January 2016

DeKalb County Farm Bureau®

Connections

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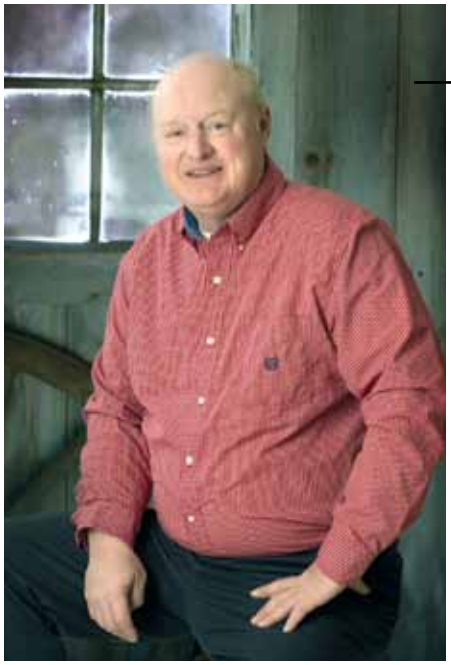

Mark Tuttle is a 4th generation farmer from Somonauk and president of the DeKalb County Farm Bureau.

Connecting *to You*

Mark Tuttle, *DeKalb County Farm Bureau President*

New Year, New Challenges

Optimism is the tendency to look on the bright side of things and hope for a successful outcome.

This is true when we start a new job, when we watch our favorite sports team (Green Bay Packers, of course), or even when we plan for the next phase of life. Sure, we will have challenges along the way as well as changes we must embrace to have a successful outcome.

With the New Year, now is the time to look at the future, address our challenges, set goals, and prepare for the future.

DeKalb County Farm Bureau is optimistic about the future and continues to look forward in addressing challenges that face agriculture. An example is the adoption of a resolution we introduced in December at the Illinois Farm Bureau Annual Meeting regarding future membership in the Farm Bureau organization.

We see the challenges ahead of an aging farm population and proposed to change our "farmer" membership guidelines that support a membership of those actively engaged in farming but also those that support our industry through employment in the ag sector. In short, we must continue to build alliances through membership.

Whatever your challenge may be in 2016, I hope you are optimistic about the future and wish you success! ■

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PRINTED WITH SOYINK

On the cover:
Gene Larson, Shabbona Township Road Commissioner

On Prairie Drive

Mariam Wassmann, *Editor*

My Farm Bureau Family

Everyone has extended families. For me it's my relatives, my church family, and my Farm Bureau family.

Growing up I didn't think too much about how connected my farm family was to Farm Bureau. My grandparents were Farm Bureau members. My Dad served on the LaSalle County Farm Bureau Board (later, my brother was president). My Mom chaired the Women's Committee. We frequented the county Farm Bureau building for Farm Bureau and 4-H events. We did business with the local Farm Supply Company and had Country Companies insurance. We also sold our milk to Farm Bureau's co-op, Prairie Farms. Our family was Farm Bureau through and through.

So when I landed my first job here, right out of college, my parents were elated. First, they were thankful that I was gainfully employed and secondly, that I was working for a county Farm Bureau. My oldest brother recommended I accept the job. He told me, "You will feel right at home with the people you will be working with." He was absolutely right.

Flash forward to 2016. I'm still writing for Farm Bureau. We do business with Conserv FS. Our sons work for FS companies. We are insured by COUNTRY Financial. My family's loyalty to the Farm Bureau family of companies has spanned generations. By all means, I'm proud to call Farm Bureau, family. ■

Connections

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DeKalb County Farm Bureau Staff

Greg Millburg
Manager

Mariam Wassmann
Director of Information/Editor

Rhodora Collins
Ag Literacy Coordinator

Sherry Johnson
Information Specialist

Anna Schelkopf
Ag Literacy & Communications Specialist

Dava Wayman
Administrative Assistant/Accounting

Diane Yunek
Administrative Assistant/Membership

Tom Marsh
Building Maintenance

Find the pine cone and win!

Let's see if you can find the pine cone (resembling the one above) in this month's issue of our magazine and be eligible to win a prize.

Email your answer to connections@dekalbfarmbureau.org or call us, 815-756-6361, by Feb. 1 for your chance to win.

When responding by email, please include the page number and exact description of the location of the pine cone on that page. You will also need to include your name, address and phone number in the email.

Correct answers will be put into a drawing and one winner will be drawn to receive a $20 gift card.

Last month's winner of the pine cone contest was John Rey of DeKalb. The pine cone was hidden on page 33 in the classroom photo with Kevin McArtor (on the water bottle). ■

Calendar

January

Jan. 27
Ag Seminar
First National Bank
9:45 a.m. – 3 p.m.
RSVP, 815-754-8090

February

Feb. 1
"Scams & Frauds - The Oldest Tricks in the Book & Newest Trends"
By Chad McNett
Prime Timers Program
12-Noon
$7, RSVP by Jan. 26

Feb. 20
Shedd Aquarium Trip
Chicago
8 a.m. – 5 p.m.
$40 adults, $33 children

Feb. 16, 18, 23, 25
Annie's Project
6 – 9 p.m.
Register at 815-758-8194

Feb. 22
DCFB Annual Meeting
For "M" Farmer Members
8 a.m.

March

March 1, 3
Annie's Project
6 – 9 p.m.

March 7
Sycamore High School Jazz Band
Prime Timers Program
12-Noon
$7, RSVP by March 1

Meetings are held at the Center for Agriculture unless otherwise noted. For most meeting reservations contact the DeKalb County Farm Bureau office, 815-756-6361.

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DeKalb County

AGRICULTURE By the NUMBERS

Farm Costs

Controlling farm costs is especially important to farm profitability. The largest expenses for farmers are seed, fertilizer and chemicals, as well as farmland rent.

Annually, the percent of total farm expenditures on average includes:

- **31%** Seed, Fertilizer, Chemicals
- **21%** Rent
- **9.7%** Farm Machinery
- **7.1%** Farm Services
- **6.5%** Other Expenses
- **5.6%** Interest & Taxes
- **4.1%** Fuel
- **4%** Farm Supplies & Repairs
- **4%** Farm Improvement & Construction
- **3%** Livestock
- **2.8%** Labor
- **1.2%** Trucks & Autos

Source: USDA, Farm Production Expenditures 2013 Summary, August 2014

Finding Farm Profits

Can farmers turn a profit in 2016?

It may be a challenging year for grain farmers based on tight margins. Local ag lenders provide their perspectives of the down cycle in the farm economy and offer strategies for farm profitability.

Farmers work closely with ag lenders and other advisors as they strive for profitability in 2016. Here, Bill Davey with First State Bank reviews farm finances with Brock Foster, Maple Park farmer.

Questions

1. With tight farm margins, how can farmers generate profits in 2016?
2. What are your recommendations for improving a farmer's financial standing?

Bill Davey

President, North Operations, First State Bank

1. "In my opinion, the top three expenses that farmers can control quickly are: living expenses, capital purchases and farmland rent. This, of course, is easier said than done, but they must be addressed to help keep the farm operation profitable.

With historically high profits in the last 6-7 years, living expenses have increased quite a bit. There is room to reduce these expenses, but it may not be popular with some family members until the necessity is explained. Good communication within the family unit is always important and will help get your team working together.

Capital purchases should be easier to cut. Most operations have upgraded their equipment and buildings recently and should not need to spend much in those areas.

Rent can also be a difficult expense category to reduce, but must also be evaluated. Every farm and landlord is different and rents naturally vary with the situation. In the good years, many farmers unilaterally raised their rents based on their increased revenue. Hopefully, most landlords will be receptive to a decrease in rent based on current profit margins. Again, good communication between the tenant and landlord can help negotiate a rent that both parties can accept."

2. "Farmers can improve their financial standing by sticking with the fundamentals. Like any good sports team, sound fundamentals are important to success. Most farmers know what it takes to run their operation profitably, but the revenues of recent years hid some problems. More bad decisions are made in good years than in bad years.

Stay with the basics: control costs no matter how small, conserve cash to strengthen working capital, know your cost of production, keep good records and use them, develop a marketing plan, focus on improving production and stay with proven technologies until something better is established. It brings to mind the old saying: "Be not the first by whom the new is tried or last to set the old aside." ■

Grant Goltz

Vice President & Commercial Loan Officer, NB&T

1. "I don't know that there is a clear path to net farm profitability in 2016, but by knowing your historical costs of production and breakeven levels given past commodity prices, yields and input costs, you can at least begin to formulate a plan on reaching profitability for your individual operation this coming year.

As part of whatever strategy an agricultural producer chooses, it's important to be keeping and maintaining accurate and understandable historical financial records. By making confident and informed decisions based on the actual historical performance of your farm, you may be able to realize opportunities for cost controls or efficiencies that will most likely lead the way to profitability in 2016. Also, keep your negotiation skills sharp and don't hesitate to rely on your outside advisors."

2. "I'd say that discipline, restraint and a conservative attitude will go a long way toward improving a farmer's financial standing over the next few years. This may mean limiting or delaying investment in new equipment and machinery unless replacement is absolutely necessary, temporarily reducing family living expenses or not taking on that additional acreage that may be available.

Retaining any earned net worth and building working capital would be two measures our bank would look toward as an indicator of improved financial standing." ■

Landon Faivre

Lead Director, Agribusiness Banking, First National Bank

1. "With current input prices, land rents, and grain futures prices, it looks like it will be a challenge for many grain farmers to generate a profit in 2016. In some cases, minimizing losses may be the objective.

