

# The Cattlemen's Advocate

Serving Central & Eastern Missouri & Western Illinois

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## Land grab by water

Government threatens seizure of 85-year-old's entire farm for irrigating wrong field

By CHRIS BENNETT  
Reprinted by permission of Farm Journal/AgWeb

**DEER PARK, Washington** — The government is preparing to take the private land and legacy of an 85-year-old farmer for the crime of irrigation. Why? He watered his crops without regulatory approval.

"I didn't use a drop past my legal rights, but because I put it on the wrong field, I'm a criminal and the state wants to take everything I have," Bob Greiff says. "It's all about control. And power."

In response to Greiff's water "violations," the Washington State Department of Ecology levied a series of fines totaling \$121,000 and slapped a lien on his property. The department issued press releases champi-

oning its actions, and portrayed Greiff as an environmental outlaw. Notably, Ecology officials are not penalizing Greiff for the amount of water pumped, but rather, the location applied. Put it where we say, or else.

"This is the worst abuse of power by Ecology over a farmer I've seen in my career," says water consultant Tim Reierson. "Why the state chose to issue massive fines instead of permits is unexplainable. And the more facts you know, the worse it gets. Ecology made it impossible for Bob to be legal and still survive on that farm. It's cruel. I can back everything I say."

Greiff insists the state's measures are a "nightmare dream you don't wake up from."

"Why do they care what crops or acres I put my legally obtained water on?" he asks. "How did things ever get this crazy for farmers?"

### Make or Break

On a bare-bones 160-acre (120 arable) farm outside Deer

See LAND GRAB, page 3



**NIGHTMARE DREAM:** The Washington state government is preparing to take the private land and legacy of an 85-year-old farmer for the crime of irrigation because he watered his crops without regulatory approval. "The state wants people to think I'm an outlaw," Bob Greiff says. "I've always tried to do things right on this farm and I never dreamed my own state would treat me or anyone else like this." (Photos by Ray Aguirre)



## Extension updated budgets show improved cow-calf outlook for 2025

**FORSYTH, Mo.** — University of Missouri Extension recently released the 2025 Missouri Beef Cattle Enterprise Budgets which provide new estimates of income and expenses for 2026.

"The budgets look favorable for cow-calf producers in the coming year, but as we've seen, markets can change quickly," says Jacob Hefley, field specialist in agricultural business.

"Operations that buy animals or retain calves past weaning will still face tight margins as the purchase price of cattle and interest expenses remain high."

Optimism for Cow-Calf Producers, Challenges for Other Enterprises

Higher expected prices for weaned calves, along with updated input price estimates, support improved projected income for cow-calf herds compared to last year's 2025 budget. Both spring- and fall-calving operations show a better outlook

for 2026, with higher calf prices helping to offset increased production costs, particularly higher pasture expenses.

Enterprises that rely on buying or retaining animals face a more challenging outlook, primarily due to higher feeder calf prices and production costs. The beef backgrounding budget, which projected positive returns last year, now projects potential losses. The replacement heifer development budget is also less attractive than last year, as keeping heifers instead of selling them reduces the income those calves could have generated at weaning.

The beef finishing budget continues to struggle with tight margins but shows improvement from last year driven by higher fed cattle prices.

These budgets use prices generated in mid-October, just days before recent shifts in cattle markets. Market conditions, input costs, and calf prices can

change quickly throughout the year, which may affect projected returns. Regularly reviewing and updating budgets allows producers to understand how these changes impact their operation and make informed management decisions.

"Budgets are a snapshot in

time," Hefley said. "Conditions change quickly, so it's important to revisit your numbers regularly. Doing so helps producers make informed choices and adjust their management strategies as markets evolve."

All beef cattle budgets are available at [mizzou.us/BeefBudgets](http://mizzou.us/BeefBudgets).

Updates for 2025 include sensitivity analysis tables that show how changes in calf prices, feed costs, or pasture rent can affect profitability. Budgets also now report income over cash costs

See BEEF BUDGETS, page 16

## Trump touts \$12 billion in new farm aid as tariffs weigh on producers

The Trump administration announced a \$12 billion aid package recently for farmers impacted by President Donald Trump's tariffs and broader economic pressures tied to trade and rising production costs.

Trump unveiled the plan during a roundtable discussion with farmers, lawmakers and agriculture industry representatives. Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent, Agriculture Secretary Brooke Rollins and National

Economic Council Director Kevin Hassett also attended.

"Now we're once again in a position where a president is able to put farmers first," Trump said. "But unfortunately I'm the only president that does that."

Rollins said farmers will begin receiving payments by Feb. 28. Applications are expected to open in the coming weeks, giving producers clarity on payment levels before key planting decisions are made.

While Trump repeatedly said during the discussion that the assistance was funded by tariffs, administration officials said the \$12 billion will be drawn from a USDA fund financed with taxpayer dollars.

According to a White House official who spoke to Politico on condition of anonymity, as much as \$11 billion of the package will go to producers of major row

See FARM AID, page 11

# UPCOMING SALES

**Tuesday, Dec. 30 – NO SALE**  
**Tuesday, Jan. 6 – Feeder Special**  
**Tuesday, Jan. 13 – Feeder Special**  
**Tuesday, Jan. 20 – Regular Sale**  
**Tuesday, Jan. 27 – Feeder Special**  
**Tuesday, Feb. 3 – High Noon Cow Sale**  
**Tuesday, Feb. 10 – Feeder Special**  
**Tuesday, Feb. 17 – Regular Sale**  
**Tuesday, Feb. 24 – Feeder Special**

## Cattle Receiving Hours

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 Tuesday: All Day Sale Day

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**It's a great time  
 to be in the  
 cattle business!**

What a great time to be in the cattle business. All time highs calves, and yearlings with just enough market volatility to keep things interesting. 2026 promises to be another year of high cattle prices and volatility from top to bottom. We hope our track record speaks for itself, F&T is the Livestock Auction to use when you want to do business with an organization that not only appreciates your cattle — We appreciate you.

As we head into the new year flurry of selling yearlings and then calves for grass, we would love for you to choose the F&T team. If you have any questions about doing business and F&T, whether it is buying or selling, please contact one of field reps listed. Keep in mind the best field representatives for the good livestock auctions are satisfied customers. Please, do not keep us a secret. We would love to hear from your friends and neighbors.

Spring is right around the corner, and we all need a grazing project. The high noon cow sale February 3 will bring to Northeast Missouri the opportunity to buy cattle, hundreds of cows with big calves, bred back ready for grass. When you have the most grass in spring, you'll have a cow that's already bred and a calf that's gaining 2 pounds per day or more. These 3-1s will make money. One of the best investments a cow man can make is in a three-in-one pair.

Be sure and take a look at the listings for the February 3 high noon cow sale!

– Justin Angell  
 F&T Field Representative

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## High Noon Cow Sale

**Tuesday, Feb. 3, 2026 • Noon**

**F&T Livestock Auction, Palmyra, MO**

## Early Consignments

**Ron and Sherry Morse**

20 bred heifers. These fancy Red Angus heifers are AI bred to Bieber Blue Chip to start calving March 7. These have been turned out and lightly bucket fed for a good disposition.

**Rudy Pate**

19 fall heifer pairs, with July and August calves all born unassisted, mostly 10 bwf, 5 blk and 4 CharX bred back to a registered black Angus bull with a productive history.

**Joey Crigler**

12 five to seven year old black pairs running back with a black bull. The cows originated from the Tom Struberg herd near New Haven MO.

**Rowena Farms**

65 Red Angus mostly 4 and some 5 year olds with Red Angus or Charolais crossbred calves by there side... running back with Charolais and Angus bulls.

**Joni E Yoder**

15 head dispersal. Having moved we have a complete dispersal of cow herd. The females will mostly be red hided cows (12) of running ages and three heifers. Most will be spring calving so there will be several offered as pairs. They ran with a Angell Thomas RA/Charolais bull but a few of the late spring calvers could be bred to a black bull.

**Alvin Miller**

7 Pair. These will be seven heifer pairs that have Sept and Oct calves at their side. An Angus bull was turned in on November 15 making these an opportunity for three in one.

*If you have cows to consign, there is still time.  
 Look online for updates and photos of early consignments.*

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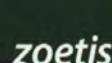
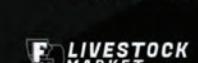
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## LAND GRAB from page 1

Park, in northeast Washington's Spokane County, Bob Greiff rotates alfalfa, oats, hay, and barley. His fields are evenly split by a road—two 80-acre tracts to the south and north of the ribbon. Greiff rubs pennies to make dollars: His last tractor purchase was in 1992—for \$70,000. "We traded a number of even older tractors just to get the price down to what we could afford," he recalls.

Deploying conservative farming practices on relatively tiny acreage, Greiff's operation is akin to a step back in time. Describing Greiff as old-school is an understatement.

In 1939, Greiff's father, Willie, purchased an initial portion of the creek-side property and planted seed potatoes. A decade later, in 1949, Willie secured a water right and began irrigating.

"My dad bought that first 80 by the creek and then bought another 80 across the road," Greiff explains. "In about 1953, he ran a pipe under the road and started pumping to both fields because the second one had more cultivated land and was level."

Willie watered on both sides of the road until his death in

**"Sound crazy? It is. One day I'm pumping water just like I have for 70 years, and the next day I'm the target of people who know nothing about farming. Nothing."**

1991. Greiff continued watering in the same manner. Potatoes were replaced by alfalfa and grain. Regardless of crop, Greiff's soil produces limited yield without moisture. Each year, as his crops rotate on a given piece of dirt, he requires flexibility to add more water in some areas and less in others. The logistical dance is make or break: For example, Greiff typically grows one crop of alfalfa dryland and three irrigated, and he grows 50-bushel dryland wheat and 100-plus-bushel irrigated wheat.

Legally, Greiff holds three water rights totaling 136 acre-feet per year annual volume for irrigation on 37 acres north of the dividing road. "I've always pumped from our water rights and survived on this dirt since I was a boy," Greiff exclaims. "Now they tell me they'll kick me off my own land. For what? Because I irrigated the wrong acres without permission and owe them \$121,000."

**"Sound crazy? It is. One day I'm pumping water just like I have for 70 years, and the next day I'm the target of people who know nothing about farming. Nothing."**

In 2019, Greiff's mailbox clinked with a snail-mail message from the Washington State Department of Ecology. Mr. Greiff, you're irrigating on the south side the road, but we don't find a record of a water right for you to do that.

Significantly, Ecology made



**NOT GONNA RUN AND HIDE:** "If they want to destroy a farmer because he put his water on unapproved acres, then I'm not gonna run and hide," Bob Greiff says. (Photo by Ray Aguirre)

recent headlines in 2023 after fining King Ranch in Grant and Douglas counties almost \$268,000 for alleged wetlands

destruction. Ecology referred King Ranch to the state attorney general for a criminal investigation. USDA is backing King

Ranch.)

"It all started with a letter," Greiff says, his voice trailing off in disbelief. "I had a set amount of water I was allowed to use, but they said I was in big trouble if I used it on any row except what they allowed."

### Gone to Hell

In July 2019, Greiff knocked on the front door of water consultant Tim Reierson's home in Yakima, roughly three hours distant. Seated at Reierson's dining room table, Greiff told his tale.

At the helm of Streamline Water Consulting, and highly esteemed in the irrigation industry, Reierson navigates both agriculture rows and the paperwork maze of water rights. Prior to private practice, he worked for seven years (1989-1996) at Ecology in the Water Rights

Division. Translated: Reierson understands nuance on both sides of the table.

Reierson researched Greiff's water rights and farm history.

"The research showed Bob's water rights don't cover south of the road. Ecology doesn't seem to register the significance of irrigating in plain sight for decades, but I found an explanation for it. In 1968, Bob filed to irrigate both north and south, and it was approved in 1975. But when Ecology certified the right in 1983, they left out the south part, possibly in error."

"I don't think Bob read the certificate fine print," Reierson continues. "He thought it was fixed and farmed it 50 years. Ecology has this false narrative they've spread around that he's a

**See LAND GRAB, page 11**

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# From the Publisher... Jon Angell

Up front we have a story involving irrigation and water rights. These are two things I have very little knowledge of, but I am intrigued when I travel in the Western U.S. by the water infrastructure. Water is plentiful for the most part here, but water, its use and its management is critical and often a point of much friction. For much of the western parts of the country, when water management is mismanaged, agriculture and sometimes communities literally dry up and in some cases blow away. This front-page story tells an unfortunate tale of bureaucracy that is likely out of hand or at the very least out of touch with its mission.

