference. The University of Missouri Extension hosted the conference, which featured a dinner, a trade show with more than one dozen booths and a panel of producers to discuss interspecies grazing. Speakers also gave presentations on a variety of topics including grazing and vaccination.

Gatlin Bunton, Director of the Wurdack Extension and Education Center in Crawford County, gave a presentation that challenged the perception of weeds as useless pests.

“It’s not always that every weed is a bad thing,” Bunton said. “If it’s not a bad thing, we can probably look at it as forage. Some of you might shake your heads at that, and that’s alright because weeds are weeds. But if it has forage value, and it is growing, and we need forage, then that’s pretty valuable to our operations. A lot of people probably relied on weeds last year during the drought.”

Bunton acknowledged some of the things



PHOTOS BY COLIN WILLARD

**LOCAL FARMERS** attend the Central Missouri Forage & Beef Conference at the Vienna Knights of Columbus Hall on March 3.

that give weeds a bad reputation. They are the most abundant pest in Missouri pastures while outnumbering creatures such as armyworms and rabbits that often disrupt the pasture environment. Weeds also occupy space and displace other forms of forage while using resources such as light, water and nutrients in the soil.

The average field contains 20,000 weeds per acre. Cultivators can weigh their options for controlling weeds because some, such as dandelions, are digestible for grazing ani-

mals. Many other weeds are toxic. Spraying herbicides and mowing weeds are common solutions, but Bunton said grazing is also a good tool for clearing weeds.

“By the end of the summer, that means we have a lot of potential to either break the sprayer out or turn the cows on it,” Bunton said. “It all depends on what we’re looking at.”

One of Bunton’s points in favor of grazing as weed control was the economic value. The cost of mowing weeds can be unpredictable

because of fluctuating diesel prices. Herbicide sprays also cost money but offer an opportunity for better control. However, if cows graze the weeds, the solution to a weed problem no longer costs money. Instead, it provides value by feeding the cows.

“It’s a mindset change,” Bunton said. “Those animals are grazing, and at some point, if we can teach them to keep grazing it, that’s a useful skill.”

See **Weeds**, Page 21B

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## Weeds • from page 20B

Bunton shared some anecdotal evidence from his work at the Wurdack Extension and Education Center. He said that the manager before he took over did a very good job of controlling weeds. The cows there did not eat weeds when grazing. After increasing the stocking density at the research center, the cows began to eat weeds such as ragweed broadleaf plantain to a point that Bunton described as a “pretty even mow.”

Cattle are more eager to graze on some types of weeds than others. Bunton said that some weeds, such as chicory are valuable because they are palatable for cows due to their easily stripped leaves.

Palatability is a large part of how cows respond to grazing weeds. Bunton presented data about how often cows ate certain weeds. Cattle grazed dandelion, which is one of the more common weeds in the state, at an 86 percent rate. Unfavorable weeds scored much lower. The cows that were part of the study only ate ironweed at a rate of about eight percent.

“I have the habit of going around and tasting weeds,” Bunton said. “I know my mouth isn’t the same as a cow’s, but ironweed is pretty darn gross.”

Bunton pointed to common ragweed, which appears in 97 percent of pastures but cows only graze 28 percent of the time, as a good target for cattle owners to use for grazing. When it first starts to grow and appears about four or five inches above the ground, cows eat it more often because it offers 26 percent protein. Once it reaches maturity, it still has about 15 percent protein, but cattle are less likely to eat it.

Ultimately, cattle’s reception to eating weeds is herd-dependent though they can learn to eat it. One method for teaching weed grazing is what Bunton called identity grazing.

“We just threw 93 head on three acres, and eventually they all started grazing it,” Bunton said. “We did that a couple of times, and now those cows eat weeds a little more readily than before we got started. If we can teach one cow to do it, and she’s dominant enough



**GATLIN BUNTON**, Director of the Wurdack Extension and Education Center gives a presentation on weeds.

in that herd, usually she will pick that up and other cows will follow.”

Another method to encourage cattle to graze on weeds is to make the plants more palatable. The taste of the weeds can improve by spraying sugar or molasses on them. Bunton said this method might need a few tries to work, but they will start eating the weeds eventually.