In this type of environment it will be important for producers to truly understand their cost of production and their fully loaded breakeven (including debt payments, family living expenses, etc.) so that they can develop a production and marketing plan to be successful.

Reducing costs (while minimizing any negative impact on production), minimizing capital expenditures, and scaling back family living expenses will all be steps producers can take to give themselves a better chance for financial success in 2016."

2. "Hopefully farmers have positioned themselves well after the high profitability years of the early 2010's because it is difficult to improve their financial standing in a period of low profitability or losses. However, there are several things that we have been doing with our producers to better position them for a period of low profitability.

Maintaining strong working capital is the ultimate form of insurance to withstand agricultural cycle troughs. Matching the term of debt with the asset class is important. In many cases capital items such as land and equipment were purchased with cash/working capital during the high profitability years, so we are now terming out those purchases with longer term debt to replenish working capital levels." ■

Questions

1. With tight farm margins, how can farmers generate profits in 2016?
2. What are your recommendations for improving a farmer's financial standing?

DEKALB COUNTY AGRICULTURE

Finding Farm Profits

Can farmers turn a profit in 2016?

Dave Ott

Senior Vice President, Commercial Market President, Old Second National Bank

1. "Given current market conditions it's going to be difficult for local grain farmers to generate profits unless they're able to reduce expenses by at least $100/acre from 2015 without sacrificing maximum production potential. Cash rents are the predominant lease arrangement in this area, but I recommend that farmers should still discuss alternative hybrid sharing-type lease arrangements with their landlords if they're unsuccessful in reducing their cash rent to their desired level.

Farmers also need to know their breakevens so their marketing plan allows them to take what the market gives while keeping their options open to capture any future market spikes instead of simply 'waiting for prices to go higher.' "

2. "A farm operation has greater flexibility to handle adverse conditions if it maintains adequate liquidity in combination with manageable leverage. Sometimes this requires restructuring debt and in my experience that goes much smoother for both the farmer and the lender earlier in a downturn cycle rather than later. If a farmer lacks adequate liquidity, but has a solid debt to equity position, then I suggest they proactively develop various restructure scenarios themselves before they meet with their lender to discuss those scenarios." ■

Questions

1. With tight farm margins, how can farmers generate profits in 2016?
2. What are your recommendations for improving a farmer's financial standing?

Kevin McArtor

Director of Business Services, Resource Bank

1. "Given the expectation of continued low grain prices, the only side of the net income equation left with some level of control is farm operating expenses. Generally, these are difficult to reduce significantly, but the following are items to consider for 2016:

1) Operators and their landlords should discuss mutually beneficial arrangements such as crop shares or flex lease terms that would more equitably distribute the risk and reward.

2) While maintaining fertility is critical despite lower margins, there may be alternatives such as 32 percent vs. anhydrous ammonia.

3) Consider seed alternatives; there may be older quality hybrids available at lesser cost than newer hybrids. The increased yield from premium seed is not as valuable at lower price levels.

4) Do NOT scale back on crop insurance as a means to save. Premiums may already decrease as much as 10 percent vs. year ago levels given limited loss ratios in 2014 (2015 results won't be available until April to use in actuarial calculations)."

2. "One primary topic we have been discussing with our farm clients for several years is the importance of marketing for risk management and protection of their financial gains. Know the operations break-even cash flow (after family living, taxes and debt service) on a per bushel price for both the 2015 and 2016 crops. This knowledge will give the operator the confidence to pull the trigger on sales when, or if, the opportunities are offered in the marketing year.

A qualified marketing advisor should be considered a part of the farm operator's team, right along with the accountant, banker, crop consultant, and others. Having a third party advisor to help with marketing will be critical in the coming years. In the recent past, the only question a crop producer wondered was how much profit they were going to make on a sale; now the question is if a profitable sale will even be offered in the markets." ■

Farm income significantly lower

A final tally of the financial numbers for last year confirms a steep drop in farm income. In fact, many farmers across the state could show a loss as historically high input costs outweigh significantly lower crop prices.

"Farm income will be down considerably in 2015," Gary Schnitkey, University of Illinois ag economist, said at the Illinois Farm Economics Summit. "Nonland costs plus cash rent exceeds gross revenue (on some farms)."

Farm income this year could be between $20,000 and $30,000, down from about $104,000 in 2014. Incomes could be a little better or worse on some farms, depending on crop yields.

And, it appears the trend could continue as crop prices could linger at current levels that are much lower than previous years.

"2016 likely will be a repeat of 2015 (assuming another year of decent to good yields)," Schnitkey said. "We're essentially back to 1998 to 2001 level incomes."

The main drivers of the margin squeeze are lower commodity prices and high input costs. "Revenues have come down, but costs have not," Schnitkey said. "We're looking at less revenue, obviously."

Corn prices are expected to average near $3.65/bushel during the current year and near $3.85/bushel during the 2016-17 marketing year. For soybeans, the average will be near $8.90/bushel both this year and the 2016-17 marketing year.

The economist advises farmers to attempt to cut costs by as much as $100 per acre for the coming year to balance their budgets.

Those who maintain or even bid up cash rents just to control or add acreage should budget it out to make sure they can absorb potential short-term losses in the hopes of long-term gains.

The main drivers of the farm margin squeeze are lower commodity prices and high input costs, says Gary Schnitkey.

"Many farmers are in economically strong positions and could postpone cost-cutting decisions," Schnitkey said. Those who attempt to cut costs, though, shouldn't sacrifice yield potential, he noted. ■

Fertilizer prizes may give farmers a break

December 2015 prices are used to project 2016 fertilizer costs for corn grown on high-productivity farmland in central Illinois. December 2015 prices are lower than in recent years, leading to lower projected 2016 fertilizer costs.

The Agricultural Marketing Service reports fertilizer prices in its twice monthly *Illinois Production Costs Report*. In the December 10 update, the average price of anhydrous ammonia in Illinois is $650 per ton -- that's $78 per ton lower than the $728 per ton in December 2014. The $650 price is also the lowest price since 2008 when anhydrous ammonia was selling for $478 per ton.

Diammonium phosphate (DAP) currently is $536 per ton -- $23 per ton lower than the 2014 price of $559 per ton. Potash is $414 per ton in December 2015 -- $65 per ton lower than the 2014 price of $479 per ton.

FarmDoc's Gary Schnitkey says implied fertilizer costs in December 2015 are lower than in all years since 2009, suggesting that fertilizer costs in 2016 could be lower than in recent years. Current projections put fertilizer costs in 2016 about $10 per acre lower than in 2015. If fertilizer prices continue to decrease, this cost decrease could become larger. ■

Sources: Illinois Farm Bureau, farmdoc

DEKALB COUNTY AGRICULTURE

Around the FARM

by Paul Taylor, *Esmond farmer*

Paul Taylor is a fifth generation grain farmer who grows corn, soybeans and vegetables in northern DeKalb County, near Esmond.

It will be different this time

The New Year's celebrations have passed, the resolutions are being reassessed and signing 2016 is coming more naturally. So if you're inclined, what are you going to do differently this year?

Each of our answers is likely to be unique. Maybe yours is to lose that extra weight in order to get off the hypertension meds, or figure out how to deal with grain prices below the cost of production. Whatever it is, we'll keep those resolutions this year … it will be different this time.

Being a person that loves conversation, I have been asking folks I visit with about what they see ahead in 2016. Of course, the responses pretty much reflect their circumstances.

Some younger farmers respond they are scared to death about adequate farm cash flow and profitability. Other folks share concerns about a coming long-term cyclical decline of farm profitability following the "wealth build" years since corn ethanol brought an economic resurgence to much of rural America. Some see opportunities ahead in the transitions that are most likely, if not certain, to come.

Today's farm situation may be like the early 1980's in that many knew then that something in our economy had to change, but identification of strategies and timing were not so clear.

The profitable years of the 1970s are referred to by some as the "go-go" years for that generation of farmers. We hear from folks in agriculture that the circumstances today are different from the 1980s. Of course they are. We don't have crippling interest rates in the vicinity of 20%. We don't have a hangover from the binge and subsequent hangover of seemingly unchecked inflation either. Crude oil and commodity prices have led a deflationary trend that few expected. We are used to low interest rates and lots of cash around.

Back around 1980 when I was farming in southwestern Wisconsin, I recall coming home to Esmond for a family visit. My dad and I talked about the changes the 1970s had brought to local farmers. New paint was everywhere it seemed; new four-wheel drive tractors, combines, field cultivators and bigger planters populated the countryside. Folks had recapitalized and over capitalized their farm equipment. I recall thinking at the time, no new equipment would need to be purchased for years. Ultimately, that is exactly what happened during the 1980s.

For farmers, the '80s were a brutal time financially with low incomes and anemic cash flows. On the farm and off, bankruptcies followed. It was a transformed farm landscape by 1990, for farmers and agribusiness alike. It will be different this time.

A concern exists among some that the policy of near "zero interest rates" of the Federal Reserve and Quantitative Easing since 2008 will have unforeseen impacts. A realized example today would be the strength of the U.S. dollar and its impact on our competitive position for exporting products ranging from ag commodities to Caterpillar equipment.

Today's farm situation may be like the early 1980's in that many knew then that something in our economy had to change, but identification of strategies and timing were not so clear. There are some among us today that believe we can transition smoothly from the boom portion of this cycle to a "new plateau" of higher prices than pre-2006 without creating havoc in the ag community. Will it be different this time?

May you and your families be blessed through the coming seasons. Whether your 2016 resolutions hold or life's events push us to make uncomfortable adjustments in our operations and households, one thing I have high confidence in this year … it will be different this time.

Down on the farm ... I'm Paul Taylor. ■

Fascinating FARM FACTS

Horses

How do horses stay warm in the winter?