It tells a tale of a farmer caught up in a bureaucratic hoop jumping exercise that finally gives up and finally quits dancing due to bureaucratic fatigue. I can't say that I fault him much. In fact, it seems to me he made a good deal of effort to mend things with no results. This isn't the first time we have shared in these pages' bureaucracy gone wrong, nor will it be the last. We all know that with so much government involvement in every corner of life, these stories are as plentiful as they are misfortunate.

**Concerns over the Trump Administration's** policies are an ongoing thing. The tariff tools that they have been utilizing are generating a good bit of money for the U.S. Treasury evidently. It looks like they plan on farm aids of some sort. The story is on the front page, and our friend Alan Guebert's column on page 5 is unsurprisingly critical of the Trump Administration actions surrounding this.

While I'm thinking about the Trump Administration, I would point out an opinion editorial on page 16 from Peter Navarro, a key White House trade counselor. Navarro is an outspoken and controversial personality in academia and among economists.

I have no idea if he is right or wrong. He has had many wins and losses, but is always interesting and often promotes unconventional positions as well as being willing to step into nearly any fray. He is also willing to act on his convictions, and even was the target of political prosecution from his work in the first Trump administration.

I'll admit, I kind of like the guy, I bet he is a great conversationalist at social gatherings!

Right after we published our paper last month came news of the closure of the large Tyson beef plant in Lexington, NE. This was a big surprise to many. But to some of us, we knew packing capacity often consolidates or contracts in this time of tight cattle availability in the cattle cycle. We just didn't know which packer and which plant would blink first. The plant in Lexington was an old IBP plant and was rumored to be one of Tyson's least efficient.

A new more efficient competing packing plant is opening about an hour away, and I am told by more than one contact from Nebraska it looks like more of a wash than a hit. Time will tell.

Steve Dittmer gets into some of the details in his column on page 17.

**Another story I ran across** is of a small family business you'll find on page 8. I found it interesting in a lot of ways, especially their thoughts on how to run a family business, who they are competing with, how they attract business, and their use of AI to their competitive advantage.

For clarity, in this instance, we are talking about artificial intelligence not artificial insemination, which would be the more typical use of AI in our publication.

**Talk about first mover advantage**, how many of us are using artificial intelligence tools to analyze our business books and promotion. Do the lessons within this story maybe have implications for what you are doing?

**On page 15**, Bill Bullard does a good job of comparing chicken, pork and beef. For those of us who are cattle producers, this would be good information to read, study and internalize as we all encounter family, friends, and some strangers that have no clue as to why proteins are priced the way they are.

As cattlemen, we are probably best positioned to tell this story to consumers, Bill's column this month is good material to work from.

**Looking back at 2025**, I can't help but think it was full of volatility and surprises, both good and bad. I am looking forward to the challenges of 2026. I have every expectation that it too will be full of volatility and surprises.

We will look forward to bringing you news and commentary right here for another year, thanks for reading and your continued support.

## Review your farm lease for 2026

**MEXICO, Mo.** – As the end of the year approaches, many landowners and tenants are reviewing farm leases for the 2026 season. For those using a verbal agreement, University of Missouri Extension encourages a careful review of a newly revised guide, "Verbal Farm Rental Agreements Under Missouri Law," which is available for free download at <https://muext.us/G520>.

Verbal or oral farm leases are legal leases in Missouri, says MU Extension field specialist Mary Sobba. Unlike surrounding states that set specific dates for verbal leases, Missouri allows verbal farm lease agreements to begin on any date. This flexibility can create confusion when one party wishes to terminate. For example, Iowa requires landowners to notify ten-

ants by Sept. 1 to end a lease the following March 1.

In Missouri, the most common verbal lease is a "periodic tenancy, year-to-year." Under this arrangement, the tenant continues farming for another year at the anniversary of the original agreement unless either party provides the other with written notice of termination at least 60 days before that anniversary date, Sobba says.

Verbal farm leases have been used for many decades in Missouri and remain common. Typically, these agreements are based on a conversation between the landowner and tenant agreeing on terms and are sealed with a handshake.

"Verbal leases can work well, but if misunderstandings or disagreements arise, they become challenging," she says. "It can be difficult to determine which party is correct if each party recalls the lease terms differently. Our guide discusses common challenges related to lease duration, termination, invalid verbal agreements, subleases and death of the landlord or tenant."

Because difficulties can arise when disputes occur in a verbal farm lease, MU Extension recommends putting all farm leases in writing. Written leases give both parties an opportunity to discuss, understand and document terms and responsibilities.

Find additional MU Extension farm lease resources at <https://muext.us/MOfarmleases>.



## DIRECTORY OF ADVERTISERS

F&T Livestock Market	page 2
Wheeler Consignment Auction	page 3
Hatton Vermeer Sales	page 5
Hopewell Farms	page 5
Hamilton Hay	page 6
The Bank of Missouri	page 7
Bowling Green Vet Clinic	page 7
Beefland	page 7
Larry Clementz Real Estate	page 7
Circle 5 Beef	page 8
Bruce Fencing	page 9
Scotland Co. Livestock Auction	page 9
Callaway Livestock Center	page 10
Boyd Harris	page 10
Cattle Visions	page 10
Maxwell Trailers	page 11
Purina	page 11
Missouri Beef Industry Council	page 12
Meyer Implement	page 12
Ridgway Seed & Soil	page 12
Meyers Truck Service	page 13
Zuroweste Welding	page 13
Eastern Mo. Cowboy Church	page 14
Hall Seed & Chemical	page 14
Miller Brothers Lumber	page 14
Girod Construction	page 14
Central Mo. Feed & Supply	page 15
Angell's Western Wear	pages 15, 23
Angell Livestock	page 16
EMCC market report	page 18
Sheep & Goat market report	page 19
Angell-Thomas Charolais	page 20
Angell's Western Wear	page 20
Albert's Shoe Repair	page 20
Cary Livestock	page 20
CYS Builders	page 20
Nation Polled Herefords	page 20
Shannon Farms	page 20
SHek Boutique	page 20
Mark Robertson	page 20
Savannah's Farm Fresh	page 20
Eastern Mo. Comm. Co.	page 24

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# FARM & FOOD FILE

## Bridge to where, exactly?

By ALAN GUEBERT  
For The Cattleman's Advocate

There was so much blarney and puffery flying around the Cabinet Room during the Dec. 8 White House farmer/rancher gathering that it became impossible to tell fact from fiction.

For example, in explaining the \$12 billion "bridge payment" the White House hopes to send U.S. farmers by



Feb. 28, President Donald Trump "suggested that tariffs would fund the assistance," noted Agri-Pulse.

Nope, Secretary of Agriculture Brooke Rollins later corrected. The \$12 billion will be taxpayer money from USDA's newly replenished Commodity Credit Corporation, she explained, not the up-and-down tariffs collected by the President's up-and-down tariff policy.

Rollins herself had trouble with facts. According to Successful Farming, the ag boss "called the one-time bridge payments 'the bridge to get from the last administration, and what happened under the last president and the last U.S. Department of Agriculture, to this Golden Age of farmers.'"

To ensure everyone got her multiple "last" references to the Biden Administration, Rollins added lastly, "It was an absolute war on agriculture and our rural communities'... that changed on Jan. 20."

USDA farm income data,

**Further proof that the bridge the White House wants American taxpayers to again finance needs to be one for it to get over their failed-again tariff policy.**

however, shows there was no "war on agriculture and our rural communities" during the Biden Administration. In fact, it shows just the opposite: The Biden years, 2021 to 2024 inclusive, posted \$751 billion in collective net farm income with \$64 billion of it tied to "federal government direct farm program payments."

On the other hand, the first Trump Administration, 2017 through 2020 inclusive, shows collective net farm income at \$338.8 billion, or just 45 percent of the subsequent Biden years, while federal farm program payments were a whopping \$93.2 billion, or 145 percent greater than during the Biden years.

Since both administrations operated under very similar farm legislation, the crop insurance-centered 2014 and 2018 Farm Bills, the comparison is almost straight-line. As such, there's no distinctive policy difference for the stunningly low net farm income or steep increase in government payments during the first Trump term.

Except, of course, for the tariffs imposed by the White House in 2019.

The impact of those tariffs—especially those aimed at China—hit U.S. ag markets like a sledge hammer. Best analyses now claim those tariffs cost U.S. farmers \$27 billion in ag exports in 2019 and 2020. The loss of sales to China accounted for about 95 percent of the shortfall.

Back then, the Trump Administration papered over its crushing tariff policy with billions of taxpayer dollars. Federal

farm program payments ballooned from \$13.7 billion in pre-tariff 2018 to \$22.4 billion in 2019 and a whopping \$45.6 billion in 2020.

And we know that those increased payments were tied to the market-clipping tariffs for two reasons. First, the White House and its then ag chief, Sonny Perdue, acknowledged as much when tariff mitigation schemes were pulled out of thin air and put into play. Remember the mathematical gymnastics of the "market facilitation payments" program?

More convincingly, however, once the ag side of the Trump tariff plan ended with Biden's 2020 election, bailout payments to farmers began to sag. Farm program spending fell from \$26 billion in 2021 to \$15.6 billion in 2022, \$12.3 billion in 2023, and just \$10.1 billion in 2024.

Meanwhile, China, the target of tariffs then and now, casually brushed aside each. Indeed, the day before the Trump/Rollins "bridge" meeting with ag leaders, China announced that its trade surplus "topped \$1 trillion for the first time" this year.

Further proof that the bridge the White House wants American taxpayers to again finance needs to be one for it to get over their failed-again tariff policy.

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## Mexico optimistic on restoration of cattle trade over NMW

Cochliomyia hominivorax, the New World screw-worm fly, or screw-worm for short, is a species of parasitic fly that is well known for the way in which its larvae (maggots) eat the living tissue.

Mexican government officials see a resumption of the nation's cattle entering the United States now that the screwworm (NWS) infestation has "been contained."

Julio Berdegué, head of the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development (SADER), contends that 99.9% of the NWS cases in the southwest of the country have been contained since November 2024. The government tab to fight the NWS infestation so far is about \$65.7 million, with most of the cases in the south-southwest region.

Infections in the central and northern regions of Mexico—which prompted U.S. officials to launch a ban on Mexican cattle entering the United States in May 2025—were addressed without any subsequent infections being reported, according to a report in Mexico Business News.

The government has used canine teams to detect infestations in addition to traps and screwworm fly sterilization plants in order to identify and address the rise in NWS cases since last year. Berdegué also announced at the opening of a new Federal (NWS) Verification and Inspection Point in the state of Veracruz that the facility is slated to review nearly 1,700 head of cattle per day and eventually will inspect more than 50,000 head for NWS infestation per month.

USDA has not formally responded to the NWS claims from officials in Mexico, but the agency opened a sterile fly facility in Tampico, Mexico, last month that provides access to more hot spots for NWS in the northern regions in the country.

—Meatingplace.com

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## Here are the scheduled advertising deadlines for The Cattleman's Advocate through June 2026:

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# Thoughts From Justin's Side of the Fence

By JUSTIN ANGELL

For about two weeks, I was pretty sure I was going to start this article by telling you how bad the fed cattle market was and how much we had lost on the live market and the calf market. Here's part of a paragraph I wrote three weeks ago to get my article started.

"\$400 per head less and they're still pretty dang good. Look at the glass as half full instead of half empty and enjoy the time when our cups were running over."

You can't hold a beach ball underwater forever, and a market this short of fed cattle supply cannot be held back. All my life it seems like cheap corn always wrecks the Fed cattle market. The line of thought runs like, "Corn is cheap, replacement feeder cattle are high so why don't we just make the ones we already own bigger?"

My friend Ted out in Brady, Nebraska told me a story about a neighboring feed yard that possessed a lot of cheap corn, so they ran a group of 1,500 pound steers through the chute and re-implanted them with a target weight of 1,800 pounds. Cheap corn makes these giant cattle possible and as always overloaded fed cattle supply. By luck, our overloaded supply is nonexistent. As we get these jumbo fed cattle cleaned up, the short supply will allow fed cattle to bounce back probably around \$2.30 maybe \$2.40.