The other method Bunton suggested was one he said the Australian Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry had endorsed for decades. The process involves spraying sub-lethal doses of herbicides on weeds. Although

the herbicide will not kill the plants, it will cause them to twist and cells will break. That releases sugar, which makes the weeds more palatable to the animals.

Bunton said that one thing to beware of is that if cows learn to graze palatable weeds, they can also learn to graze toxic weeds. Anyone training cows to eat weeds should ensure that no toxic weeds are in the grazing area.

“It just takes one naive animal to be effective, and with the price of cows right now, nobody can afford to lose any,” Bunton said.

The presentation included photos and facts about some of the state’s most common toxic weeds to kill instead of teaching cows to graze them. Those species included black cherry, jimsonweed, perilla mint and poison hemlock.

Poison hemlock is among the most toxic plants in Missouri. It is biannual, so it is a rosette with a purple stem in its first year before growing to look like giant wild carrot. Bunton said that lethal doses of poison hemlock scale at about two to six grams per pound of body weight.

“When you do the math on that, it comes out that a 1,000-pound steer would die after eating about the normal-sized salad,” he said. “Just a couple of bites and that thing would be dead. One plant could wipe out a fair number of animals if they were to graze it.”

Bunton said most herds will not eat poison hemlock, but owners should still be aware because some animals are naive and will eat it.

Later, Bunton said that grazing weeds is a good way to get cattle through a drought. He also reiterated the value that some weeds have when used as forage.

“You have a lot of forage built in there that you didn’t necessarily have to plant,” he said. “We can actually manage weeds. It’s very counterintuitive, but if you’re using it for forage, we need to make sure we keep some of them on our place. Not every weed is bad. Not every weed is good.”

Bunton recommended that anyone with more questions about Missouri’s weeds should read the Weed and Brush Control guide published by the University of Missouri Extension.

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# Tips on selling your timber

**BY LINDA GEIST**

Missouri University Extension

KIRKSVILLE—There are important steps to take when considering selling timber, says University of Missouri Extension forester Hank Stelzer.

In addition to providing additional revenue, harvesting timber can improve the health and vigor of woods and wildlife.

Most landowners don't know the value of their woodlands, Stelzer says. Too often, landowners make uneducated decisions on selling their trees and underestimate their value.

Stelzer recommends consulting with a forester. Professional foresters can help guide the process so that the seller benefits financially and the woodlands remain in good health. Public foresters, such as those with the Missouri Department of Conservation, can provide assistance but there may be a wait. "While consulting foresters charge for their services, they work for you and are usually more responsive," he says.

Stelzer offers these tips:

1. Educate yourself and know what you have to sell. Read guides and talk with other woodlands owners in your area. MU Extension publication G5051, "Selling Timber: What the Landowner Needs To Know," is available for free download at [extension.missouri.edu/p/G5051](http://extension.missouri.edu/p/G5051). "While the information in this guide will not make you an expert, it will familiarize you with the overall process and some of



the lingo used by both foresters and loggers," Stelzer says.

2. Work with a professional forester. Call 877-564-7483 or go to [www.call4ucut.com/missouri](http://www.call4ucut.com/missouri) (opens in new window). This free service will send a consulting forester to your property to give an initial assessment. If they determine you have a potential sale, you can hire them or you may contact a Missouri Department of Conservation forester. Either forester will identify which trees to harvest based on your overall objectives and the financial and biological maturity of trees in the sale area. They will also determine the potential value of the sale based on species, merchantable volume and quality.

3. Find a trained logger. The Missouri Forest Products

Association lists professional timber harvesters by county at [www.moforest.org/loggers](http://www.moforest.org/loggers). "Insist at a minimum that the logger you hire has completed the association's Professional Timber Harvester Program," says Stelzer. "Better yet is for the logger to have earned their Missouri Master Logger certification. Your professional forester helps you with this as part of their services."

4. Know how to report your sale to the IRS. "Managing Your Timber Sale Tax," at [extension.missouri.edu/g5056](http://extension.missouri.edu/g5056), has guidance on how to report the sale of your trees to minimize your tax liability.

For more resources, visit MU Extension's Missouri Woodland Steward website at [muext.us/WoodlandSteward](http://muext.us/WoodlandSteward).