Have you ever seen a horse outdoors in winter, covered by a layer of snow or frost? Did you wonder if it was okay?

Horses can actually be very comfortable in cold winter weather.

Horses and ponies naturally adapt to colder weather by growing a thick coat of hair.

When you are cold, you get goosebumps. This is called piloerection. In horses, it causes their hair to stand up. This traps warm air against their bodies, keeping them from getting cold.

Having plenty of good hay also helps horses stay warm. As a horse digests plant fiber, its gut generates heat, helping to keep it warm from the inside.

Fresh water is also important, because a horse without enough water nearby may not eat enough feed to keep warm.

Horses kept outdoors in winter should also have a shelter to keep them dry and out of the wind if needed.

Horses that are groomed and clipped throughout winter spend more time in barns. When turned out for fresh air and exercise, they may be covered in special blankets to keep warm.

Sources/for more information: *University of Minnesota Extension, Equine Winter Care*, http://bit.ly/1t1tn6n; Equus Magazine, *How Horses Keep Warm*, http://bit.ly/1NOOrV0; University of Maine Cooperative Extension, Bulletin #1007 – *Winter Care for Horses*, http://bit.ly/1xjW8uW

With pets spending so much time in our yards, it is important to understand which plants are safe for animals and which plants may be harmful.

Photos courtesy of Bob Lindholm

Green Thumb

Barb Lindholm, University of Illinois Extension
DeKalb County Master Gardener

A Safe Haven

This winter as we begin to plan for our 2016 gardens, we can remember to use plants that will not harm our animals.

As Americans, we love our pets. They are important members of our family. We will often go to any extreme to make sure that Fido and Fluffy are happy, well fed, and safe.

With pets spending so much time in our yards, it is important to understand which plants are safe for animals and which plants may be harmful. It is incorrect to assume that cats and dogs have an innate sense of what they should and should not be eating. Ingestion of some plants can be fatal or cause serious illness. Physical contact with certain plants can result in severe skin irritation for your pet.

Common garden plants that may cause problems for your pets include perennial foxgloves, larkspur, lupines, lilies and mums. Shrubs with toxic properties are hydrangeas, burning bush, Angels trumpet, yews, azaleas, and rhododendrons. Detailed lists of toxic plants are available on the internet.

Cocoa mulch. We love the look. We love the smell. However, it contains theobiomine which is a toxic compound. Depending on the size of the dog and the amount ingested, it can be fatal. Wood mulch is safer. Remember, also, to keep your pets out of the compost area.

Symptoms of plant poisoning can appear in several forms. Your pet may be lethargic, have inflammation around its mouth, exhibit breathing difficulty, drink excessive amounts of water, or vomiting.

If you suspect toxic plant poisoning, take your pet to the vet immediately. Bring the toxic plant with you if possible as this is important in the treatment decision your vet will be making.

Common garden plants that may cause problems for your pets include perennial foxgloves, larkspur, lupines, lilies and mums. Shrubs with toxic properties are hydrangeas, burning bush, Angels trumpet, yews, azaleas, and rhododendrons.

Quick treatment within the first four hours before the poison can be absorbed by the digestive tract or travel to vital organs should result in a good recovery.

Before you go out to your yard and start pulling out toxic flowers and bushes, you will be happy to know that there are many landscape options that will allow you to keep your favorite plants and still have a yard that is safe for your pet.

Fencing is one of the most efficient ways to keep your pet safe. You can design separate areas for the dogs and for your garden plants.

For those of you who prefer a more open look in your landscape, invisible fencing is a good option. With this type of fencing, you can cordon off your entire yard or restrict small sections of your garden.

Growing your favorite plants in tall containers or on trellises will keep plants up and away from your pets.

An article on pet safety would not be complete without a reminder to keep all yard and garden chemicals stored away from pet areas. Move pets to a safe location when sprayi ng.

Creating a pet friendly landscape. will take some planning and preparation. The pleasure of knowing that Fido and Fluffy have a safe haven where they can enjoy the outdoors will make the effort very worthwhile. ■

Ask a Farmer

Q: Where does milk go after it leaves the farm?

A: Milk is shipped daily from my Sycamore farm to a dairy company in Rockford where it is bottled and sold under the Prairie Farms label.

Our milk is picked up every day from the farm, about 8 o'clock in the morning. The milk truck hauler agitates the milk and takes a sample from our farm. This farm sample is used to measure the fat, protein and quality of the milk.

The milk truck then arrives at the dairy plant but before the hauler unloads the milk another sample is taken and tested to make sure all of the milk in the truck is of the highest quality and there are no antibiotics or quality issues. If anything is ever found in the milk it would be discarded and the individual farm samples will identify which farm is responsible. All milk must have no antibiotics in it and dairy farmers can lose their permit to sell milk if they violate these standards.

My milk is sold to the Midwest Dairymen's Company in Rockford. The Midwest Dairymen's Company is a cooperative which means that I and other producers are members and owners of the company. The company owns Shullsburg Cheese in Shullsburg, Wisconsin, and has a joint venture with Prairie Farms, a bottling plant in Rockford, called Muller-Pinehurst Dairy.

My cows' milk is hauled to Muller-Pinehurst to be homogenized and pasteurized and then bottled under the label of Prairie Farms. It is usually bottled the same day and then is delivered the following day to stores and schools.

Muller's delivers milk to most of the schools in the area and several grocery stores, such as Hy-Vee. Sometimes when schools are not in session, like in the summers or Christmas break, my milk may go to another location or our co-op could sell it to another dairy plant primarily in northern Illinois.

In northern Illinois there are bottling plants for fluid milk, ice cream plants, bottling plants for Kiefer which is a drinkable yogurt, cottage cheese plants, and several cheese plants. These plants get their milk from Illinois and Wisconsin dairy farms.

Take a close look at the jug or carton of your (Prairie Farms) milk to see if the milk may be from my farm. Underneath the expiration date is a plant code; the first number indicates the state. The state of Illinois number is 17. If the first number isn't 17, the milk was produced in a different state. The Muller-Pinehurst plant number is 284. So 17–284 is milk from Muller-Pinehurst in Rockford and could possibly be milk from my farm. Additionally, the plant code may be on generic store brand labels, like Hy-Vee, which also gets deliveries from Muller's.

Being a co-op member, I share collectively with other dairy farmers who are owners of the co-op. So if the co-op makes a profit, we all share in the profits and receive patronage refunds at the end of the year.

As a dairy farmer I take care of my cows, continually monitoring their health and nutrition, so they can produce good quality milk for my family and yours. ■

Bill Deutsch is a fifth generation dairy and grain farmer from Sycamore. He milks cows and grows corn, soybeans, wheat and alfalfa, with his brother, Pat. Bill and his wife, Chris, reside on the family farm. They have four adult children: Sarah, Mary, Rachel and Paul.

Got a question for a farmer?

Submit your farm and food questions to **connections@dekalbfarmbureau.org.** We will share questions with our local farmers and publish their answers as space allows in upcoming issues of *Connections*.

Lazy Day Beef & Vegetable Soup

Total Recipe Time:
HIGH 5 to 6 hours or
on LOW 8 to 9 hours

Makes 6 to 8 servings

Ingredients

2 1/2 lbs. beef stew meat, cut into 3/4-inch pieces
2 cans (14 to 14 1/2 ounces each) reduced-sodium beef broth
1 can (15 ounces) chickpeas, rinsed, drained
1 can (14 1/2 ounces) no-salt added diced tomatoes, undrained
1 cup water
1 tsp. dried Italian seasoning
1/2 tsp. salt
1/2 tsp. pepper
2 cups frozen mixed vegetables
1 cup uncooked ditalini or other small pasta
Shredded Romano cheese (optional)

Instructions

1. Combine beef, broth, chickpeas, tomatoes, water, Italian seasoning, salt and pepper in 4 1/2 to 5 1/2 quart slow cooker; toss to coat well. Cover and cook on HIGH 5 hours or on LOW 8 hours. (No stirring is necessary during cooking.)

2. Stir in mixed vegetables and pasta. Continue cooking, covered, 1 hour or until beef and pasta are tender. Season with salt and pepper, as desired. Stir well before serving. Serve with cheese, if desired.

Food Allergies

Why has there been an increase in food allergies?

"Why is there such an increase in food-related allergies, such as peanut, eggs, and gluten? Could it be the chemicals that are used in the production of food?"

You've probably heard someone ask these questions, or even asked them yourself. Best Food Facts reached out to Dr. Stephen Taylor, Professor and Co-Director of the University of Nebraska Food Allergy Research & Resource Program, for his expert insight on the question of why there has been an increase in food allergies in recent years.

He doubts any experts would hypothesize that chemicals used in food production play a role in the prevalence of food allergies. He explains other theories that seem much more plausible, but have not been proven, like cleanliness, c-section births and avoidance of specific foods.

Is there an increase in the prevalence of food allergies or does it just seem that way?

Dr. Taylor: "Most experts do believe that there's a genuine increase in food allergies. Certainly, diagnoses have improved over the last 25 years, so some of the increase may just be attributable to better diagnoses. Even so, there's been a genuine increase in doctor-diagnosed food allergies as well. Self-diagnosed food allergies are not very reliable." ►

Local Physician's Perspective

"I agree with Dr. Taylor's comments. As for the last question about attempting to build up tolerance by consuming small amounts of food, I must re-emphasize that this practice is strongly discouraged, except perhaps in a very controlled medical setting. True food allergy can be a serious business, with – at times – life threatening consequences. Even though well-meaning friends or relatives may trivialize this issue, patients and parents of patients must remain mindful and vigilant while at the same time not becoming unduly anxious."