We're just heading into January, and I can feel the spring grass fever heating up already. Partially because I've got it, I'm excited about 2026. I hope you are too. I'm already thinking about gathering some cattle for grass. I won't be the only one. The feeder cattle market has seemed crazy high in 2025, and I wouldn't put it past 2026 to be heard to say; "Hold my beer and watch this!"

My final thought for this month is the February 3 high noon cow sale at F&T in Palmyra. We will have a great selection of good young cows and pairs. Mark your calendar. Come buy some cattle that'll make you money, it's a good time to own the factory producing calves.

I'm not really satisfied with this article. I know it's a rare occasion, but I am presently having trouble thinking of anything more to write about that would be interesting and at the same time does not get me in trouble reaching out too speculatively in my thoughts.

Let's just say, let's all do our part to work toward a great 2026. See you at the auction.



## Cattle groups differ on plan for keeping Texas screwworm-free

Leaders of some cattle groups in Texas differ in their view of the state's readiness for keeping New World screwworm at bay.

Texas lawmakers on Tuesday heard from various witnesses on the state's work with USDA for a response plan, which came on the heels of a new case of screwworm in Mexico detected only 120 miles from the Texas border.

The response plan is likely to be published in two months, according to Dr. Lewis "Bud" Dinges, the state's top veterinarian and executive director of the Texas Animal Health Commission.

"Our plan was to go through the New World screwworm playbook that USDA's developed and go through our plan with individual or smaller industry groups over the next couple of months," he said at a hearing held by the Texas House of Representative's Agriculture & Livestock and Culture, Recreation & Tourism.

Cattle industry leaders among the wit-

nesses included Ben Weinheimer, president and CEO of the Texas Cattle Feeders Association, and Tim Niedecken, executive director of the Livestock Marketing Association of Texas. They differed in their outlook on the issue.

Weinheimer called for a reopening of the border, noting both Mexican and USDA protocols related to inspection, treatment, and transport controls have proven effective. He noted the distinction between screwworm flies and larvae, contending the fly has mostly been contained to southern Mexico and the few isolated cases reported in the north have consisted of dead larvae, validating the existing measures.

"Science and history have proven we can [resume importation of Mexican feeder cattle] safely, and the economics tell us it is time to do this now," Weinheimer said, referring to high beef prices related, in part, to lower cattle supplies.

Niedecken wasn't as comfortable. He warned officials that the response plan isn't moving along quickly enough, noting USDA's own modeling has it that come April 1, 2026, the risk of screwworm reaching South Texas goes up from single digits to more than 90%.

Niedecken also called for revisions to the plan because, as presented thus far, his constituents could not comply. He said the requirement that livestock being transported out of an infested zone must have an ear tag, vet inspection and receive treatment was an example of how the plan was out of touch with the realities of daily industry operations.

"I promise you none of you will win a popularity contest with your constituents in the ranching world if you go home and tell them about that requirement," he told lawmakers. "That is a massive change that USDA is enforcing upon different states."

— Meatingplace.com

## Registration open for 2026 Heroes to Hives program; online class begins in March

COLUMBIA, Mo. — Registration is now open for the 2026 Heroes to Hives program.

University of Missouri Extension assistant professor Karen Funkenbusch said veterans who want to learn about beekeeping can attend the self-paced online class, which runs March-November. Participants also receive on-ground training on hive handling, hive inspections, pest and pathogen management and beekeeping ergonomics from April to October.

Locations for hands-on training include the Heroes to Hives apiary at the University of Central Missouri's Mitchell Street Farm at Warrensburg; MU Southwest Center at Mount Vernon; Three Rivers Community College; University of Missouri-St. Louis; and MU Jefferson Farm and Garden in Columbia.

On-ground training sessions are for

registered veteran participants and their dependents age 18 and older. Register at <https://mizzou.us/HeroesToHives>.

Since 2021, MU Extension has offered the Heroes to Hives program with support from the Missouri AgrAbility Project and Missouri Beginning Farmer and Rancher Program, U.S. Department of Agriculture - National Institute of Food and Agriculture, and Rotary Club of Columbia.

Army veteran and Michigan State agricultural entomologist Adam Imgra and his wife began the program in 2015. Missouri is the first state chapter.

**Got an idea for a story you'd like to see in The Cattleman's Advocate? Drop us a line and let us know at: [cattlemen@virtualimages.us](mailto:cattlemen@virtualimages.us)**

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# It's The Pitts...

## Name calling

By LEE PITTS  
For The Cattleman's Advocate

I have a strongly held belief that people grow up to become what they are named. You just know that a guy named Reginald Winfield III is not going to be a homeless beggar. He'll more likely turn out to be an investment banker or a Congressman beggar.

I, on the other hand have been cursed by a bad name from the day I was born. Did you know that the most prevalent name amongst mass murderers is Lee? It's no wonder I'm always disappointing myself. If only I had a decent name. Of course, I blame my parents for my lack of achievement in life. I understand why they named my older brother John, one of the best names in the English language. Our father was named John as were his dad and his granddad. But how do you switch from giving him such a good name to naming me Leland Warren Pitts? Goodness gracious, I had two strikes against me before my first bowel movement. Thanks a lot mom and dad.

I'll never know why my parents double cursed me with two names that were last heard in the 1800's, and even then they weren't all that popular. These days your name is your brand and its all about marketing and in business your good name is your most valuable asset. Do you think Baxter Black and Waddie Mitchell would have become great cowboy poets if instead their names had been Hieronymous or Grayson Monet? John Wayne knew he'd never amount to much

**Brahma is an excellent name for a future PRCA cowboy and if a ranch couple had twins they could name them Angus and Brangus.**

if he kept his real name, which was Marion, which comes close to almost being as bad as Leland. I often wonder how many more books I could have sold as a Cody, Rope, Stetson, Ty or Clint, great cowboy names one and all.

I suppose I should be grateful they didn't name me Harry with a middle name of Arm so I could have gone through life with a nickname of "Stinky". I think my very first words were, "Please call me Lee." But that was before I realized that Lee could also be used as a girl's name! Now you know why I'm a big promoter of the idea that a kid should be able to change his name when entering kindergarten. Personally, I've always seen myself as a "Tom Roberts" kind of guy and if that was my name I'm quite sure I'd have won a Pulitzer and owned a ranch the size of Delaware by now.

Speaking of Pulitzers, I read a lot and one of my favorite writers is John Sandford who came up with an interesting system of name calling that I fully endorse. Because one father lived and breathed fishing he named his children after outboard motors, so he ended up with two sons named Mercury Johnson and Johnson Johnson. His daughter Evie was named after Evinrude. I think we should take a page from Sandford's book and farmers should name their children after tractors, for example John Deere, Alice Chalmers, Massey

Ferguson and Oliver Oliver. If you're a Caterpillar family instead you could name your daughter Kitty Cat, although that name strikes me more as a female engaged in the adult entertainment industry. Kids in a trucker's family with the right last name could be Ken Worth, Peter Built, or Otto Carr.

The animal industries offer up a plethora of possible names that a good marketing plan could be built around. Can you imagine the name recognition of a red headed purebred breeder whose name was Red Angus? And there are other breed names that would make good people monikers. Brahma is an excellent name for a future PRCA cowboy and if a ranch couple had twins they could name them Angus and Brangus. Charolais sounds like a lovely girl's name and if a daughter already had the last name of Ford you could name her "Her" and the Hereford Association would put Her in their Hall of Fame.

Writers and actors often change their names and I should have changed mine a long time ago. Heck, John Sandford isn't really his name either, although I think he has a great real name which is John Roswell Camp. I guarantee that if his name had been Leland Warren Pitts he'd still be writing obituaries for some small town newspaper instead of having written over 50 books.

[www.LeePittsbooks.com](http://www.LeePittsbooks.com)

## Sustainable Beef eyes further capacity expansion

A Sustainable Beef plant in North Platte, Neb., is in the process of implementing plans announced in October to expand its capacity to 1,500 head of cattle per day, even as company officials consider ramping up for even more production growth.

The all-Angus beef plant, which supplies Walmart's case-ready beef facility in Olathe, Kan., currently processes up to 1,300 head daily, according to CEO David Briggs. The plant has a payroll of nearly 900 and is looking for more workers as Walmart needs more specialized beef cuts, which requires more

employees. Sustainable Beef distributes the products to the retailer's stores in 13 states, and that roster is expected to expand as Walmart eventually plans on selling the beef cuts at 650 U.S. stores.

Sustainable Beef's board of directors already is considering boosting the processing operation by 20% to 1,800 head daily as part of a single daytime shift, Briggs told the North Platte Bulletin. The recent closure of a Tyson Foods Inc. beef plant in Lexington, Neb., has opened the door for some of the 3,000 laid-

off workers to find new jobs at Sustainable Beef, about 60 miles from the Tyson facility. Briggs noted that his company already has received job applications from an unspecified number of former Tyson beef plant workers.

"We've seen a significant increase in job applications after the Tyson announcement," Briggs told Meatingplace. "We're looking at being able to expand our cattle processing to the 1,800 head level sometime near the end of 2026."

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## FSIS updates 'Product of the USA' guidelines

USDA's Food Safety and Inspection Service (FSIS) recently updated and responded to comments on a guideline the agency provided to help processing plants meet new requirements for use of voluntary U.S.-origin label claims.

FSIS published a final rule in March 2024 amending its labeling regulations to allow "Product of USA" and "Made in the USA" to be generically approved for use on single ingredient FSIS-regulated products from animals born, raised, slaughtered and processed in the United States.

The rule also stipulates those two voluntary label claims are generically approved for use on multi-ingredient FSIS-regulated products if:

(1) All FSIS-regulated products in the multi-ingredient product are derived from animals born, raised, slaughtered, and processed in the United States;

(2) all other ingredients, other than spices and flavorings, are of domestic origin; and (3) the preparation and processing steps for the multi-ingredient product have occurred in the United States.

Also under the final rule, label claims other than "Product of USA" or "Made in the USA" indicating a preparation or processing step of an FSIS-regulated product is of US origin are generically approved for use, but such claims will need to include the preparation and processing steps that occurred in the United States upon which the claim is made.

FSIS concurrently made available the revised guideline on label approval and requested comments, only receiving three during a 60-day comment period. During ensuing webinars, the agency received several comments and then several questions also through its web-based phone hotline askFSIS.

The process prompted to FSIS to revise the guideline for clarification. Among the revisions is clarification on the meaning of "raised," which is "from birth to slaughter," and the term "harvested" may be used to mean "slaughtered."

Other examples among a litany of updates is the requirement pertaining to label claims on multi-ingredient products, the one stating "all other ingredients other than spices and flavorings" must be of domestic origin does not include sub-ingredients. The agency, meanwhile, is clarifying the definitions of "spices and flavorings."

FSIS also clarifies that "Product of North America" is allowed as a voluntary label claim if its "truthful and not misleading." And the agency provides additional examples of voluntary US-origin label claims that may be used, such as "Cooked in the U.S.A."

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# How a small-town Wisconsin meat processor has thrived for 6 decades

**Lake Geneva Country Meats is a cross between small-town values and major metropolitan know-how**

By LISA M. KEEFE  
Meatingplace.com

It's 9 a.m. on a Friday and the customers are four deep at the counter of Lake Geneva Country Meats (LGCM) in Lake Geneva, Wis.

That it's still summer and the retail crowd in this picturesque town is padded by tourists and summer house-holders from Chicago and Milwaukee helps, but LGCM does a brisk business regardless of the season.

"Sixty-five percent of our customer base is located within a 15- to 20-minute drive from us. That's year-round," says Vice President Nicholas Vorpagel.

Like most meat processors serving a local or regional market, Vorpagel is just the latest generation in charge of a family company. As is also common for family-owned operations, he works hard to bring the latest technologies and techniques to the company while still honoring the legacies that made it successful in the first place.

"I'm very 'in' on predictive analytics," Vorpagel says, "so we track about 70 data points every day — weather, season, time of day, percentage of new customers versus returning customers." Vorpagel then feeds those insights into an AI program to uncover overlooked opportunities. "I'm a big believer in controlling what you can control, and what we can control is our quality."