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# 100-year-old sells farm after 'work, work, work'

**BY LINDA GEIST**  
Missouri University Extension

CARROLLTON — Centenarian Wilda Cox knows hard work. She's built barns, lugged 110-pound cans of milk, picked and husked corn by hand and bucked hay bales.

But Cox endured no harder day than Oct. 31, 2022, when she sold the farm that had been in her family for more than a century.

Cox was born on the family farm near Bogard in Carroll County on Sept. 17, 1922. She lived there 92 years, then lived with a widowed female friend before moving to an assisted living facility recently.

The youngest of six children, Cox started farming at age 11, when her father lost a leg to disease. Her father had grown up with a series of foster parents, one of whom had beaten him so severely with a hickory switch that he would fight infections in his leg throughout his life. Young Wilda took over many of the farming duties

for her father, a sharecropper on 64 acres of land. She became the extra set of eyes, ears, hands and legs that allowed him to continue farming and take on other jobs such as setting poles for the local telephone exchange.

She became the caretaker of a team of horses during the Great Depression and after. She traveled mud roads to peddle eggs, milk and cream at the nearby Mandeville country store. During the drought of 1934, she helped dig a well by hand on the family farm. During her eight years of school, she milked cows and did other chores before and after school. "It was work, work, work," she says.

When she was 16, her dad gave her a calf named Boots. She fed it cornmeal mush and milk, and it bore three heifer calves in a row. "That put the kid in the cattle business," she says.

That Angus calf would become the backbone of the "Circle J" brand, which would later fetch top prices at

See **100-year-old**, Page 25B



**AT 100**, Wilda Cox has seen a lot of changes since she began farming at age 11. Her father gave her a calf, Boots, pictured here. That calf would be the beginning of the well-respected "Circle J" brand.

PHOTO BY LINDA GEIST

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**IN 2015**, at age 93, Wilda Cox attended MU Extension's "Pearls of Production" event for women in animal production.

PHOTO COURTESY OF MARCIA SHANNON.

## 100-year-old • from page 24B

local sale barns.

Wilda's dad died when she was 21. She assumed the lease for the farm ground and helped her mother. A diminutive 5'2", Wilda was a gritty powerhouse, cutting wood with an axe to heat the house and shooting squirrels for their meals. By doing seasonal routines of cutting corn in the morning and cutting wood in the afternoon, she was ready for winter by Thanksgiving.

Wilda had the benefit of learning skills and resourcefulness from her father and grandfather, who was a carpenter.

Friend Randy Rodenberg recalls when he and his wife went to check on Wilda one harsh, icy winter day in the 1980s. They worried when they couldn't find her inside her home and were relieved to find her in the cattle lot caring for her animals. She had made snow treads for her boots from horseshoes.

She also learned by doing — whether learning to use a chain saw, shooting a gun or climbing a telephone pole. Her formal farm training came from reading every farm magazine she could lay her hands on. "Oh, what I haven't done ain't worth telling," she says.

In 2015, at age 93, she attended Pearls of Production, a University of Missouri Extension program for women in animal production. MU Extension swine specialist Marcia Shannon, one of the organizers, remembers that Wilda enjoyed meeting other women farmers and the hands-on sessions.

Over the years, Wilda has met a series of extension agents and specialists, most of whom she has outlived. One of them, MU alumnus Jim Heitmeyer, also 100, recently received special recognition at the annual Tweedie Agri-Business Forum for his 40 years as a livestock specialist for MU Extension.

When she was 24, Wilda Smith married James Olsen Cox, who worked on a neighboring farm and had a sawmill. They married at the church parsonage and celebrated with a noon lunch. They honeymooned that afternoon by cutting telephone poles for the local exchange. She would eventually travel three times to Arkansas, but no farther, content to be needed at home.

In 1955, they bought their first tractor, a John Deere. The bought 48 more acres in 1957 and another 288 acres in 1961. They plowed under the land's sweet clover crop and planted Sudan grass and rye for pasture and hay. In 1958, they were among the first to use artificial insemination in their cattle herd.

In the meantime, they built a herd of 80 by trading two bull calves for one heifer. They implemented a herd improvement system and maintained a detailed record-keeping system. Records of the farm's income and expenses go back to the 1800s.