Dr. Peter Baum is a local board-certified immunologist/ allergist with the Kishwaukee Physician Group.

Can you explain the difference between food allergy and food intolerance?

Dr. Taylor: "My definition is that allergies are abnormal responses of the human immune system to naturally-occurring proteins in foods. More than one kind of immune mechanism can be involved. Peanut allergy, for example, has a different immune mechanism than gluten sensitivity.

Some theories suggest that cleanliness, c-section births and avoidance of specific foods play a role in the prevalance of food allergies.

There are also intolerances due to foods that do not involve abnormal responses of the immune system and for the most part, those illnesses have milder symptoms. For example, lactose intolerance leads some people to restrict their dairy product intake, but they don't have to avoid it nearly as carefully as someone with a true milk allergy."

Why is there such an increase in food-related allergies, such as peanut, eggs, and gluten?

Dr. Taylor: "Well, experts really don't know for sure why there is an increase in food-related allergies, but there are several theories.

The one that's gotten the most publicity is called the hygiene hypothesis. It hypothesizes that we're too clean and, therefore, our immune system doesn't have very much to be concerned about. Instead, it becomes mischievous and gives us allergies. It's been very well noted that consumers in societies where hygiene is not that high seem to have lower prevalence of food allergies.

Another theory that has been pretty clearly demonstrated is the increase in prevalence of birth by caesarean section because a baby born by caesarean does not acquire his mother's gastrointestinal bacteria during the birthing process. The immunities that the baby might acquire during the birthing process may be quite important in preventing the development of food allergies, so babies born via caesarean seem to be at higher risk.

Another theory that's been discussed but has little proof is the change in weaning practices that have occurred over the last three decades. We put a lot of emphasis on avoiding solid foods and weaning babies a little bit later in life, sometimes at two-to-three years old. And it seems like a good idea to avoid allergens in food, but that may not be the best course. There's some evidence that suggests early introduction of certain kinds of solid foods into the baby's diet may actually promote tolerance of those foods, rather than the development of food allergies. Recently completed research in England indicates that early ingestion of peanuts may help to prevent the development of peanut allergy, but parents should seek advice from their pediatrician or allergist because there are some important caveats to that advice."

Is it true that some allergists have people consume small amounts of foods they're allergic to in order to build up tolerance?

Dr. Taylor: "I would suggest that people talk to their allergists before they try that. The allergist may, in some cases, suggest periodically trying the food to see if you've outgrown your allergy, but you should do that only with expert advice. It can be a risky proposition as it is really hard to control the dose. It has to be done under expert medical guidance; doing it at home is not recommended." ■

Adapted from www.bestfoodfacts.org, a site administered by The Center for Food Integrity. Used with permission.

Annie's Project: Enpowering Women in Agriculture

Annie's Project is an educational program dedicated to strengthening women's role in the modern farm enterprise. Annie's Project fosters problem solving, record keeping, and decision-making skills in farm women.

Local farm women are invited to participate in Annie's Project being offered at the DeKalb County Farm Bureau in February and March.

Annie's Project is a six-session course that brings women together in discussion based workshops to learn from experts in production, financial management, human resources, marketing, and the legal field.

The educational sessions are scheduled for Feb. 16, 18, 23, 25, March 1 and 3 in Sycamore. Each session will run from 6 to 9 p.m.

Annie's Project will cover topics that include business planning for farms, crop insurance basics, leasing farmland, marketing basics for selling crops and livestock, working with government agencies, basic financial documents for farms, and much more.

Whether new or experienced, farm women will learn to understand agricultural risk, know how to analyze spreadsheets, and cultivate other necessary skills. Sessions are developed as an interactive program between participants, state-wide keynote speakers and local speakers.

Annie's Project is being sponsored by the University of Illinois Extension and DeKalb County Farm Bureau.

To register call the U of I Extension DeKalb office at 815-758-8194 or register online at web.extension.illinois.edu/bdo/. Registration fee is $50.

The deadline to register is Feb. 10. ■

Farmers gather for book signing

Farmers and other local people attended the signing of Max Armstrong's book, "Stories from the Heartland" at the Barshinger shop near Waterman. Here, three generations of Huftalins stopped by to purchase the book and have Max sign it. Don, Noah and Bert Hufatlin from Malta also conversed with the former WGN farm broadcaster about the past. About 250 people participated in the book signing event last month. Copies of Max's book can be purchased at Amazon.com. ■

Marketing Strategies Meeting

The Hueber Report and Consolidated Grain and Barge are cosponsoring a Marketing Strategies Meeting for area farmers.

Farmers will learn marketing strategies that will help them navigate in the year ahead. Dan Hueber and Jeff Kaprelian with The Hueber Report will be the featured speakers.

"Area producers have faced some challenging years and the market isn't painting a better picture for the year ahead. We want to be able to present the best tools and ideas to help our farm community manage those challenges and risks," said Dan Hueber, General Manager, The Hueber Report.

The meeting is scheduled for Thursday, Feb. 4 at the DeKalb County Farm Bureau Center for Agriculture from 11 a.m. until 2 p.m.

Lunch will be served and the following topics will be covered:

- Old crop price targets
- What can spark a rally in the corn market
- Where are we in the commodity cycle
- CGB's new Market Solutions contracts.

Reservations for the marketing meeting should be made by Jan. 29 at 815-680-5088 or jeff.kaprelian@cgb.com. ■

"We want to be able to present the best marketing tools and ideas to help our farm community manage challenges and risks," said Dan Hueber, The Hueber Report General Manager, about the Feb. 4 marketing meeting.

Annual Meeting Notice

Notice is hereby given that the Annual Business Meeting of the DeKalb County Farm Bureau will be held on Monday, Feb. 22 at 8 a.m. in the DeKalb County Farm Bureau Center for Agriculture, Sycamore, IL to receive reports of the tellers of election for directors for the past year; and if approved, confirm the reports of the officers for the year ending Dec. 31, 2015 and any other business that may properly come before the meeting. ■

Roy Plote
Secretary

Certification for livestock producers

Workshops have been scheduled to provide livestock producers the training needed to meet the requirements of the state's Livestock Management Facilities Act (LMFA). Workshops will be held in nine locations throughout the state through March, 2016.

One of the workshops will be held in Sycamore, on Feb. 25, at the DeKalb County Farm Bureau Center for Agriculture.

Registration begins at 8:30 a.m. and training starts promptly at 9 a.m. At 12:30 p.m. the Certified Livestock Manager exam will be given.

The LMFA requires facilities with 300 or more animal units to have at least one employee certified in proper manure handling procedures. For facilities with 300 to 999 animal units, the employee either must attend a workshop or pass the Illinois Department of Agriculture Certified Livestock Manager's exam. Facilities of 1,000 or more animal units must do both to achieve certification. Certification is good for three years.

The cost of the workshop is $30.

To register for the workshop go online at: **www.livestocktraining.com/register** or call the U of I at 1-800-345-6087.

The workshop is being presented by the University of Illinois Extension and the exam will be administered by the Illinois Department of Agriculture. ■

PLOWING Roads & Fields

Whether he's plowing snow or plowing a furrow, Gene Larson feels pretty darn good about both. "I get the same great feeling about being road commissioner as I do farming," said Gene. "When the day is over I feel a sense of accomplishment for a job well done."

"Being a farmer and road commissioner is a good mix," he said. "I farm primarily in the spring and fall and then in the summer and winter I focus on being a road commissioner."

Granted, sometimes Gene does both jobs simultaneously, but seasonally there are clear distinctions as to his whereabouts – in a farm field or on a township road in Shabbona.

Plowing Snow

During the winter the Shabbona Township road commissioner's attention turns to plowing snow and salting roads. When it snows, he works from midnight to morning clearing the township roads. "My job is to get all the roads open by 7 a.m. for school buses and for people going to work," Gene said.

Winter storms are most challenging when he's called on by police to assist stranded motorists or to open roads for emergency vehicles to get through. "I'm out there to assist in bad winter weather and when we get plenty of snow it keeps us real busy," Gene said.

He gets some extra help from his son, Dan, who works with him full-time both at the township and on the farm. Dan runs the township's John Deere road grader equipped with a large snow plow blade while Gene and two part-time employees run the trucks with standard blades while spreading salt.

Being road commissioner is "all about the weather," states Gene. "I'm on call 24/7 and put in a lot of hours when we have a ton of snow." But Gene says he really doesn't mind the extra and long hours - he's used to it as a farmer.

Gene maintains 42 miles of roads and five bridges in Shabbona Township. After the winter season, his work also entails installing culverts in ditches for farm field access and drainage, removing overgrown and down trees from ditches around the state park, replacing road signs, and mowing ditches. When spring rolls around Gene grades the township gravel roads; about 38% of the roads are gravel roads. The remainder of the roads are paved with hot mix or seal coat surfaces. ►

Above: Gene Larson has been Shabbona Township Road Commissioner for 17 years.

Maintaining equipment is an ongoing task at the township for the Larsons. With Dan's mechanical skills, Gene has put his son in charge of keeping the equipment in good operating order.

Paving Roads

Gene would like to upgrade more township roads, but funding is limited. Townships are receiving less revenue due to a reduction in federal and state tax dollars and also because the state recently withheld the motor fuel tax which was their main revenue fund for road improvements, explains Gene.

"It costs $14,000 per mile to upgrade a three-inch base level of gravel," quotes Gene. "Gravel costs have increased substantially from when I started as commissioner 17 years ago – $4.85 per ton in 1999 to $12 per ton today."

That's why he completes road projects in stages, to save money. "We just don't have enough funds to upgrade all the township roads," said Gene.