## John and Rita

Most stories are not best told in chronological order, but to understand where Vorpagel — and therefore LGCM — is coming from, one has to start in 1965.

His maternal grandparents, John and Rita Leahy, opened the doors that year (the name lives on as LGCM's Leahy-branded

## Tyson, Cargill settlements clear first hurdle in beef antitrust case

A federal judge granted preliminary approval for settlements between Consumer Indirect Purchaser Plaintiffs and Tyson Foods and Cargill, clearing the way for consumers across 26 states and the District of Columbia to pursue compensation over alleged beef price-fixing.

The decision followed a motion from the Consumer IPPs seeking approval of settlement agreements with Tyson and Cargill. Neither company opposed the request. The court said the deals, reached after arm's-length negotiations with an experienced mediator, fell "within the range of possible approval."

Under the agreements, Tyson will pay \$55 million and Cargill will pay \$32.5 million to resolve consumer claims that the companies conspired to raise beef



**SMALL-TOWN VALUES:** Above, the exterior of Lake Geneva Country Meats in Lake Geneva, Wisc., where the meat processor has been serving customers since 1965. At right, LGCM prefers hiring people with no prior meat experience so they can learn the "Lake Geneva Country Meats way." (Photo by Lyndon French)



sausages and meats). John had the butcher know-how, but it was Rita who connected with the community. She was the kind of woman who put up all the employees at the family's home across the street during blizzards to keep them off the dark country roads. She wrapped meat and managed the books and worked full-time as a teacher. And when John's health began slipping, Rita took over the day-to-day. Her grandson still refers to her as "Saint Rita."

Even now, much of the décor is what John and Rita hung on the walls, from the old cowbells and pieces of folk art to the 1960s newspaper photos (the wooden Wisconsin Badger in the retail store with a paper lei around his neck is a more recent addition).

As Rita aged and couldn't keep up the pace, her daughter Kathy — Vorpagel's mom — stepped in and saw an opportunity to expand the company's retail presence. The store now accounts for about 75% of LGCM's total revenues, selling the company's meats but also a wide variety of complementary items, including craft beer, wine,

cheese, crackers, sauces and condiments. In 2001, Kathy convinced her corporate chemist husband to come on board to oversee operations; Scott is now president and CEO.

"They took what her father and mother started and really put new life in it," their son says.

Not that working so closely with immediate family members is a walk in the park. The younger Vorpagel, though, chalks it up to a passion for the business.

"We're going to have fights and we're going to be mad at each other about stuff, but we're still family," he notes. "You can't go from working seven days a week, long hours, because you care so deeply about something and then get home and just turn it off. We have to deal with it. We all live within walking

distance of one another."

For their part, in 2022, Vorpagel and Kathy took their business and personal story and turned it into a contribution to Midwest American culture: They sat down with the StoryCorps studio — a project that sets up across the country to record the stories of everyday Americans

— to talk about what it was like for Kathy to grow up in the meat business. A sample recollection: Back when the Grand Geneva Resort and Spa in Lake Geneva was the first Playboy Club-Hotel, her father gave Hugh Hefner a business card at an event and pitched him on selling LGCM meat at the property. The upshot is, the resort is still a customer for LGCM meat products.

Recorded or not, Vorpagel tells his family's story with pride, but being next in the line carries its own weight. "It's real-

ly, really hard. It's not a job. It's not even something you own," he says. "It's something with your grandparents' names on the door. To fail to do things the right way is just disrespectful to them, to your family."

## Not-so-country cousins

So Lake Geneva Country Meats is an old-fashioned kind of family business, but its beating heart increasingly is one built with 21st century high-tech infrastructure.

Take AI: While many industries have struggled with AI "workslop" and unmet expectations, Vorpagel has been successful with it — he takes those 70 data points that he collects and feeds them into an AI tool for analysis, and looks for pockets of opportunity.

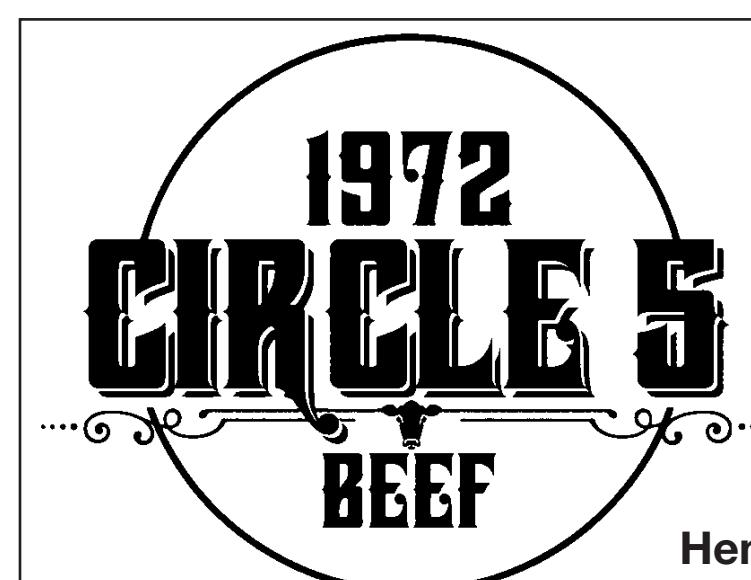
It takes time, he admits. He's been at it for more than a year and reworks his prompts constantly to make sure he's getting useful analysis back on the information the AI database has been provided.

But it pays off: One AI program — a location and competitive analysis platform called Placer — has enabled LGCM to cut its advertising costs by about half.

Also, "there's a strong correlation between Lake Geneva having a busy Sunday and us having a big Monday," Vorpagel says. "And having a good Monday generally means we have a good week. So we try to support Sunday events in Lake Geneva. And that's something that took a 20-minute discussion with ChatGPT."

Vorpagel definitely considers AI a competitive edge for his

See **COUNTRY MEATS**,  
page 10



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# Livestock News & Notes.....

## Feds should evoke Packers-Stockyards Act to force sale of Tyson Lexington plant: Senate candidate

As the political and economic repercussions continue from the closure of Tyson Foods' Lexington, Neb., beef facility, a candidate for the U.S. Senate is seizing the moment.

Dan Osborn, an independent U.S. Senate candidate campaigning to unseat Republican Senator Pete Ricketts in 2026, told News Talk WJAG that the 1921 Packers & Stockyards Act should be evoked to force a sales of the Lexington facility, versus its planned closure in January.

"We have laws on the books ... to hold them accountable to keep that plant open and for sale," Osborn told local media. "And so they cannot just manipulate the market like that. ... We should hold them accountable to do the right thing and put this plant up for sale."

Osborn's campaign hosted a press conference devoted to the Lexington closure, and put out an appeal for local community members to speak. Previously, Osborn stated Tyson "must ensure employees are offered severance for a layoff occurring just days before Thanksgiving."

### Local groups redouble efforts

As the Lexington plant's Jan. 20 closing approaches, local groups and political organizations have reiterated their support for the facility's 3,200 workers.

The Dawson County Board of Commissioners issued a statement on "Tyson's sudden and shocking decision," and assured the community "you are not facing this moment alone. ... We reaffirm our commitment to advancing the county's best interests with full transparency and accountability during this period of uncertainty."

Similarly, more than 740 of the plant's workers attended two Rapid Response layoff services events last week that Nebraska state government organized. An additional session will take place Dec. 13, and job fairs are scheduled for Dec. 11 and Dec. 13.

"Our state agencies will support these workers as long as there is a need," said Gov. Jim Pillen. "Our goal is to keep these hardworking individuals in Nebraska and in positions that help provide a good quality of life in our state."

## New task forces to probe meat industry's 'anti-competitive behavior': Trump

President Donald Trump recently ordered the creation of "Food Supply Chain Security Task Forces" to investigate "anti-competitive behavior" among meat processors and other food industry players.

Announced via executive

order, separate task forces will be created through the Department of Justice and the Federal Trade Commission, and will "take all necessary and appropriate actions" in their investigations of not just the food supply chain, but moreover, "whether control of food-related industries by foreign entities is increasing the cost of food products in the United States or creating a national or economic security threat to Americans."

"Anti-competitive behavior, especially when carried out by foreign-controlled corporations, threatens the stability and affordability of America's food supply," Trump's order stated. "In recent years certain companies in the American food supply chain have even settled civil suits accusing them of price fixing for tens of millions of dollars. ... My Administration will act to determine whether anti-competitive behavior, especially by foreign-controlled companies, increases the cost of living for Americans and address any associated national security threat to food supply chains."

Should Attorney General Pam Bondi uncover "criminal collusion," Trump continued, criminal proceedings will commence "as appropriate," including grand juries. The task forces are to provide updates to numerous

congressional leaders first within the next 180 days, and then within the investigation's first year.

Trump's issued the order a month after his opening salvo against the nation's meatpackers, when he directed the DOJ to "immediately" begin an investigation into "illicit collusion, price fixing, and price manipulation."

Both Bondi and Agriculture Secretary Brooke Rollins quickly stated their support for the investigation, though news later broke that the DOJ had recently concluded a 2020 investigation of beef packer concentration without filing any charges.

According to the Wall Street Journal, Rollins has met with Trump in recent weeks to discuss U.S. beef prices, as have trade advisor Peter Navarro and United States Homeland Security Advisor Stephen Miller.

## Legislators again call for single federal food safety agency

Lawmakers Rosa DeLauro (D-Conn.) and Dick Durbin (D-Ill.) again are calling for a single federal food agency, recently reintroducing the Federal Food Administration Act.

The bill would consolidate food oversight into a single

agency with focused resources, staff and mission, they said.

DeLauro noted such oversight is "scattered" among multiple agencies, with most of the responsibility falling to the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) — "where food safety has often been treated like a second-class citizen."

Durbin echoed the criticism, saying FDA "has failed to protect Americans from preventable foodborne illnesses and death." He cited as examples babies with bacterial infections from infant formula and lead-tainted applesauce pouches.

FDA regulates some 80% of the U.S. food supply, the lawmakers noted. But increased authorities included in the Food Safety Modernization Act (FSMA) and the creation of the Human Foods Program at FDA have not resulted in reducing rates of foodborne illness and death in the US, they contend.

About one in six Americans — or 48 million people — con-

tract a foodborne illness every year. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) estimates 128,000 Americans are hospitalized, and 3,000 die of foodborne diseases per year.

Joining Durbin and DeLauro as original cosponsors of this legislation is Sen. Richard Blumenthal (D-Conn) and Rep. Sara Jacobs (D-Calif.).

Consumer Reports, Consumer Federation of America, Environmental Working Group, and STOP Foodborne Illness have endorsed the bill.

Many of the preceding items were taken from Meatingplace.com

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## Sale Schedule

### Regular Cattle Sale with Hay Auction

Tuesday, Dec. 30 @ 12:30 a.m.  
Hay Sale @ 11:30

### Special Cattle Sale

Tuesday, Jan. 6 @ 12:30 a.m.

### Dairy Sale

Tuesday, Jan. 13 @ 10:30 a.m.

### Special Cattle Sale

Tuesday, Jan. 20 @ 12:30 a.m.

### Regular Cattle Sale with Hay Auction

Tuesday, Jan. 27 @ 12:30 a.m.  
Hay Sale @ 11:30

## COUNTRY MEATS from page 8

company — against all comers.

"I don't think we're competing with other butcher shops," he says. "I think we're competing with anybody that sells food, so I think we're competing with Walmart. And Walmart is [using AI]. If they're doing something purposefully, it's clearly because they spent millions of dollars on R&D and there's something there."

If he's not toying with his spreadsheets, Vorpagel is creating, posting and tracking LGCM's multiple social media channels, as he has done since 2010. He started on Facebook.

"We really had an early mover advantage there. We really got on the idea of content marketing before anybody else, and were able to acquire a significant Facebook audience and a significant email audience, very cheap," he says.

LGCM is still active on Facebook, but Vorpagel has built out the company's YouTube presence with a channel chock-full of videos ranging from cutting demonstrations to recipes, cooking tips, food safety and wine tastings — 273 in all. The YouTube channel has almost 9,500 subscribers — more than the entire population of Lake Geneva (8,700) — and has racked up nearly 4 million views.