While she remained the backbone of the farming operation, she credits her late husband with a keen ability to spot a good bloodline of cattle. "He didn't know sic 'em about farming. What he learned, he learned from me," she says. But he did know a good cow when he saw one, a quality that helped them build the "Circle J" brand into a sought-after commodity at local sale barns.

They were married 40 years before his death at age 67. Wilda was 64.

Farming has not been without its dangers. She's been kicked, stepped on and knocked to the ground by cows and horses. She broke a hip in 2019 and developed mouth cancer that required extensive facial surgery.

Farming today requires less physical work and more money than it did when Wilda started farming, but she offers some advice for others. "Buy little by little. Don't try to buy the whole county. Find a mentor and you have to be there," she says.

Finally, "When you plant, pray to the Lord to give you a good harvest."

She is grateful for the good harvest of a long life doing what she loves to do — farm



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PHOTO BY DAVE MARNER


**OWENSVILLE FARMER** John Nicks offloads wheat harvested in 2022 from a field along Highway 19 across from the R-2 schools. Wheat stalks were also being raked and baled for straw during the harvest process.

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# Weeds adapt to fight back against herbicides

BY LINDA GEIST

Missouri University Extension

COLUMBIA — Weeds today aren't like "what Mom used to make," says University of Missouri Extension weed scientist Kevin Bradley.

Today's weeds know how to fight back against long-used herbicides and adapt in ways that spell trouble in production agriculture, says Bradley. Officially, Missouri already has 11 different herbicide-resistant weed species. Waterhemp and Palmer amaranth, both weeds in the pigweed family, rule the roost when it comes to resistant weeds in Missouri, he says.

Resistant weeds are fast outpacing the development of new herbicides. It's not just resistance running amok; it's the type of resistance that concerns Bradley. "Some of the mechanisms responsible for resistance in these weeds like waterhemp and Palmer amaranth aren't like anything we've seen before," he says.

Herbicides focus on specific enzymes that bind to target sites. Historically, weeds have adapted through mutations in their internal enzymes that result in changes to the those target sites. This has been one of the most common resistance mechanisms identified in weeds for the past several decades.

More recently, weeds have been increasingly developing metabolic-based resistance, or non-target-site resistance, which lets plants convert the herbicide's active

ingredient into inactive metabolites that don't kill the plant. Worse yet, metabolic resistance can confer resistance to other herbicides within the same chemical groups and perhaps even to herbicides in other groups. It's possible that metabolic resistance can confer resistance to new herbicides that have never been sprayed in that field. This makes weed control even more unpredictable and concerning, says Bradley.

"Unfortunately, the trend with resistant pigweeds like waterhemp and Palmer amaranth right now is metabolic resistance," says Bradley. "When weed scientists have investigated the 2,4-D, dicamba or group 15 resistant pigweed populations that have been found in some states in recent years, they have found metabolic resistance mechanisms in these weeds more often than not," he says.

"Keep mixing and rotating herbicide sites of action, but remember, herbicides alone aren't a silver bullet to solve the resistance problem."

Meanwhile, Bradley is studying other ways to control weeds and prevent weed seeds from returning to the soil. Methods include weed electrocution and a seed destructor that crushes seeds during harvest. Bradley says that it is going to take more than herbicides alone to solve this problem with resistant weeds.

Visit [weeds.science.missouri.edu](http://weeds.science.missouri.edu) for more information.



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# MU Extension guide has tips on controlling black vulture damage

BY JULIE HARKER  
Missouri University Extension

COLUMBIA, Mo. – Missouri’s growing population of black vultures has led to increasing attacks on vulnerable livestock. Black vultures often inflict damage to the eyes and tongues of young livestock, kill and feed on domestic fowl and scar animals that survive.

A new MU Extension guide provides information for livestock producers to prevent and control problems with black vultures. “Controlling Nuisance Black Vultures in Missouri,” available at [extension.missouri.edu/g9466](http://extension.missouri.edu/g9466), was developed by MU Extension state wildlife and fisheries specialist Bob Pierce and Travis Guerrant, Wildlife Services state director for Missouri and

Iowa at the USDA Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service.