One plus for the township was having some of their roads improved with the building of wind turbines in 2009. There are 32 wind turbines in Shabbona Township. The wind farm company spent $800,000 in road improvements seven years ago.

Gene Larson regularly look over the township map which shows its 42 miles of roads and the state park.

As road commissioner, Gene meets monthly with township trustees, all farm friends of his. These same trustees initially convinced Gene to take the road commissioner job when the job became vacant. "I told them I didn't want the job. But they convinced me to take it. And I admit it's been a good job."

One of the changes that he's seen over time is "increased traffic on the roads." On a daily basis more than 500 cars travel on University Road, he explains. Another change is an "increase in semi-trucks" used by farmers for hauling grain. The township roads are built to handle the 80,000 pound truck loads.

Farming Together

Gene, a fourth generation farmer, has been farming his entire life. At 64 years, he now is turning some of the farm tasks over to his son. Dan embraces today's farm technology and precision farming practices as he runs the planter and combine. "I've run these rigs for years; it's Dan's time to run them now," said Gene.

Dan and Gene Larson farm together and work together at the township building.

"Farming is what I always wanted to do" said Dan, 29. "I've learned a lot from Dad and am glad I have this opportunity."

The Larsons grow primarily corn and soybeans and some wheat in a 15-mile span of fields from Rollo to DeKalb, but most of their farm fields are near Shabbona.

Their home farm base is located south of Shabbona, a farm that has been in their family since 1892. Dan and his wife Kimber and son Wyatt live on the centennial farm. Gene and his wife Mary reside on a farmstead near Route 30, west of Shabbona. Gene and Mary's daughter, Ann Horack, lives in Wisconsin and works for an agriculture public relations agency.

The Larsons take every opportunity to educate others about what they are doing on the farm. They have invited young moms and their children to enjoy combine rides. They have gone into classrooms to help students understand where their food comes from. "We're farmers and we need to help others understand what we do," says Gene.

"As a farmer I provide good and safe food for people to eat and as a road commissioner I provide good and safe roads to get people to work – now that's double satisfaction," declares Gene. ■

Apply now for Farm Bureau scholarships

The DeKalb County Farm Bureau Foundation announces the availability of application forms for its Senior Scholarships. The Foundation will grant scholarships to deserving high school seniors pursuing a college education.

High school seniors who will be attending a two or four-year college, university or vocational/technical school in the fall of 2016 are eligible to apply. Students' families must have been an M (voting) or an A (Associate) member in good standing of the DeKalb County Farm Bureau continuously since Sept. 1, 2014.

Scholarship selection is based on academics, leadership, and community service. The scholarship award is for a total of $1,200 for the freshman year of college.

"The Farm Bureau Scholarship helps out immensely with the cost of school. It's not cheap to attend a large school, but the money I received makes it a little easier to follow your dream." *Kelly Aves*

The application form may be downloaded at **www.dekalbfarmbureau.org.** Save the document to your computer, fill it out electronically, print a copy and mail or deliver the completed form, along with all necessary attachments, to the Farm Bureau. The application cannot be submitted electronically.

DeKalb County Farm Bureau FOUNDATION *for agriculture*

Kelly Aves was one of the 2015 recipients of the DeKalb County Farm Bureau Senior Scholarship. Kelly is a freshman at the University of Illinois studying crop sciences.

Application forms are also available through the Farm Bureau office or from school guidance counselors.

Completed applications are due by Friday, March 11. ■

Illinois Beef Association Scholarship

The Illinois Beef Association (IBA) will be awarding nine college scholarships to high school seniors and college students. Scholarships range from $500 to $3,000.

Scholarships are being presented by IBA and also in memory of Maralee Johnson, Terry Clemons, and Marion Butler.

Eligible IBA youth must be from a family that is actively involved in beef production and currently an IBA member. Students must complete an application and an essay. Go to: **www.illinoisbeef.com** for an application form.

The deadline for IBA scholarship applications is March 1. ■

Farm Credit Ag Scholarship

1st Farm Credit Services is offering 24, $1,500 scholarships to graduating high school seniors to further their education in an agriculture or a rural life-related field of study.

The First Choice Agriculture Scholarship is for graduating high school seniors who have been accepted into an agriculture or agriculture-related curriculum at a university, college or community college and either reside or attend high school within 1st Farm Credit Services' service territory.

Agriculture-related fields include those that would contribute to the quality of rural life for people living in rural areas, or for those who want to return to a rural area to work in any field.

Selection will be based on a combination of academic achievement, community and agricultural youth organization involvement and brief essays. Applicants will be judged by a panel of independent agribusiness, education, youth and farm organization leaders.

Qualifying students may obtain an application online at **www.1stfarmcredit.com** or through a local 1st Farm Credit Services office.

The deadline to apply is March 31. ■

IAA Foundation Scholarships

Agriculture students and Illinois Farm Bureau® (IFB) members and their children may apply for college scholarships offered by the IAA Foundation. Sixty-six scholarships, ranging from $1,000 to $7,500 per year, will be awarded for the 2016-2017 school year.

Students may apply for a variety of scholarships, including three IAA Foundation Top Scholarships, where winners will each receive $5,000 awards. Another $7,500 award goes to the Illinois Farm Bureau Legacy of Leadership scholarship winner.

New this year, the Dwain Ford Memorial Soybean Scholarship was established by colleagues, friends and family to honor the memory of this long time leader of the soybean industry, and offers a $1,000 award to an ag student active in 4-H and FFA.

Students studying crop science and pursuing a masters degree related to research are eligible for the Illinois Soybean Association Crop Science Scholarships. Ten $4,000 scholarships will be awarded to junior level majors. Recipients are then eligible for an additional $4,000 in this renewable program, providing a total of $8,000 for his or her junior and senior year of college.

Twelve Prairie Farms Dairy scholarships each worth $2,000 are available to patrons and employees of the company.

Additional scholarships, ranging from $1,000 to $1,500, are available to students that meet certain criteria, including area of study, place of residence, previous 4-H experience and college or university attended.

All applicants must be high school seniors accepted for enrollment or students already enrolled at an accredited college, university or community college. Scholarships are awarded for exceptional academic ability, leadership and financial need. Previous winners of an IAA Foundation scholarship are eligible to apply again.

A full listing of available scholarships, eligibility guidelines, and application documents are available at the Foundation website, **www.iaafoundation.org.**

For more information, contact the IAA Foundation at 309-557-2230, or e-mail smoore@ilfb.org.

Completed applications must be postmarked on or before Feb. 1. ■

DeKalb County Farmland Foundation Simonson Scholarship

One $1,000 scholarship will be awarded to a DeKalb County high school graduating senior interested in or intending to pursue a career in agriculture, the environment, or land use.

The Simonson Scholarship was established by the DeKalb County Farmland Foundation to recognize the Simonson Family commitment in support of agriculture, the environment, and in the promotion of sound land use practices.

Applicant must be a DeKalb County senior graduating resident and enrolled as a full-time freshman at a college/university.

Application deadline is March 11.

For application information contact Dan Kenney, DeKalb County Farmland Foundation President; dkenney53@hotmail.com or send a letter of intent to DCFF P.O. Box 375, DeKalb IL 60115. ■

John Buck Memorial Scholarship

Applications are now being accepted for the John Buck Memorial Scholarship. High school students in Kane, DeKalb, McHenry, Boone, Lake, DuPage or Will County are eligible to apply.

The application deadline is Feb. 15.

John Buck was the founder of Buck Brothers, Inc. and J.W. Turf, dealers and distributors of John Deere farm equipment and golf course maintenance equipment, respectively. In recognition of Buck's passion for agriculture and golf, his family and friends established the John Buck Memorial Scholarship for agriculture students through the Kane County Farm Bureau Foundation.

Since his death from cancer in 2001, the scholarship has helped Buck's legacy live on, by helping to fund the college educations of students pursuing higher education in an agriculture related career field.

An endowment to the Kane County Farm Bureau Foundation, supplemented by the annual John Buck Memorial Open golf outing, provides funds for a $1,000 college scholarship for an agriculture student.

Applications are available on the Kane County Farm Bureau website at **www.kanecfb.com,** at Buck Brothers, Inc. and J.W. Turf in Hampshire or by contacting Steve Arnold, Executive Director of the Kane County Farm Bureau Foundation, at 630-584-8660. ■

A Desire to Preserve Rural America

The Wildenradts have a real affinity for agriculture and appreciation for rural collections like this wooden sleigh in their home.

Bob and Norma Wildenradt have a genuine desire to help sustain and preserve Rural America.

"Agriculture has played a strong role in developing America," says Bob. "We need to do all we can to treasure agriculture and preserve it. We need to keep strong the fundamentals of Rural America and keep it going."

Together, Bob and Norma have a real affinity for agriculture in the shaping of our country. The Wildenradts also have a deep appreciation for rural landscapes such as the charming Shabbona and DeKalb countrysides where Norma spent her youth and the quaint rural community of Sycamore where Bob has managed his businesses.

"I'm proud to be part of the farming community," says Norma, of the Sanderson family. In her younger years she helped on the family farm, detasseled corn, and then worked for DeKalb Ag. Norma was also part of the singing Sanderson sisters, a family quartet which entertained at various community events and also performed at the WLS Barn Dance.

Bob was the third generation to be involved in the family-owned construction business, Wildenradt Construction. "I grew up a city boy and carpenter," said Bob. He then joined the Air Force, married Norma, and went to the University of Illinois to earn an engineering degree.