In a town the size of Lake Geneva, it's not hard to make a name for one's self, but Vorpagel's profile is everywhere. The company is on Instagram, Facebook, X and YouTube. He posts on Instagram and Facebook 15-20 times a week, the rest about three times a week.

He swears it doesn't take all his time.

"I have a very good videographer partner and we've gotten smart about how we shoot content," he explains. "We shoot big bins of content and I can use tools to make a variety of different content types out of those."

AI helps here, too: "There are helpers and ideation programs that make that easier. But I'm not the one wielding the knife; what I do is get people in the door, so I have to do it."

Where many businesses send their message out on social media and cross their fingers, LGCM measures response to each post.

"We track how many people see our stuff a week, how many people engage with our stuff, how many open an email, how many click an email, our frequency of touches each week — and that we can correlate to overall sales success and people through the door," Vorpagel says.

"What I think about is, 'What's our next competitive advantage?'" he asks. "What's our next 'first mover' thing that

we get into? It's more of an art than a science, but yeah, we've worked pretty hard on figuring out how we can — oh God, I hate saying this — how we can 'leverage our assets' and available tools."

### Millennial speaking

Along with his aversion to business jargon, Vorpagel carries other hallmarks of his millennial generation, like the way he eschews credit. He's a showman, no doubt, but as closely as he has connected his face to the business among his target market, he is clear in his regard for the employees who actually make what he's selling.

"The story of Lake Geneva Country Meats isn't just that my grandparents started it or my mom and my dad came in and moved the business forward or that I'm smart about AI," he explains. "We have had an incredible group of employees here, people that give the business so much and make this place incredible. There are other places to work that are less chal-

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**MOVING MEAT:** LGCM custom slaughters about 20 steers, 20 to 40 pigs and "sheep as available," says Vice President Nicholas Vorpagel. (Photo by Lyndon French)

lenging."

He allows that LGCM's employee turnover is "pretty high" for people new to the job and "pretty low if you make it one year."

The one-year mark is when "the muscle memory, the knife skills, all that stuff really kicks

**See COUNTRY MEATS, page 18**

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1,749 Steers: Med & Large Frame  
Computer Avg. - Top 29 - 300 & Down 460 - 615  
76 - 300-400 445 - 535  
224 - 400-500 450 - 527  
273 - 500-600 400 - 468  
352 - 600-700 370 - 418  
390 - 700-800 360 - 385  
396 - 800-900 350 - 368  
727 Heifers: Med & Large Frame  
Computer Avg. - Top 29 - 300 & Down 460 - 542  
76 - 300-400 420 - 505  
164 - 400-500 400 - 472  
156 - 500-600 360 - 405  
227 - 600-700 345 - 382  
38 - 700-800 320 - 363  
20 - 800-900 300 - 319

59 - Bred Cows (Better) - 2500 - 2950 • 7 - Pairs - 3100-3550  
192 Slaughter Cows: Hi-dressing 155-165 Bulk 145-155  
Low 120-140 Thin 100-120

31 Slaughter Bulls Avg - 190 Thin

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Choice 2 & 3 - 220 - 224; Mixed Select - 218; Select - 210

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## LAND GRAB from page 3

bad actor. Bob Greiff actually wants to follow the rules. That's why he contacted me."

"People need to understand how important this farm is, and Bob's legacy. It's subsistence farming and water-efficient to keep pumping costs down. Classic rotation practices; hand labor moving wheel lines; and the orchestrated timing and movement of limited water. He's a treasure and so is that farm."

Reierson's remedy was straightforward: Follow the rulebook and get Greiff legally clear to irrigate the south acreage. Once approved, Greiff could take his 136-acre feet and "spread" it to the south acreage. Same amount of water—but poured thinner across more acres.

According to Washington State law, a grower is required to adhere to a single irrigation program for two years before "spreading" is allowed. Greiff willingly jumped through the onerous regulatory hoop.

"I asked Bob to follow the statutory requirements exactly to qualify for increasing acres, all while still using the same amount of water," Reierson details. "There's a calculation called the ACQ, the annual consumptive quantity, based on proving your annual beneficial use. It averages the highest two years in the past five. All we needed was two years of water use on the 37 acres in the north, file the applications, provide all the supporting documentation and technical work, and get the approvals. This is what I do for a living."

"Bob did what I asked in 2020 and 2021, irrigating an alfalfa stand in the north. Alfalfa hay has deep roots. It takes lots of water and then gives multiple cuttings. He even had bad luck with a pump going down that hurt his average. He was willing to give up some water rights to get approved quickly."

In 2022, with regulatory boxes ticked, Reierson presented all the paperwork to the Spokane County Water Conservancy Board and gained approval in August that year. Conservancy shipped their decisions to Ecology for a maximum 75-day review period. Under Washington State law, if Ecology does nothing, Conservancy



**NOT ABOUT THE WATER:** "One thing for certain, this was sure as hell never about water or the environment for them (Ecology)," Bob Greiff says. (Photo by Ray Aguirre)

approvals automatically become final.

After two years of yield losses on his south-of-the-road acreage to satisfy the state's regulations, Greiff was on the cusp of gaining permission to spread water.

And then everything went to hell.

"Ecology intervened on day 58 and that's when it got surreal," Reierson says. "At first, they said the water rights couldn't be overlapped, which is nonsense, but they also said Greiff wouldn't be able to farm that many acres with the amount of rights he had. The power records on his irrigation pumps proved he did. To tell Greiff how he can and can't farm is insulting—and embarrassing for Ecology."

### Bring Me a Rock

Conservancy had accepted Reierson's irrigation plan on Aug. 22, 2022, opening a path for Greiff to irrigate on both sides of the road and spread the water onto all irrigated acres.

However, on Nov. 9, Conservancy called for a meeting with Ecology, recalls Kevin Freeman, then chair of Conservancy. "There's not funding for us to hire our own private consultants to review those applications. We're a volunteer board, so we rely on Ecology's technical expertise related to the applications. Regarding Mr. Greiff, we had questions about the technical aspects of how water spreading was to occur between groundwater and surface rights. Turns out,

Ecology didn't agree with Mr. Greiff's consultant's (Reierson) interpretation of how the water was to be spread and if that was appropriate."

"We never approved the application," says Freeman, a geologist and a hydrogeologist working mainly in lower Yakima Valley with long legs in private consulting—35 years of experience. "This was a technical disagreement at the state level between Ecology and Mr. Greiff and his consultant. It was apparent that that difference was strong enough that Ecology would reject the application. We felt it was better for Mr. Greiff to work directly with Ecology."

Six days later, on Nov. 15, public records show Conservancy voted to withdraw its decisions, stating for each: "The board intends to revise and resubmit for Ecology review the record of decision and report of examination for the subject application."

Reierson explained his consent, "I initially agreed to that step, for the board to withdraw its formal approvals from August 2022, based on the promise a compromise could be found with Ecology. Plus, we had no leverage, meaning no money or time to fight Ecology in court if they denied the board's approvals. But when Ecology intervened, what followed was an exhausting game of 'bring me a rock.'"

"That's where clients without wealth would go broke," Reierson adds, "but I'd stopped charging Bob by this time so it didn't work."

In early February 2023, Reierson completed a third technical report. He thought

he had finally broken through. He had not. What happened next was fatal to Greiff's compliance efforts.

"The 2023 irrigation season was approaching. On February 13, the Conservancy Board held a meeting without telling me," Reierson notes. "They asked for technical support about ACQ from Ecology. Herman Spangle, the liaison to the board, and his supervisor Jaime Short attended. At the end of that meeting the board voted to drop the applications completely. I only know details because I did a public records request for their emails."

"After that, the applications went to Ecology as last resort for approval. They could have approved them in April. Instead, Ecology sat on the applications and waited Bob out, then fined him in June. Then, as if it couldn't get worse, Ecology rejected his applications based on his noncompliance, and kept adding fines. What the hell?"

"I even sent them an email four months before that final rejection, begging them to issue the permits, not fines. It was short. I remember it saying 'Please...Be human. Be humane.' And here we are."

### Comply or Die

Technical excuses are a dime a dozen, Greiff says. "It's always the same story with the agencies and departments," Greiff says. "They got a million reasons why I've done something wrong, but they don't want to talk about the plain truth that I'm just trying to spread my water rights

**See LAND GRAB, page 19**

## FARM AID from page 1

crops including corn, soybeans, wheat, rice and cotton. The remaining funds will be directed to growers of fruits, vegetables and other specialty crops following lobbying by agriculture groups and lawmakers seeking broader eligibility.

Administration officials also pointed

to recent trade agreements with China and other major buyers as easing pressure on the farm economy, though agriculture groups have raised concerns that China has been slow to follow through on pledged soybean purchases.

— Meatingplace.com

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## Understand economics: Quit exporting our future

By TRENT LOOS  
Special to the Advocate  
Courtesy of High Plains Journal

Why are the people who think beef is too high-priced not saying squat about a 57% increase in home heating fuels since January of 2025? National gas has long been a very affordable energy source and, according to the U.S. Energy Information Agency (USEPI), nearly 1 in 2 homes rely on it for heating. What has happened? First off, we need to understand that in the oil regions of this country we have been flaring methane instead of putting it to use. As a reminder, natural gas is 92% methane. USEPI just reported that flaring/venting of methane has hit a new low with a significant reduction in the past two years. If there is increased availability of natural gas, why is the cost going up? I smell a problem here.

Clearly, the answer is demand. With the ridiculous demonization of coal, natural gas has become the reliable supply of base load electricity in the U.S. However, that story is problematic as well because in 2024, 42% of the electricity was sourced by natural gas but in 2025 it slipped to 40%. So why have natural gas prices increased by 57%? The answer is that industrial uses are skyrocketing in AI data centers and ethanol production facilities.

The following is from DTN on Dec 3, 2025:

*Ethanol production in the United States averaged 1.126 million barrels per day (bpd) for the week ended Nov. 28, the Energy Information Administration reported Wednesday. This was up 13,000 bpd week-on-week and 53,000 bpd, or 4.7%, higher than in the same week last year. Four-week average output at 1.102 million bpd was 2,000 bpd below the same four weeks last year.*

The increased production of any farm crop is good thing, right? I would say, it depends. Let's just talk about ethanol eco-



**In case you didn't know, the plan is to send the CO2 to Wyoming and bury it 8,000 feet deep into the earth. It is also worth mentioning here that just last week, a North Dakota district court ruled that burying CO2 is unconstitutional.**

nomics for a moment. Just south of my house is an ethanol plant that just put in a CO2 pipeline to capture CO2, then compress it into a 12" pipe and send it south to the Trailblazer pipeline. The Trailblazer was originally built to carry natural gas from oil country in Wyoming to the east for needed energy requirements. For the record, reports are that eleven Nebraska ethanol plants have agreed to the same plan for a mere \$1/gallon tax credit that the farmer will never see.

In case you didn't know, the plan is to send the CO2 to Wyoming and bury it 8,000 feet deep into the earth. It is also worth mentioning here that just last week, a North Dakota district court ruled that burying CO2 is unconstitutional. Personally, I can't wait until the day that all the Ponzi scheme of CO2 pipelines and burying plant food are shut down, but I digress.

Let's do some Cowboy Arithmetic: the conversion of the Trailblazer pipeline from natural gas to CO2 would reduce the capacity of transporting natural gas by about 33%. In addition, it appears someone has forgotten that it takes 31 cubic feet of natural gas to produce every gallon of ethanol. Nebraska alone is the second largest ethanol producer at 2.3 billion gallons annually, making the natural gas requirement for production close to 72 billion cubic feet per year. Oh wait, there is more. I had a pioneer in the ethanol world tell me that each plant will need 50% of the energy they produce just to cool and compress the CO2 into a pipeline. Once the CO2 arrives in Wyoming, if it ever does, it will require another 150% of the energy equivalent to inject it

8,000 feet below the surface.

Let's weigh that against a recent statement by Nebraska Gov Jim Pillen who said, "Now with carbon capture, the ethanol plants will double in size. We have extraordinary growth on the horizon, and then, that doesn't even talk about the bioeconomy, which includes things that we'll be continuing to make from carbon above the ground instead of below the ground."