The guide details nonlethal damage control techniques, including the use of effigies, lasers, pyrotechnics or loud noises to scare vultures, and provides livestock management recommendations such as moving cattle with calves nearer to protected areas, Pierce said.

“Black vultures are legally protected under the Migratory Bird Treaty Act of 1918, so a permit to use lethal control methods is required,” he said. The guide outlines the process for obtaining a permit should it be warranted.

USDA APHIS Wildlife Services is charged with responding to conflicts with migratory species, including black vultures, Guerrant said. He advises Missouri live-

stock producers who suffer damage from black vultures to first contact the Wildlife Services state office in Columbia at 573-449-3033, ext. 10, to discuss the problem and/or schedule a site visit for a customized damage management plan.

If warranted, livestock owners who have experienced depredation from black vultures may obtain a permit to use limited lethal measures through Missouri Farm Bureau (opens in new window).

Turkey vultures are also common in Missouri, but tend to be less aggressive than black vultures, which are known to gang up and prey on calves, piglets, lambs and newborn goats. Both species are native to Missouri.

Vultures do play a critical role in the environment as scavengers of carrion, re-

ducing the risk of diseases spreading from dead animals, Pierce said.

“While black vultures can be found all the way to Canada, I don’t think that is common,” said Guerrant. “Ten years ago, we rarely saw them in Missouri. Now they are in the state nearly year-round in the far south of the state. I think the warmer winters and food availability are contributing to the northward expansion of their range.”

“As with other wildlife species, they will take advantage of resources that are available to them,” Pierce said. “This can cause issues when it involves conflicts with human dwellings and, in some cases, livestock operations.”

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**BLACK VULTURES** feed on dead animals but can also gang up and prey on calves, piglets, lambs and newborn goats. Photos courtesy USDA National Wildlife Research Center.



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## Young Farmers Attend Farm Bureau YF&R Leadership Conference

JEFFERSON CITY — It was a full house Feb. 10-12 at Margaritaville Resort at the Lake of the Ozarks where Missouri Farm Bureau's (MOFB) Young Farmers and Ranchers (YF&R) Leadership Conference hosted more than 600 attendees from across the state.

Organized by the MOFB YF&R Committee for farmers ages 18 to 35, the event is one of the largest Farm Bureau conferences in the nation. Those attending from Gasconade County enjoyed a weekend away from farm chores to catch up with their peers and learn the latest industry news.

MOFB President and Appleton City farmer Garrett Hawkins opened the conference, talking about the importance of involvement in Farm Bureau and the organization's efforts to provide affordable health insurance plans for Missourians. He was joined on stage by Terry Holdren, Kansas Farm Bureau chief executive officer and general counsel. The two discussed Kansas Farm Bureau's successful efforts to provide

other affordable options in health coverage for their members.

MOFB supports Senate Bill 11 in the Missouri Legislature which would allow the organization to do the same in this state.

After lunch, Jason Meadows, a farmer and founder of Ag State of Mind, life coaching, shared stories about prioritizing family, job and personal needs. Much like placing rocks in a bucket, then pebbles and finally sand, Meadows said to prioritize what is most important first, then the smaller challenges. He said to always put family at the top of the list.

The conference included many breakout sessions providing a mix of learning and fun. Attendees had an opportunity to meet their state YF&R committee members and others from their area. Other sessions ranged from ways to fight inflation, to commodity markets, sprayer drones and honey production. Those were joined by wine and beer

See **Conference**, Page 31B



**THOSE ATTENDING** from Gasconade County included: Cody and Trina Meyer, Laura Hardecke, Amy Jo Estes, Hannah Estes and Jeremy Rushing.