The Wildenradts returned to Sycamore where Bob was involved in his construction business and with his crew built several buildings in the local vicinity. Additionally, he was on the ground floor of starting up some manufacturing companies. Bob also ventured into real estate, owning a real estate company for 30 years. "Construction and real estate naturally went hand-in-hand," Bob stated.

When the Wildenradts sold some of their business properties they converted their equity into farmland. Their first farmland purchase was a family farm acquired along with Norma's brothers. Today, Bob manages the farmland they have procured working closely with family and other tenant farmers. He also manages other business properties from his Sycamore office.

Both Bob and Norma are retired but, "not really retired," says Norma. "Bob is a workaholic and still goes to his office daily to take care of the family interests." He also collects old horse-drawn carriages, wooden sleighs, hand tools, wind mills, and farm equipment, and continues to enjoy woodworking projects.

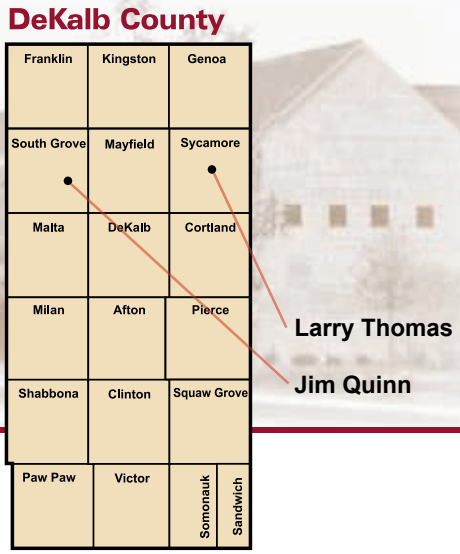
"I like to keep busy," says Bob. "I still like to fix things – which is good and bad – because I can fix it. But I wouldn't have it any other way." Bob still flies a Piper Cherokee plane to take photographs of farm fields. Norma enjoys music, quilting, travelling and family and friends.

Both enjoy spending time with their family. The Wildenradts have three adult children – Sandra, Sharon and Roger – seven grandchildren, and 13 great-grandchildren.

Recently the Wildenradts endowed a gift to the DeKalb County Farm Bureau Foundation for Agriculture. "We're supporting what has supported us," Bob says. "Here in Sycamore we've been blessed. We're paying back for the opportunities we've had. And we want to do anything we can to help sustain the values of Rural America, including agriculture." ■

DeKalb County Farm Bureau FOUNDATION *for agriculture*

Director Profiles



Jim Quinn

South Grove Township
Northern District Director

No. Years on FB Board: 12

Age: 64

Hometown & Occupation: Clare, Operations Manager at DeKalb County Highway Department

Role of Farm Bureau: To represent the agricultural community at local, state and national levels

Farm: Our farm has been in the family since 1870 and is leased at the present time.

Family: Spouse, Jane, retired from NIU; daughter, Kelsey, DeKalb, employed at Opportunity House in Sycamore; and son, Evan, student at Missouri State in Ag Business & Marketing

Education: A.A.S., Kishwaukee College; Sycamore High School; U.S. Army Reserves

Community: St. Mary's Church of Sycamore Usher, Eucharist Minister; Knights of Columbus Member, Council #215 Honor Guard; Local Emergency Planning Committee; Precinct Committeeman; Kingston Mutual Insurance Director; DeKalb County Historical Society Member; Kirkland Historical Society Member; Northern Illinois Steam Power Club Member; Living History Antiques Club Member at Franklin Grove

Hobbies/Interests: Antique tractors, camping, restoration of a vintage camping trailer, gardening, traveling to bluegrass festivals

No. Years on FB Board: 14

Age: 68

Hometown & Occupation: Sycamore, Retired from banking and small business and agricultural consulting

Role of Farm Bureau: To increase public awareness of the significant role of agriculture and to advocate for agricultural legislation as well as provide a sounding board for issues important to the membership

Farm: I grew up on a dairy farm in Ogle County which was family owned until 2006.

Family: Spouse, Mary, retired music teacher; adult children, Scott, licensed plumber in Sycamore; Bryan, DeKalb seed allocation manager for Monsanto, St. Charles, MO; Kristin German, elementary P.E., art and health teacher for Chicago Public Schools; 7 grandchildren

Education: B.S. in Agricultural Education/Economics, M.S. in Ag Finance, University of Illinois: Leaf River High School; U.S. Army Officer

Community: Sycamore United Methodist Church Leadership Team, Finance Committee & Men's Club; United Methodist Foundation Board Member; American Legion Post 301

Hobbies/Interests: Activities of our children and grandchildren

Larry Thomas

SycamoreTownship
Northern District Director

"Scams & Fraud" program for seniors

DeKalb Police Officer Chad McNett will update Prime Timers on scams and fraud happening throughout our local communities.

He will present, "Scams & Frauds: The Oldest Tricks in the Book and Newest Trends" at the Monday, Feb. 1 Prime Timers program. Farm Bureau members 55+ years are welcome to attend.

Prime Timers Chairmen

Farm Bureau welcomes Roger and Caryl Steimel as the new co-chairmen of the Farm Bureau Prime Timers Committee. The Steimels replace retiring chairman Cynthia Thompson who served in this capacity for the past four years. Shown are Caryl and Roger Steimel of DeKalb and Cynthia Thompson of Sycamore.

Officer McNett has been with the DeKalb Police Department for 20 years. He is the community relations officer/ training coordinator and a certified elderly services officer. McNett resides in DeKalb with his wife and two children.

The Prime Timers program gets underway at 1 p.m. in the Farm Bureau Theater. Prior to the program, lunch is served in the auditorium at 12-noon. Members who would like to attend the luncheon will need to make reservations at the Farm Bureau office by Tuesday, Jan. 26 and pay the $7 lunch fee. ■

DeKalb Police Officer Chad McNett will update seniors on scams and frauds occurring locally on Feb. 1.

Save on movie tickets

Buy discount movie tickets from Farm Bureau and save money. Market Square 10 discount movie tickets can be purchased for $8 each, a savings of up to $1.75 per ticket on evening shows. Market Square 10, of Carmike Cinemas, is located near Wal-Mart in DeKalb. Stop by the Farm Bureau office to purchase movie tickets. ■

Please help us update our records!

Members, we need your help in updating our membership records. If you've dropped your land line, please give us your cell phone number so we can reach you. Changed your mailing address or email address? Then give us that information too. Your information is important to us so we can reach you.

Please fill out the form below and return to DeKalb County Farm Bureau, 1350 W. Prairie Drive, Sycamore, IL 60178, or call 815-756-6361, or email dianeyunek@dekalbfarmbureau.org with any updates that you have.

Name _____

Complete Address _____

Primary Phone Number _____

Email Address _____

Thank you!

Share Your Snaps

DeKalb County Farm Bureau Monthly Photo Contest

A new year brings new ways to get involved with your local Farm Bureau! ***Share Your Snaps*** is a themed, monthly photo competition that allows you to snap, share and send your favorite photos to the DeKalb County Farm Bureau.

These photos will be posted on our Facebook page weekly. The photo that has the most "likes" by the last Friday of the month will be published in the following Connections magazine.

So have fun and be creative!

This month's theme is **WINTER.**

Here's what you need to do...

1. Photograph any subject matter with a "winter" theme. Examples include: snow-covered landscapes, architecture, animals and kids.
2. Make sure your camera or Smartphone is set to the highest resolution for quality and your photo is sent at its original size. The submitted photo must be the photographer's original work.
3. Email your pictures to aschelkopf@dekalbfarmbureau.org with a brief description of the photo and story behind it.
4. Log on to Facebook and follow the DeKalb County Farm Bureau page at www.facebook.com/DeKalbCountyFarmBureau.
5. Watch for your pictures to be posted on the Facebook page weekly.
6. Click "like" on the photo you enjoy most, and share it with family and friends.

Contestants agree that the final judgment as to all matters concerning the contest and interpretation of contest rules are at the sole discretion of the DeKalb County Farm Bureau.

So get Snapping!

The last day to enter for this month is **Friday, Jan. 29.** Watch for the first winning photo in the February issue of *Connections* magazine!

At the Shedd Aquarium
See dolphins, penquins, turtles & more

Looking for a family fun activity to break up the long winter? Then consider going to the Shedd Aquarium with DeKalb County Farm Bureau.

Farm Bureau has a day trip planned for Saturday, Feb. 20, 2016 to the Shedd Aquarium located on South Lake Shore Drive in Chicago.

See dolphins, beluga whales, sea lions & more. Encounter penguins, sea otters, sting rays, sharks, tarantulas, monkeys, green sea turtles, moray eels, salamanders, and a host of fishes.

With the Total Experience Group Pass Ticket, participants will have access to most everything at the Shedd Aquarium. In the Abbott Oceanarium you will see the Aquatic Show, visit the Wild Reef, browse the aquarium galleries, view the Amphibians special exhibit, play in the Polar Play Zone, see Waters of the World, be at home on the Great Lakes, take a ride down the Amazon River, enjoy all the creatures in the Wild Reef, and be totally fascinated in the 4-D Experience.

The cost of the trip is $40 for adults, $33 for children (3-19 yrs.). Children 2 and under are free. Price includes admission to the Shedd Aquarium with the Total Experience Group Pass and motorcoach transportation.

Families will be on their own to explore the Shedd Aquarium, from approximately 9:30 a.m. until 3 p.m., and may dine in one of three cafes.

The motorcoach will depart from the DeKalb County Farm Bureau Building at 8 a.m. and will return by 5 p.m.

To register for this trip visit the Farm Bureau office or call in and make payment with a credit card, 815-756-6361. ■

Sentimental Journey at White Fence Farm

Susan Currier will entertain members with her Sentimental Journey musical show at White Fence Farm on April 20.