If anyone wants to understand why the state of Nebraska is struggling with a \$471 million deficit, it may be because of a complete lack of understanding of basic economics. The tax incentives this state gives for ethanol consumption without any sales tax from the production of ethanol on the revenue side are shocking. We export 96% of the ethanol produced in Nebraska to other states or countries and it appears we are exporting our future as well, without any chance for a return!

*Editor's note: Trent Loos is a sixth generation United States farmer, host of the daily radio show, Loos Tales, and founder of Faces of Agriculture, a non-profit organization putting the human element back into the production of food.*

*Get more information at [www.LoosTales.com](http://www.LoosTales.com), or email Trent at [trentloos@gmail.com](mailto:trentloos@gmail.com).*

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## Cultivated meat company, Believer Meats, ceases operation in face of alleged millions in unpaid bills

Israeli start-up cultivated meat company Believer Meats ceased operations, only a month after winning USDA approval and becoming the first non-US company cleared to sell cell-cultured meat here from a new plant in Wilson County, N.C.

Anne Schubert, the company's global vice president of talent and human resources, is reported to have posted on LinkedIn "After two years of building something truly bold and special, Believer Meats made the difficult decision last week to cease operations."

Schubert's post has since been edited to say, "After two years of building something bold and ambitious, my journey with Believer Meats has come to an end."

The abrupt closure comes as Gray Construction is suing Believer Meats over an alleged \$34 million in unpaid bills amassed while building the North Carolina plant.

Gray said Believer missed a Dec. 5 deadline to pay \$22 million, part of a forbearance and release agreement that also stipulated Believer pay the remaining \$12 million in two installments next year.

Court records indicated the case was selected for mediation Dec. 8.

Believer Meats, formerly Future Meat Technologies, is one of a small number of cultivated meat companies with both FDA "no questions" clearance and USDA inspection and label approval. The company had been viewed as a bellwether for the sector because its North Carolina facility was designed to produce up to 12,000 metric tons annually.

– Meatingplace.com

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## BARN OF PIKE COUNTY

# New look and new life for a 113-year-old Pike County barn

By CAROLYN ALLEN  
Special to The Advocate

Every January people's thoughts seem to turn to New Years resolutions of slimming down for the new year. This hundred thirteen-year-old barn near the village of Stark, however, did just the opposite! The first picture of the barn was taken in the 1990s when John McLoed owned the farm.

The second picture is from 2023 after the barn's additions, updates and "face lift." The barn has certainly changed, but it is still every bit as useful – just in a new way.

John McLoed, his father (James S. McLoed) and mother (Nora Estes McLoed) moved onto what was known as the old Andy Turner place in 1907. Andy Turner sold the land to John A. Mackey in 1885, and Judge Mackey deeded it to James S. McLoed and son John in his 1907 will. According to the Pike County Assessors Office the house was already there. County records show it as being built in 1878.

The barn, on the other hand, was built by James McLoed when son John was a teenager. A note in the Louisiana Press Journal pinpoints the year as being 1912. A November issue of that year's newspaper reported that Perry Estes, who was helping James McLoed build a new barn, had a bad accident just past Buffalo Bridge. He was returning to the McLoed farm from Louisiana with a load of lumber when he apparently met an automobile. The mules shied – overturning the wagon and lumber onto Mr. Estes. Fortunately, by the time of the article, he was recovering, and the newspaper article provided a date for the barn.

John McLoed attended the University of Missouri in 1916–1920 where he majored in agriculture. Although he loved life on the farm, he also thoroughly



**FACE-LIFT:** Above left, the original McLoed barn, built in 1912, had fallen into disrepair in the 1990s. Above right, this 2023 photo shows



the barn after the current owners made additions and updates to the structure. (Photos by Carolyn Allen)

enjoyed his years in Columbia – joining an agricultural fraternity and becoming a lifelong Missouri Tigers fan. (Throughout his life he listened to all the games on the radio.) After graduation he returned to the farm to put his degree to work alongside his wife Malinda and his parents.

An article about the farm in the 1951 Bowling Green Times reported that the McLoeds had 140 acres in cultivation, 20 acres in woods and the other 20 in pasture. At that time they had 15 Hampshire hogs and 26 head of Jersey and Shorthorn cattle. They sold high test Jersey whole milk to a Louisiana dairy and raised the Shorthorns for beef. With all that going on, the barn was a busy place!

The article stressed that the farm was owned jointly, and that the McLoeds all worked together to keep it going. While James and John took care of the farming, Mrs. McLoed Jr. was in charge of poultry – keeping them supplied with an ample number of chickens and eggs. She even took 2nd place one year with her chickens at the Stark Community Fair. Mrs. McLoed Sr. looked after the garden and put up vegetables for the winter. She was also known to be a great cook and supposedly made some of the best pies and cookies

Incidentally, neighbors and friends remember that the McLoeds named their milk cows. They even had one called Miss America! They also gave

their livestock extra feed on their birthdays and holidays which caused a few problems when at least one of the cows (Snowball) wouldn't fit into the vet's chute for the annual Bangs test!

In later years John served several terms as president of the Pike County chapter of the Farm Bureau and was sometimes out of town on Farm Bureau business. On those days a neighbor would come over and help Mrs. McLoed with the feeding. The neighbor recalls one incident when a very large sow refused to move, so he tapped it gently just to get it moving in the right direction. Mrs. McLoed let him know right away that there would be no "tapping" on their farm!

As John McLoed aged, his eyesight became very poor – to the point of blindness. In order to continue his farm chores, he had a line strung from the house to the barn and followed the path several times a day – proving that where there's a will, there's a way! He passed away in 1995, and after almost 90 years of being known as the "McLoed place" the farm was sold.

The current owners expanded, updated, resided and painted the old barn. It was originally built with a main aisle and stalls on either side. After shoveling out all the manure, the new owners removed the stalls, opened it up and added a large tool shed to accommodate his construction business. They carefully removed some of the exterior

siding and moved it to the interior walls – marveling at the quality and density of the old lumber and the fact that there were so few knots in it!

While the barn has definitely not slimmed down over the years, its repurposing and expansion have allowed it to remain relevant.

Although it no longer houses livestock (with the exception of the family's Weimaraner Otis!) current owners use the renovated barn often. The large open interior of the barn serves as a great setting for family gatherings, a "kids hang-out" and a "man-cave" on football weekends. They use the addition for tools and a workshop.

With all the updates, the barn is now ready for the next 100+ years!

## New dietary guideline report pushed back due to shutdown

The release of the latest update of the Dietary Guidelines for Americans (DGA) report will not occur this month as announced in November, according to several media reports.

The new edition of the guidelines that legally must be updated every five years will now appear in early 2026 rather than by the end of 2025. The guidelines document provides recommendations for healthy meals that include fruits, lean meat, low-fat dairy products, vegetables and whole grains, among other foods. They also involve meals served in schools and military cafeterias in addition to

childcare facilities, and meals for low-income U.S. residents and older adults seeking to adhere to healthier diets.

The five-year update apparently was delayed by the 43-day U.S. government shutdown that ended Nov. 12. Jointly issued by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) and USDA, the upcoming update is expected to include new recommendations on saturated fat intake and dairy consumption. It also is likely to feature perspectives on the nation's food culture and high rates of obesity, according to the reports.

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# Livestock News & Notes.....

## Fiscal outlook for 2026 features reduced anxiety: CoBank

Steadier U.S. trade policy and an average import tax from 2025 tariffs of 10% versus a projected 17% should result in reduced market anxiety, predicts the cooperative financial institution CoBank.

The tariff rate is expected to drop even more as the reduced tariffs on China and imported food products take effect as more bilateral agreements are finalized, the report from CoBank's Knowledge Exchange noted.

Analysts at the bank that serves industries across rural areas of the United States also note that Artificial Intelligence (AI) has become the focal point of financial market prognostication. Direct investments in AI and related infrastructure, and a surging stock market, have conservatively added 1% to the U.S. Gross Domestic Product (GDP) this year alone, according to the report.

However, some concerns exist that AI has lifted the entire U.S. stock market to unsustainable levels, although Rob Fox, vice president of CoBank's Knowledge Exchange, notes that this concept is "one possibility, but not the most likely scenario." Corporate earnings remain "extremely strong and aggregate corporate debt levels are historically low," sending stocks higher in the second half of 2025 with continually improving expectations," he added.

The CoBank report adds that AI is likely to eventually play out similarly to the oil and gas shale boom between 2010 and 2015, a result of potential over-production of a commoditized product, lower than expected earnings and disappointing industry profit margins.

## Mexico launches anti-dumping investigation of U.S. pork imports

A truck transports pigs through the streets on April 29, 2009 in Mexico City, Mexico. Photo by Joe Raedle/Getty Images

The Mexican government has launched an investigation of

U.S. pork imports into the country.

According to Mexico Business News, the investigation was spurred by a group of Mexican hog producers that together account for 65% of the country's pork production. The Mexican producers allege U.S. exports of pork leg and shoulder were, because of federal and state subsidies, guilty of price discrimination and illegal subsidies in 2024, and that such practices damaged the domestic pork industry.

Specifically, the investigation will cover COVID-19 policies, the Meat and Poultry Processing Expansion Program, USDA policies, and subsidies to farmers of corn and soybeans.

"The Applicants stated that the imports of pork leg and back from the United States increased steadily during the period analyzed and were carried out under unfair international trade practices, under conditions of price discrimination and subsidies, which affected domestic prices, as well as the financial position of the national production branch, damaging its operating utility, cash flow, return on investment, and liquidity and debt ratios," the Ministry of Economy stated in its release.

Additionally, the ministry stated it would assess U.S. pork imports as far back as Jan. 1, 2022, plus retroactive measures for pork consumed "up to 90 days before the date of application."

Analysis from USDA/ERS show the U.S. exported more than 92 million pounds of pork products to Mexico in 2024.

## Environmentalists sue state regulators over Cargill beef plant emissions

An environmental group has sued Colorado state air pollution regulators, arguing they have failed to ensure Cargill's beef plant in Fort Morgan is complying with state and federal clean-air laws.

The lawsuit, filed in Morgan County District Court by the Center for Biological Diversity, alleges the Fort Morgan plant is "a large source of toxic air pollution" such as hydrogen sulfide,

sulfur dioxide, ammonia and carbon monoxide.

The complaint contends the Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment, Air Pollution Control Division has failed to meet legal deadlines for reviewing and updating the air pollution operating permit for the Fort Morgan facility. Large facilities like Fort Morgan are required to obtain updated permits every five years ensuring they comply with state and federal clean air laws, the plaintiffs note.

They claim Cargill's permit was last updated in 2019, and while the company applied for a new permit in late 2022, the state has yet to act on the application. By law, the division was required to grant or deny the application within 18 months, the lawsuit contends.

The Center for Biological Diversity is asking the court to set a deadline by which the Air Pollution Control Division must act on the permit and ensure Cargill's plant complies with state and federal clean air laws.

Cargill did not immediately respond to requests for comment.

## Texas slaughterhouse gets axed by city council

A city council in a small Texas town unanimously rejected a proposed ordinance that would have allowed a slaughterhouse to operate within city limits, following strong opposition from residents during a crowded council meeting.

The Silsbee City Council vote halted plans by Goliath Concept LP owners Rex and Kimberly Rehmeyer, who had proposed

converting the former Silsbee Doctor's Hospital into a slaughterhouse. City approval was required because existing ordinances did not permit such an operation within city limits.

Residents filled the council chambers to speak against the proposal, raising concerns about the suitability of a slaughterhouse in the community.

The vote came during a second reading of the ordinance. On Dec. 1, the council had narrowly approved the measure 4-3, which would have allowed small slaughterhouses in areas not zoned for single-family or duplex residential use. Monday's vote would have finalized the ordinance.

The Rehmeyers attended the meeting to answer questions and emphasized their desire to be part of the community.

"For us we are looking for the town to invest and be a part of this and more people and ranchers to invest and be a part of this," Kimberly Rehmeyer said according to local reports. "We are not coming in here to

be anything but a part of your town."

Despite the explanation, council members voted unanimously to reject the ordinance, effectively stopping the project.

The facility would have been USDA-inspected and would have created about 50 new jobs.