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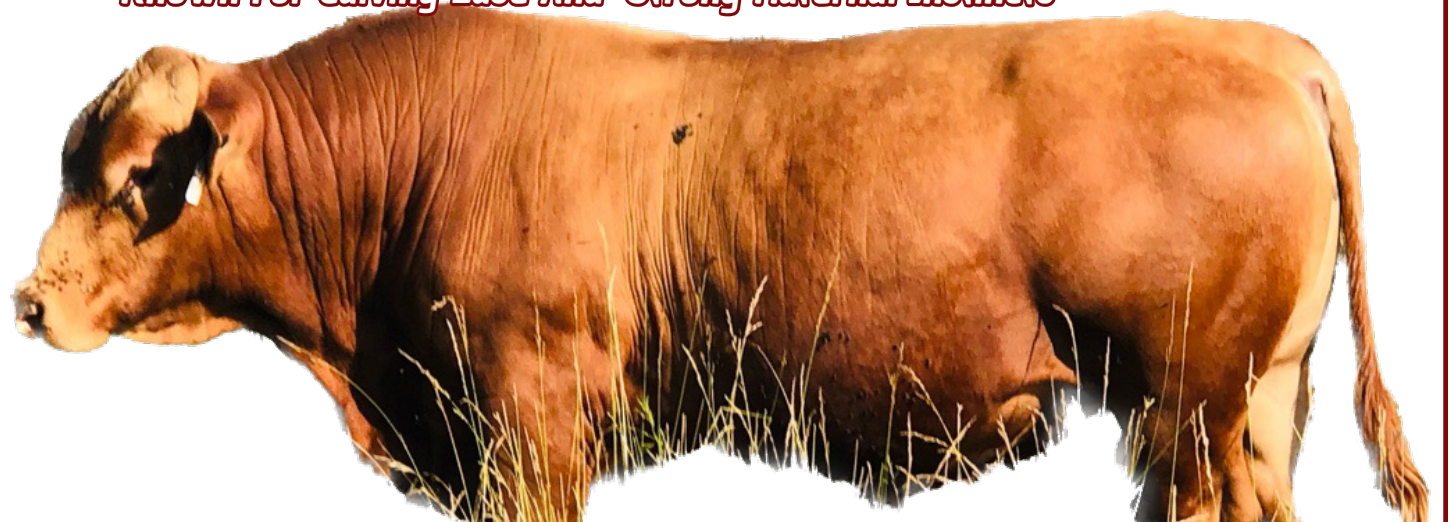
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# Workshop tells how and why to renovate tall fescue pastures

**BY LINDA GEIST**  
Missouri University Extension

COLUMBIA—Forage and beef producers can learn from world-renowned forage experts the how and why of renovating toxic tall fescue pastures at a March 23 workshop in Mount Vernon.

“This one-day workshop focuses on managing tall fescue toxicity and integrating novel tall fescue varieties into a grazing system,” says Craig Roberts, state forage specialist with University of Missouri Extension. “Toxic tall fescue reduces live-stock weight gains and lowers reproductive performance and profits.”

Roberts says local producers, company representatives, extension specialists, government workers and researchers from across the country will speak. They will discuss symptoms and causes of fescue toxicosis, establishment and first-year management, seed and endophyte testing, transitioning from toxic fescue, products and more. Speakers will also give information on incentives and cost sharing.

Speakers and topics:

- Tall Fescue Toxicosis: Symptoms and Causes, Craig Roberts, MU Extension.
- Toxicosis Management, Craig Roberts and Gene Schmitz, MU Extension.
- Understanding Endophytes, Carolyn Young, North Carolina State University.
- Establishment and First-Year Management, John Andrae, Clemson University.
- Seed Quality and Testing, Gene

Schmitz, MU Extension.

- Drill Calibration, Matt Massie, MU.
- Plot Tours, Matt Massie, MU.
- Economics, Matt Poore, North Carolina State University.

• Cost Share and Incentive Programs, Jamie Kurtz, USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service.

- Novel Endophytes on My Farm, various producers.

The Alliance for Grassland Renewal and its partners sponsor the workshop, which will be at the MU Southwest Research Center, Mount Vernon. Register at TallFescueMO23.eventbrite.com.



Conference • from page 30B

tastings later in the afternoon. Children had their own sessions and a tractor pull. Casino and Trivia nights rounded out the fun.

Toward the end, the YR&R Discussion Meet, which included four young farmers, discussed a final round question about farmers and off-farm jobs, and how Farm Bureau can be more accessible to members working in related fields. Hala Edquist of Wright County was announced the winner. Dakota Melton, also of Wright County, placed second and Madison Tunnel of Webster County placed third.

The New chair of the MOFB YF&R Committee, Andrew Boerding of St. Charles, closed the meeting. More than 60 companies and individuals lend their support to the conference. MOFB Insurance Companies is a presenting sponsor.

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