Take a trip down memory lane with Doris Day, Rosemary Clooney and Dinah Shore with songs and impersonations of these famous women.

Entertainer Susan Currier will warm your heart in this memorable show featuring songs from the ‘40s, ‘50s and ‘60s at White Fence Farm Restaurant.

Farm Bureau has reserved seats for the show and reserved tables in the dining room at White Fence Farm on Wednesday, April 20.

Lunch at White Fence Farm features a family style meal with fried chicken, baked potato, homemade chicken gravy, corn fritters, coleslaw, pickled beets, cottage cheese, kidney bean salad, choice of beverage and ice cream.

Cost of this day trip is $61 per person and includes motorcoach transportation, lunch and the show.

Farm Bureau members may register for this trip beginning Monday, Feb. 1 at the Prime Timers luncheon. After the luncheon, members may sign up in the Farm Bureau office. Spaces are limited so register soon. Farm Bureau accepts cash or credit card payments for trips.

For additional information phone 815-756-6361. ■

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Stray Kernels

Rhodora Collins, *Ag Literacy Coordinator*

Rhodora Collins is DeKalb County Farm Bureau's Ag Literacy Coordinator. Follow her Stray Kernels blog at www.straykernels.wordpress.com.

How to ask 100 people for help

It's not easy, actually.

Asking others for help has never been my strong point. I'm a fiercely independent introvert, and I tend to want to figure things out on my own while talking to as few people as possible.

It's not that I don't like people, or don't like talking. If you halfway know me and ever happen to drift by my office, I might talk your ear off. I'll probably say ten awkward things before I finally remember that you have other things to do. Then you'll leave, and I will take a deep breath and let my scattered thoughts settle for a few moments before I continue working. I'll be delighted to have talked to you, but I'll still have to regroup afterwards.

I like people, and I like talking, but it wears me out. Susan Cain, author of the (terrific) book "Quiet: The Power of Introverts in a World That Can't Stop Talking" explains that extroverts are energized by stimulation and social interaction, while introverts are energized by quiet reflection. I am at my most productive and creative in a quiet space.

But it's January, and it won't be quiet long. January in my world means gearing up for our Ag in the Classroom program. Gearing up for Ag in the Classroom means fielding requests for presentations from 140-150 teachers. It means obtaining, organizing, and preparing supplies (like corn and soybean seeds for first graders to plant and rock salt so second graders can make ice cream). Most of all, January means I will be busy asking at least 100 people for help.

"January in my world means gearing up for our Ag in the Classroom program. Gearing up for Ag in the Classroom means fielding requests for presentations from 140-150 teachers. Most of all, January means I will be busy asking at least 100 people for help."

That's how many people it takes to visit all those first through fourth grade classrooms to teach kids in our county about agriculture. And you know what? It's AWESOME. I love it. I love the energy, enthusiasm, and generosity of our volunteers. I love hearing from teachers and sometimes even parents what a profound impact those volunteers have on their students.

But it's not easy. Introversion aside, I am acutely aware of the fact that each prospective volunteer, upon receiving an e-mail or a call from me, may think something like, "Oh, shoot. She found me." As you read or listen to my plea for help, all the things that are on the plate you call life will flash before your eyes: Getting your farm tax documents in order. Attending your kid's dance rehearsals. Delivering seed. Your mother-in-law's illness. Your other kid's sporting events. Your job. Your … whatever. I get it—you're busy.

And here I am, asking you to volunteer. To walk into classrooms and talk to kids about agriculture. You know it will take more time than just the hour or so spent in each classroom. First, there's the training (if you haven't presented in the past). Then, reviewing the lesson plan, preparing the materials, and contacting the teachers. And then returning your supplies to my office afterwards. I'm asking you to devote a lot of precious time, in a life that's already full. I know this.

Plus, the thing about volunteering is that you don't have to do it. You don't *have* to add another thing to your list of things to do. I know this, too.

This knowledge is ever-present as I carefully phrase each e-mail or mentally rehearse each call before I pick up the phone. So if you get that e-mail or call from me, please know that it wasn't an easy thing for me to do, nor did I do it lightly.

But I also know that what you will do if you say yes is harder yet … and even more important.

P.S. If you have a passion for agriculture and would like to volunteer, you don't have to wait for me to contact you. E-mail me anytime at rcollins@dekalbfarmbureau.org or call 815-756-6361. I would love to talk to you! ■

Tips and Training

Ag in the Classroom "crash course" offered for volunteers

Do you have a farm background, currently farm, or work in agriculture? Do you wish people had a better understanding of what happens on a modern farm and how farming connects to all our lives? You can help!

Ag in the Classroom training will take place at Farm Bureau on Tuesday, Jan. 26 at 6:30 p.m. During this workshop, the four lessons listed below will be discussed in detail. New and past volunteers are invited to participate.

These Ag in the Classroom presentations will take place in schools throughout the month of February:

1st grade – More Than a Seed: Students plant corn and soybean seeds and learn why farmers raise these crops.
2nd grade – From Cow to Ice Cream: Students learn about dairy farming and make ice cream.
3rd grade – It's an Earful: Students learn about different kinds of corn and how they're used.
4th grade – Mapping Illinois Agriculture: Students learn about products from Illinois agriculture and identify ag-related sites across the state.

Ag in the Classroom volunteer Lori Johnson arranges the leaves of her paper corn stalk during last year's volunteer training event. This year's training will take place on Tuesday, Jan. 26 at 6:30 p.m.

If you are interested in volunteering and/or attending the training session, please contact Rhodora at rcollins@dekalbfarmbureau.org or 815-756-6361. An RSVP is recommended, but not required.

In 2015, 148 teachers requested Ag in Classroom presentations, reaching over 3,200 students. Help us make it happen again! ■

Pick of the CROP

Recommended resources about agriculture

"A Year on the Farm with Casey and Friends"

by Holly Dufek
Reading Level: ages 8 and up
Hardcover: 32 pages
Publisher: Octane Press (2014)
ISBN-13: 978-1937747565

"A Year on the Farm" pairs picture book characteristics like a storyline and engaging illustrations with non-fiction features like real-life photos, facts, and a glossary of terms.

Readers join a young farmer named Casey as she explains what happens on her farm throughout the year. (The book is the first in a series licensed by CNH Industrial America LLC which features Case IH machinery… Casey, Case—get it?) Her story starts in the spring, when her team of farm implements gears up for the growing season. As the seasons progress, new machines are introduced. Each takes a turn explaining its role on the farm, from Sammy tractor and Tammi tillage tool to Bailey baler and Kellie combine.

Along the way, a helpful earthworm named Tillus explains things like how seeds are planted and the difference between corn and grain headers on a combine. Simple diagrams and key words emphasized by bold, underlined text enhance these descriptions.

Each time a new machine is introduced, a "Size 'em up" diagram gives readers a sense of the machine's size as compared to Casey and Tillus.

This book includes features which will attract a wide variety of readers. Girls will be drawn in by the female narrator, while both girls and boys interested in machines will be engaged by the vivid photos and descriptions. The narrative arc lends itself to reading the book aloud like a story, while the factual sidebars give it an educational feel.

"A Year on the Farm" was donated to school libraries in DeKalb County in 2015. It is also available from online retailers like Amazon, by ordering through your favorite bookstore, or at some Case IH dealerships. ■

COUNTRY Thoughts

Provided by COUNTRY Financial®

Dan Howes, Chris Patterson,
Craig Popp, Mike Shipley
COUNTRY Financial Representatives

Dan Howes, Craig Popp, Mike Shipley, Chris Patterson

Take Precautions For Winter Driving

Reliable transportation is essential in the winter. It is especially important to keep your vehicle in top operating condition to avoid any unpleasant or dangerous situations while traveling in frigid weather.

Preparing your vehicle for the winter season and taking proper precautions are the keys to safe winter driving.

Prepare Your Vehicle For Winter Driving

- Winterize your vehicle. Check with a mechanic to make sure brakes, wipers, defroster and heater are working properly.
- Fill antifreeze and wiper fluids to the proper levels.
- Make sure tires are properly inflated and tread is in good condition.
- Equip car with proper materials in the event of an emergency (blankets, food, water, flashlight, ice scraper, cell phone and extra clothing).
- Keep your gas tank full. You may use more gas while traveling because it may be necessary to change routes or turn back during a bad storm.

Driving Tips

- Start early and allow plenty of time to reach your destination.
- Clear snow and ice from the hood, roof and all windows and lights before driving. Be sure to keep your headlights on in snowy conditions.
- Brake carefully and early. It takes more time to stop in adverse conditions.
- Look farther ahead in traffic than normal. Actions of other drivers' vehicles will alert you to problems and give you the extra time to safely react.
- Stay with your vehicle if it stalls and try to conserve fuel while maintaining warmth. Be alert to any possible exhaust or carbon monoxide problems.

To help with your insurance needs, contact Dan Howes, Chris Patterson, Craig Popp or Mike Shipley with COUNTRY Financial® at 815-756-9536. ■

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0116-083

This is **FS**

Here's the latest on products and services

We're off to a similar start as last year, fairly mild weather and low energy prices. It's a nice break for our patrons after a couple of challenging winters.

Propane - Propane prices are at near record lows after crushing record prices the other way in the 2013-2014 winters. Low demand for propane in the grain drying season contributed to it and global supplies are in very good shape to make one think this could be around for a while. All indications are that there is no rush at this point as long term projections continue to see good prices through the summer. Supplies continue to grow.

Fuels - Road fuels have also followed suit with gasoline remaining around $2. Be sure to stop by one of our newly remodeled FS Fast Stop fuel stations in DeKalb on Peace Road, in Waterman or Rochelle. All stations are open to the public 24/7.