Some of the preceding items were taken from Meatingplace.com

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# Let's compare protein prices for chicken, pork and beef

Op-ed by BILL BULLARD  
CEO, R-CALF USA

A long-time Idaho rancher suggested this week's segment. And we'll start with this quote from an unknown author: "Truth is, great things take time. So, either you wait or you settle for less."

With that, let's look at retail prices for the three major proteins and contrast those prices with the amount of time it takes to produce each.

We'll start with the cheapest – broiler chicken. According to Bureau of Labor Statistics data, the highest priced cut of chicken in August 2025 was "Chicken, boneless breast," priced at \$4.21 per pound.

The next cheapest is pork, and the highest priced cut of pork in August 2025 was sliced bacon, priced at \$7.21 per pound.

The most expensive reported protein was beef, and the highest priced beef cut was USDA Choice boneless sirloin steak at \$14.32 per pound.

These data show that the highest priced cut of beef was roughly three times the highest priced chicken cut and roughly two times higher than the highest priced pork cut.

Why might that be?

Let's look at the time it takes to produce each of these highest priced cuts from the three different species. Again, we'll start with the cheapest – broiler chicken.

It takes about 21 days for a fertilized egg to hatch. The eggs are typically hatched in a hatchery and then moved to a confinement chicken facility where the chicks will grow into broiler chickens in about seven weeks. The entire production cycle, from a fertilized egg to a slaughter-ready broiler chicken, lasts about ten weeks. Importantly, a hen can lay about 300 eggs per year, so each hen can produce about 300 broiler chickens per year.

Most broiler chickens are owned and raised by corporate processing companies known as integrators that own the hatchery and the chickens, while paying farmers to raise the chickens through production contracts.

Now let's look at the next expensive – pork. A bred female pig, called a sow, has a gestation period of about 115 days – three months, three weeks, and three days. The piglets are typically weaned from their mother within about two weeks and then raised in a large confinement facility for six to seven months before they are ready for slaughter.

The entire production cycle, from a bred sow to a slaughter-ready pig, lasts about nine to ten months. Importantly, sows have litters, meaning they will have about 10 pigs each time they give birth, and they can give birth about twice per year, so each sow can produce about 20 new pigs per year.

And this brings us to beef. A bred cow has a gestation period of about nine months. After a calf is born, it will

typically suckle the cow while on pasture for about 6 months and then weaned from the cow to continue grazing on pasture for about another six months. When the calf is about a year old or so, it will typically be moved from pasture into a confined feeding facility known as a feedlot, where it will be fed a finishing ration of grain for about four months.

So, the entire production cycle, from the bred cow to a slaughter-ready beef animal typically lasts more than two years. Importantly, each cow will have only one calf per year, so unlike chickens and pigs that produce hundreds or tens of offspring each year, respectively, the mother cow only produces one calf each year.

And so it is that the price progression of the three major proteins is associated with the production cycle and prolificacy of each species.

A single hen can produce hundreds of broiler chickens each year and it takes only about 10 weeks from fertilization to slaughter, all typically done in a confinement setting, to produce the lowest priced protein.

A single sow can produce tens of new pigs each year and it takes only about ten months from the time it's bred until its piglets are grown and ready for slaughter, all typically done in a confinement setting, to produce the second lowest priced protein.

And now we're back to beef. A single cow will produce only one calf each year, and each calf will spend most of its life outdoors drinking milk and eating grass. It isn't moved into a confinement setting until the last few months before slaughter. And so, with a reputation of having the longest biological cycle of any farmed animal, it is beef that has historically commanded the highest price of the three major proteins and still does today.

So, when you're ready to eat the greatest of the three proteins, be sure to look for beef from an animal that was born, raised, and slaughtered right here in the USA.

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# Do we need to break up Big Beef?

By PETER NAVARRO  
White House Senior Counselor  
for Trade and Manufacturing

Joe Biden and the Democrats drove beef inflation to about six percent a year—more than twice the rate during the Trump years. There were many reasons why.

Biden's Green New Deal policies drove up the cost of fuel, feed, and fertilizer. His "eat soy" range war against ranchers restricted access to grazing lands. His drunken-sailor spending fueled historic food-price inflation.

But all of these drivers were amplified—and exploited—by extreme market concentration in the beef industry.

The Big Beef Four—Cargill, JBS (Brazil), Tyson Foods, and National Beef—control 80 to 85 percent of U.S. fed-cattle slaughter capacity and boxed-beef sales. That's more than twice the level where economists start worrying about monopolistic price gouging.

That is no small worry here, because middleman Big Beef commands the ultimate supply chain position. Upstream, Big Beef behaves as an oligopoly—a buyers' cartel in which a handful of packers can push cattle prices down, weaken price discovery, and shortchange ranchers who have no real alternative buyers. Downstream, Big Beef operates as an oligopoly, shaping what supermarkets, restaurant chains, and ultimately consumers pay.

A growing stack of antitrust

cases confirms the problem. Tyson and Cargill are paying \$87.5 million to settle consumer claims that they conspired to inflate beef prices by restricting supply. JBS is paying \$83.5 million to resolve allegations that it helped suppress cattle prices. McDonald's alleges the same pattern.

Just how does Big Beef gouge us? First, because the Big Four own nearly all of America's large slaughter and processing facilities, they can time "maintenance," slow production lines, or idle operations to choke supply—even when cattle numbers are strong. That lets Big Beef shrink demand for fed cattle, push down rancher prices, and fatten profit margins at both ends.

Second, with only a few serious buyers in most regions, packers have abandoned open cash auctions for private "formula" contracts tied to thin spot markets. That system hides true price signals and lets Big Beef pay ranchers less even as it keeps retail prices high. In such a concentrated market, word of slaughter volumes and slowdowns travels fast, making coordination easy to pull off and almost impossible to prove.

Third, there is the "cut-out margin." This insider term describes the gap between the low price packers pay ranchers for live cattle and the much higher price they collect for boxed beef. When production slows or plants go dark, that cut-out margin balloons. Ranchers get squeezed on the front end while

consumers get gouged on the back end.

Here's the good news for ranchers and consumers alike: President Trump has put Big Beef on notice that its anti-competitive behavior will no longer be tolerated. He has directed the Department of Justice to launch a full antitrust investigation into the nation's largest meat-packing companies for "illicit collusion, price-fixing, and price manipulation." Working with USDA, DOJ's Antitrust Division can now subpoena documents, compel testimony, and dig into capacity decisions and data-sharing to determine whether slaughter cuts and plant slowdowns crossed the line into criminal conspiracy.

At the same time, the Trump administration is moving to break Big Beef's middle-man chokehold by rebuilding competition from the ground up. Through USDA's Meat and Poultry Processing Expansion Program and related initiatives, Secretary of Agriculture Brooke Rollins is helping finance smaller, decentralized processing plants—facilities closer to ranchers and the local and regional markets they serve.

The antitrust goal is simple: more plants, more bidders, more competition, and lower transportation and processing costs in every pound of beef.

Going forward, the Trump administration will use every tool available—from the antitrust laws to the Packers and Stockyards Act—to stop abuse of market power. If the Big Four prove unwilling or unable to compete fairly, structural remedies—up to and including breaking up Big Beef—are squarely on the table.

Biden and the Democrats left the American people with a beef-inflation mess that will be tough to tame. But Trump is on the job, fighting the inflation that Democrats caused. He is doing everything possible—cracking down on Big Beef, empowering independent processors, and standing with America's ranchers and consumers—to finally bring honest competition back to the beef case.

## BEEF BUDGETS from page 1

alongside operating and total costs, giving producers a clearer picture of short-term cash flow. In addition, pasture costs are reported per acre rather than per animal unit month (AUM), making cost calculations simpler and easier to estimate.

In addition to the printable version, all budgets are also available as downloadable,

editable spreadsheet files, allowing producers to enter their own costs and prices to customize the budgets for their individual operations.

For more information on the 2025 Missouri beef cattle enterprise budgets, contact MU Extension specialists Jake Hefley, Wesley Tucker, Drew Kientzy or Zachary Erwin.

## China breaking Ractopamine promise from Phase 1: NPPC

The National Pork Producers Council (NPPC) is calling out China over the country's failure to follow established trade commitments going back to January 2020.

The producer organization is part of a coalition of U.S. pork stakeholders commenting on the Office of the U.S. Trade Representative's (USTR) probe of China not living up to negotiated standards as part of the Phase One Agreement. Specifically, China is accused of not conducting a risk assessment on ractopamine use as a feed additive in pork and beef production as outlined in the trade deal that was signed Jan. 15, 2020, during President Donald Trump's first term.

USTR has scheduled a hearing on the issue for Dec. 16. The Phase One Agreement called on China to work with U.S. experts on the risk assessment of rac-

topamine, which boosts the amount of pork produced while also lowering feed costs. Not a legally binding trade treaty, the Phase One deal has become a template for the trade frameworks arranged by the current Trump administration with more than a dozen governments this year.

China bans ractopamine despite its approval by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) and a "safe" designation from the food safety arm of the United Nations, according to NPPC.

China was the number two destination for U.S. pork exports through the first eight months of 2025.

While down 16% from last year's pace due to trade policy disruptions, 2025 volume was at 249,469 metric tons, worth \$581 million.

—Meatingplace.com

## Cutting red tape for infrastructure projects

By REP. SAM GRAVES  
Congressman, 6th District of Missouri

Anyone who has ever built a road, undertaken a water project, or constructed a home knows that the permitting process can hamstring the whole thing. While permits do serve a purpose, there's no need for them to be overly burdensome or cause massive delays, particularly at the federal level.

While the Clean Water Act has been in place since 1972, some of the Act's permitting processes have gotten out of control over the years, costing folks time and money. They've also been increasingly abused to stop infrastructure projects for reasons unrelated to water quality. It was past time to restore sanity to the Clean Water Act.

That's why we passed the Promoting Efficient Review for Modern Infrastructure Today (PERMIT) Act this week in the House, which I was proud to introduce. The PERMIT Act cuts red tape and reduces costly project delays and litigation. The bill makes permitting under the Clean Water Act (CWA) more efficient, consistent, and transparent. These reforms will continue protecting the nation's water quality while helping states, local communities, and others more confidently comply with the CWA.

Included in the bill are many commonsense reforms, such as codifying longstanding exemptions to the Waters of the United States (WOTUS) rule for water treatment systems, ephemeral features—like streams that only appear after heavy rainfall, groundwater, and prior converted cropland. It's time farmers, families, and homebuilders no longer got caught in the ever-changing rule.

It requires the Corps to eliminate the existing backlog of permit requests for Section 404 dredge and fill permits. Folks rely on permits getting done in a timely manner, and the Corps needs to clear the current backlog of more than 3,500 pending determinations. The PERMIT Act also keeps activists from weaponizing the Clean Water Act to stop projects and prevents the EPA from vetoing a 404 permit if the Corps has approved it. These are critical reforms for protecting people and property along our rivers.

There are many more important reforms included in the bill, but the bottom line is that the PERMIT Act will help lower construction costs and utility bills, provide greater regulatory certainty, and get projects done faster. As the Chair of the Transportation and Infrastructure Committee, I also look forward to working on permitting reform in the Highway Bill, which I am currently writing. If we ever want it to be affordable to live in this country again, we have to let builders build again. I'll continue working to get the federal government off folks' backs so we can do just that.

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# The boot has dropped on the Packer situation

By STEVE DITTMER  
Executive Vice President  
Agribusiness Freedom Foundation

Well, the boot has dropped. With the numbers of cattle available, cattlemen have feared and speculated what packer might make the first move. Last time, it was Cargill at Plainview, Tx. This time, it's Tyson at Lexington, Ne.

On top of the smaller cattle supply, there are new plant openings to draw on the supply in that region. American Stores opened America's Heartland plant this spring in Missouri, as did Sustainable Beef at North Platte, Ne. Those two plants added an additional 3,000-plus head daily capacity.

Given the narrow margin slaughter and fabricating plants operate on, running plants at much below capacity doesn't work over the long run.

Given the supply of cattle on the High Plains of Nebraska, it still is a little surprising that was the plant Tyson decided to close down. Our guess it comes down to the age, design and equipment at a given plant, plus a lot of other factors like labor supply, environmental difficulties, etc. We don't know the competition conditions for the available labor supply in the area, but we do know the new plant at North Platte did not intend to be shy about adding to its team by offering workers jobs in a brand new plant.