Profits - 2015 turned out to be another successful year for our members. Near record income has allowed us to pay over $3 million in patronage back to our members as well as redeem stock in excess of $600,000.

Turf Products - Our Turf Division will be hosting a seminar in March at Pheasant Run in St Charles. The one day program will cover a host of topics for turf professionals. Our last seminar had over 200 attendees from throughout Illinois and Wisconsin.

FS Billing - A new billing system was implemented this fall making customer statements easier to read. A new online portal will become available later this year for customers to securely access billing information.

We appreciate the support of the DeKalb Farm Bureau and all of our affiliated Farm Bureaus. ■

CONSERV FS

www.conservfs.com

GROWMARK announces FFA essay contest

FFA members ponder: "What can young people do to ensure the sustainability of agriculture?" GROWMARK Inc. made that the topic for its 2016 essay contest.

Sponsored by GROWMARK and FS member cooperatives in conjunction with Illinois FFA, the contest allows FFA members to hone their writing skills, learn about issues affecting agriculture and understand cooperatives' role.

Essays should be about 500 words, typed and double-spaced. The postmarked entry deadline is March 1.

The state winner receives $500 and the winner's FFA chapter receives $300.

High school agriculture teachers have received more details. For information, visit **http://bit.ly/1NSYRRh.** ■

Lamb Buffet in February

The DeKalb County Lamb & Wool Producers will hold their annual Lamb Buffet on Saturday, Feb. 6 at the DeKalb County Farm Bureau. The buffet is open to the public and begins at 5:30 p.m. with a catered lamb meal by 5 B's Catering.

Tickets are $15 for adults and $8 for youth (5-12 years). Children four and under are free. Tickets may be purchased at the Farm Bureau office by Feb. 2.

Following the buffet, the Lamb & Wool Producers will conduct their annual meeting for members.

Lamb & Wool Producer members are urged to mail in their reservation form along with $30 family dues and buffet meal reservations by the **Feb. 2 deadline.** ■

Become a Master Gardener

If gardening is your passion, and you would like to be part of a team that educates youth and adults alike on the joys of gardening, consider becoming a University of Illinois Extension Master Gardener.

DeKalb County will be having an in-person training starting February 2016, and is now accepting applications. Submitted applications will be reviewed and interviews will be set up with Extension staff. Applicants must complete an application, interview, and screening.

The Master Gardener training will be offered Wednesdays, starting Feb. 17 and run through May 4, from 9 a.m. to 3:30 p.m. at the DeKalb County Farm Bureau Center for Agriculture. In-person training costs $175 and includes the Master Gardener manual with helpful resources and other materials.

If you are interested in becoming a DeKalb County Master Gardener contact University of Illinois Extension at 815-758-8194, visit online at **http://web.extension.illinois.edu/bdo** or stop by the DeKalb County Extension office. ■

Sycamore FFA Fundraiser planned

The Sycamore FFA is partnering with the Culver's Cares Fundraising Team to give back to our local community. The Sycamore FFA will be hosting this fundraiser during National FFA week, on Tuesday, Feb. 23, from 5 to 8 p.m.

The fundraiser is designed to promote agriculture awareness in our community. The money raised from this fundraiser will help fund new member FFA jackets, conferences, conventions, and help the FFA give back to DeKalb County; 10% of all restaurant sales will go to the Sycamore FFA. ■

Sycamore FFA members are making plans for a Culver's fundraiser on Feb. 23. Helping with last year's fundraiser were Teagan Neff, Morgan Jones and Jillian Diehl.

THIS ONE'S FOR THE girls

WOMEN'S HEALTH EVENT

Women of all ages are invited to join us for a morning dedicated to you! Enjoy snacks, giveaways, prizes, health screenings, education, laughs, pampering and even some shopping!

SAVE THE DATE!

VALLEY WEST HOSPITAL

Feb. 6
8 am - 1 pm
1302 N. Main St., Sandwich

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Pre-register online for a chance to win a purple KitchenAid Mixer!

For assistance with online registration call 815.748.5950.

kishforthegirls.org

Don't Forget Your Annual Mammogram

Call 815.748.2975 in DeKalb or 815.786.3794 in Sandwich and mention that you are attending this event. (Additional cost, subject to insurance).

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Center for Agriculture News

Farm storage facility loans

USDA has a program to help producers build or upgrade feed and grain farm-storage facilities for producers determined to be short of storage. The Farm Storage Facility Loan (FSFL) program provides very low-interest financing to assist producers with the construction or rehabilitation of storage structures.

The maximum amount of a loan through the FSFL program is $500,000 per structure with FSA loaning on up to 85% of the eligible costs. The interest rate in effect at the time the loan is approved is locked in for the life of the loan. December interest rates vary from 2.00% for 7-year loans, 2.25% for 10-year, and 2.375% for 12-year loans.

The program is designed to help ensure that producers have adequate capacity to store their harvested production until they feed or sell the harvested crop. The low-interest funds can be used to build or upgrade permanent facilities to store commodities. Eligible commodities include grains, oilseeds, pulse crops, hay, honey, renewable biomass commodities, fruits, vegetables, and milk. Qualified facilities include bunkers, flat storage, hay barns, grain bins, silos and oxygen limiting structures, grain drying and handling facilities, along with cold storage facilities for fruits and vegetables, and bulk tanks for milk.

An FSFL needs to be approved before any site preparation or construction can begin. FSFL security requirements have been eased for loans between $50,000 and $100,000. Previously, all loans in excess of $50,000 required a promissory note and additional security, such as a lien on real estate. Now loans up to $100,000 can be secured by only a promissory note, unless the structure has no re-sale value, then additional collateral is still required.

Anyone interested in an FSFL needs to contact the local FSA office prior to any planned construction to allow for loan processing. All loans require a $100 non-refundable loan application fee. Please contact the DeKalb County FSA office if you have any questions. ■

Enroll in ARC, PLC programs

USDA's Farm Service Agency (FSA) has announced that producers who chose coverage from the safety net programs established by the 2014 Farm Bill, known as the Agriculture Risk Coverage (ARC) or the Price Loss Coverage (PLC) programs, can now visit FSA county offices to sign contracts to enroll in coverage for 2016.

Producers are encouraged to contact the local FSA office to schedule an appointment to enroll. The enrollment period will continue until Aug. 1, 2016.

Although the choice between ARC and PLC is completed and remains in effect through 2018, producers must still enroll their farm by signing a contract each year to receive coverage.

If a farm is not enrolled during the 2016 enrollment period, producers on that farm will not be eligible for financial assistance from the ARC or PLC programs should crop prices or farm revenues fall below the historical price or revenue benchmarks established by the program. ■

Berry Production program

University of Illinois Extension is pleased to announce the Northern Illinois Berry School will be held in Sycamore on Monday, Feb. 1 from 1 to 4 p.m. at the DeKalb County Farm Bureau.

In collaboration with several University of Illinois Extension Educators, this program - for new growers and homeowners - will give an overview of production, weed and insect control, and general management suggestions for strawberries, raspberries, blueberries, and blackberries.

The program begins at 1 p.m. with Extension Educator Candice Miller presenting "Beginning Your Small Fruit Operation", giving gardeners the initial steps to establishing berries, including site selection, soil testing, site preparation, variety selection and proper planting techniques. At 2 p.m., Extension Educator Bruce Black will discuss "Successful Seasonal Management and Strategies" including trellising, pruning, irrigation, harvesting berries and post-harvest handling tips. At 3 p.m. Extension Educator Grant McCarty will conclude the day presenting "Keeping the Pests Away" which will cover information about specific pests and disease that you will see in berry crops that can lead to decline in plant health, effect fruit quality and production. Participants will learn how to identify these issues on their crops, methods of control, and to build Spotted Wing Drosophila traps.

Registration can be completed online at: **http://go.illinois.edu/BerrySchool_DeKalb** or by calling the University of Illinois Extension at 815-758-8194. Registration fee is $15. ■

DeKalb County 4-H'ers honored

DeKalb County 4-H members and volunteers received special recognition for their accomplishments and time spent with the 4-H program.

Over 100 volunteers were honored that have dedicated anywhere from one year to 57 years to 4-H program, said Nicole Groezinger, 4-H program coordinator in DeKalb County.

Listed below are the names of some of the 4-H members and volunteers that received special recognition at a recent awards program:

Outstanding 4-H Secretary Book - First Place Hannah Sutter of Tilton Park Clovers, Honorable Mention Jarrod Pritchett of DeKalb Choreboys & Choregirls.

Outstanding Treasurer Book - First Place Sawyer Willrett of the Malta Mustangs, Honorable Mention Elliott Pritchett of DeKalb Choreboys & Choregirls.

Top 4-H'er Award - Justene Jennings of Green Meadows and Carson Groezinger of DeKalb Choreboys & Choregirls.

Justene Jennings and Carson Groezinger were recognized with the Top 4-H'er Award.

Melanie Yaeger received the Bob Brown Award for Leadership and Citizenship.

Bob Brown Award for Leadership and Citizenship - Melanie Yaeger of Green Meadows

Illinois State 4-H Award in Animal Science - Mary Kate Harrod of Hinckley Harvestors

Illinois State 4-H Award in Personal Development - Justene Jennings of Green Meadows

I Dare You Award - Carson Groezinger of DeKalb Choreboys & Choregirls

Outstanding 4-H Volunteer Award - Bess Kershisnik from the Tilton Park Clovers 4-H Club

Outstanding 4-H Supporter Award - Jamie and Larisa Willrett from the Malta Mustangs. ■

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