We never want to see the industry lose a major plant. But timing the match of capacity to cattle supply, given the vagaries of Mother Nature's effects on the supply of raw material, is difficult.

One thing will be instructive. The announcement about the plant comes shortly after President Trump directed the DOJ to investigate allegations of collusion or manipulation by the big packers. We suspect -- given that one of the biggest packers in the country has closed an entire plant -- that that investigation won't take long to conclude. The big plants aren't likely to be found engineering their big losses on purpose for a long time and besides the financial information available, a major wouldn't be shutting down a big plant if it was the "money machine" opponents often claim.

So what is likely to come of President Trump's directive to DOJ? We recently reviewed a speech given by Assistant Attorney General Gail Slater, now the head of the Anti-Trust Division, commenting on anti-trust enforcement and agriculture at Drake University Law School in Iowa.

Slater spent some time sharing her understanding of America's free market system, its benefits and the importance of making sure there is competition on both the input and output sides of any industry. She also shared some research on attitudes of our younger generations and the public in general regarding competition, anti-trust regulation and the capitalism vs. socialist economic systems.

Slater was at the FTC from 2004-2014, observing that the attitude of the 1980s regarding anti-



trust enforcement was still the precedent then. The approach was to have a "light touch" because markets can self-correct over time, absent significant barriers to entry; concentration is rarely if ever a problem; exclusionary conduct is rare and fleeting and buyer power is rarely a concern.

In our situation, it was thought the capital alone required to start a packing plant might be a barrier to entry. But two new plants in Idaho, and one each in Nebraska and Missouri in the last few years belie that theory.

Concentration has been the song and dance for industry naysayers for years, yet the competition between the big packers and even more numerous smaller packers has not yielded any complaint that would stick. Packers not only compete for cattle, they compete to get pens under contract and the demand for quality from consumers has heightened the drive to get enough high quality cattle to fill commitments and contracts.

The strong demand in the face of record prices has certainly bolstered the opinion that the system all sectors of the industry has been participating in is vigorous, competitive and is delivering what consumers demand.

High prices to consumers are the result of a tight supply, caused more by Mother Nature's faulty moisture supply than any other reason.

Last time we began Assistant Attorney General Gail Slater's presentation to Drake Law School. She is head of the Antitrust division at DOJ.

The yelp that packers slow the slaughter to knock prices down for feeders especially doesn't apply, if it ever does, when, 1) packers are already short of enough cattle to run plants; 2) delaying cattle for very long can make them too big and too finished for many of the value-added, high quality programs that every sector depends on.

And now, given tight supplies, we would imagine it is difficult enough to meet commitments for some of these programs that dragging their feet would only hurt the highest paying programs. Packers and feeders and those who feed in their lots would know and yell.

There's another factor most don't fathom. The big packers not only have a huge maw to fill every day, they also have the financial muscle pay more and go after cattle they want and need. We're guessing the smaller packers can testify to that.

By the way, Colorado State University economist's Steve Koontz's examination of voluminous Livestock Marketing Report data has shown that the bigger packers pay more money for cattle in a given area than smaller ones can afford.

One interesting concept Slater mentioned could be construed as positive to the thought that the DOJ might not try to fix what isn't broken. The Chesterton's Fence principle advises against changing

or removing a law or rule until one understands its original purpose. If it exists, there must have been a reason, it serves some purpose that may not be obvious to us today. The principle encourages caution, a conservative approach to change, to understand the "why" before making changes, to avoid unforeseen consequences.

Perhaps one of the most worrisome comments in her speech was Slater's pride in the 50 or so Ph.D. economists on staff. We can only hope that they are totally different from the Ph.D. economists on the Federal Reserve staff, who are at the root of all the hide-bound, Keynesian, faulty-modeled theories in that institution. We don't need more economists who believe that growth is the root of all evil.

Slater turned to agriculture and does recognize that farmers and ranchers need the freedom to operate their own operations and the folly of central planning. She also noted that farmers and ranchers need freedom as buyers and as sellers.

The DOJ has P&S enforcement responsibility and Slater notes the provisions that "prohibit meat packer conduct that is deceptive, unfair or unjustly discriminatory."

We would hope that there will not be an effort to re-define those terms -- yet again.

Slater mentioned that the Biden administration had "challenged information sharing among processors" involving price effects on poultry and pork prices. She noted that the case was still pending in Minnesota but did not mention that DOJ had lost earlier versions of the case twice, had significantly narrowed the scope of the case and had not been able to get the courts to find untoward conduct, despite years of work.

She did also note that USDA has the investigatory powers in these cases and refers any cases to DOJ.

Slater said that USDA and DOJ have committed to a Memorandum of Understanding to protect competition on agricultural inputs. Input costs have risen significantly since 2020. The directive from the top has been to see if they can lower input prices to farmers and ranchers. They are going to coordinate investigation and any enforcement from DOJ's Chicago field office.

Slater did reassure everyone that agricultural cases will turn on facts and evidence and be grounded in existing law and precedent. They will utilize their economists and whistleblowers.

"...we will exercise our criminal antitrust jurisdiction over bid rigging, price fixing and other per se conduct as appropriate when well supported by facts and evidence," she said.

Slater said meetings and hearings in Washington have shown there is bipartisan support for strong antitrust enforcement from both voters and politicians.

She concluded by saying her father-in-law ranches in Oregon. She is cognizant of ranchers' desire for free, open and competitive markets in order to keep operations intact from generation to generation.

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- Moscow Feed and Grain  
Moscow Mills, MO
- New Haven Farm & Feed  
New Haven, MO
- People's Savings Bank  
Hermann, MO  
Montgomery City, MO  
New Florence, MO  
New Haven, MO  
New Melle, MO  
Rhineland, MO
- Pike Feeds  
Pittsfield, IL
- Prairie Home Coop  
Prairie Home, MO
- Quinn Farm Supply  
Monroe City, MO
- Ricketts Farm Service of Cairo  
Cairo, MO
- Ricketts Farm Service  
Salisbury, MO  
Shelbina, MO
- Rural King  
Wentzville, MO
- Ruyle's Angus  
Roodhouse, IL
- Scheidt Bros. LLC  
California, MO
- Shelton Seed  
Centralia, MO
- Shetler Feed  
Clark, MO
- State Farm Insurance  
Centralia, MO  
Vandalia, MO
- Straatmann Feed  
New Melle, MO
- Stratmann Feed and Transfer  
Labadie, MO
- Twillman Feed  
Fulton, MO  
Mexico, MO
- USA Market News Office  
Country Club, MO
- Windmill Ridge  
Shelbyville, MO

### Other locations

- A&S Printing  
Monroe City, MO
- Abel's/McDonald's  
Bowling Green, MO
- Agriservices of Brunswick  
Brunswick, MO
- American Bank of Missouri  
Wellsville, MO  
Middletown, MO  
Montgomery City, MO
- Angell's Western Wear  
Centralia, MO
- Bank of Montgomery County  
Montgomery City, MO
- Bowling Green Tractor  
Bowling Green, MO
- Bowling Green Veterinary Clinic  
Bowling Green, MO
- Central Elevator  
Silex, MO
- C & S Grocery  
Harrisburg, MO
- Dawson's Store  
Thompson, MO
- Dearwester Grain Services  
Mt. Sterling, IL  
Golden, IL  
Carthage, IL
- Eastern Missouri Commission Co.  
Bowling Green, MO
- Farmers Cooperative  
Ewing, MO
- Farmers Cooperative Services  
New London, MO
- Farmers Cooperative Services  
Palmyra, MO
- Farmer's Elevator & Exchange  
Monroe City, MO
- FCS Financial  
Columbia, MO  
Hannibal, MO
- Feeders Grain, Inc.  
Bowling Green, MO
- Fish Hook Market  
Baylis, IL
- Grotjan Conoco Station  
New Franklin
- Hank Hedges  
O'Fallon, MO
- Hannibal Tractor  
Hannibal, MO
- Hatton Vermeer Sales  
Auxvasse, MO
- Hiltz's Meats  
Bowling Green, MO
- HNB Bank  
Bowling Green, MO  
Hannibal, MO  
Monroe City, MO  
Perry, MO
- Jones Brothers AgriServices  
La Monte, MO

# Digging Deeper....

By JUSTIN ANGELL

I hope everyone had a wonderful Christmas like we have had. "The Kellmeister" and I went to see the South Dakota grandkids first week of December.

The day we left, Centralia canceled school because it was cold and we were supposed to get 3 inches of snow. Same day in South Dakota, the little Norwegians were all at school, the cold front that pushed through never phased them. They had three full recesses for 30 minutes each outside with the windchill at 20 below zero. The kiddos assured me they did not get cold because they were running so much.

Visiting for Christmas, Cooper, the almost 3 year old surfer dude from San Diego, got to see snow for the first time in his life.

We all know that even a blind sow can occasionally find an acorn. Last month's silver prediction so far is coming through in flying colors. I'm writing this portion on Thursday, December 11, and today, silver prices are \$3.55 higher, moving towards \$65 per ounce. A year ago that would've been a 10% move, but even after the 2025 price double, it is still a respectable 5% daily move.

At the sale Tuesday, a reader asked me an interesting question. Would it be better to buy cows or silver? I refused the chance to step into that trap because the truth is I do not know.

Assuming the world holds together, I actually think they are both going to be good investments in the next 12-18 months. Cows would be safer, but silver has the chance to be exponentially more profitable.

Colton, my Nebraska commodity guy, has warned me for years that ag commodities generally follow oil. Oil is sliding lower and is now in the \$55 range. In previous articles, I've dedicated space discussing this, but new drilling technologies have changed hydrocarbon production. Natural gas is so abun-

dant now that in some parts of the country (like the Permian basin in Texas), oil companies actually have to pay to get rid of it. Actually, with natural gas there is a negative price. The question of the hour is how cheap can oil get and will ag commodities follow it lower? Converting the energy value of natural gas to crude oil, crude would be only \$15 per barrel. The reason I bring this up again is because, I believe, next year we will have two-dollar gasoline over most areas of the country. Cheaper fuel, cheaper total energy will decrease inflation, finally giving the middle class some financial relief. Politics is real, and next year being a mid-term election year, I expect the buzzwords will be "living affordability".

**Housing will also be part of the affordability push** and there are early signs that home prices and rent are declining. The decline is attributed to lower demand as millions of illegal immigrants return home through I.C.E. deportation and self-deportations. Once again, we find much of the housing for the illegal immigrants was being paid for through federal government programs. Government programs and spending always cause inflation.

**Getting back to the silver forecast** from last month, I did make a critical mistake when I claimed that the CME and the LBMA would just change the rules if they started losing their game like they did when the Hunt Brothers cornered the silver market in 1980. Importantly, I was not aware that last year the international banking regulatory organization that establishes capital requirements and risk management measures for banks globally ratified the Basel III agreement in which gold became recognized as a tier one asset. It has been pointed out to me that since the Basel III organization is recognized internationally (including the United States), their rules trump national, regional, and private business rules. Therefore, a CME or LBMA rule change would vio-

late international law. Therefore, CME, LBMA, and U.S. Government cannot change rules like they did with the Hunt brothers were actively cornering the silver market in the late 1970s. There now appears to be no obvious escape for the massive amount of short positions that have been holding silver prices back and seem to be coming off. If this trend continues, there's no telling how high silver will go in the next 12 months.

**Last month**, I talked about stable coins. I've done a little research and I understand the concept just enough to be dangerous, but surely not to explain it to anyone else. Suffice to say that there is a chance that Trump's people may have a plan for rescuing the currency of United States from collapse. The next 18 months in the financial

industry will be very interesting and perhaps revolutionary. The biggest problem this administration and government has (absolutely no one in a position of power wants to talk about) is in 2026 there is a wall of \$8 trillion worth of treasures that needs to be refinanced and all of which has to be refinanced at much higher interest rates than the near-zero environment it was originally issued in. Some have claimed that Janet Yellen allowing this condition to form using only short-term rates near zero versus long-term borrowing for the government at 2% is a form of financial malpractice.

In simple terms:  
\*The U.S. loaded up on cheap debt.

\*That cheap debt now has to be rolled over at expensive rates. (maybe this is why Trump wants one percent interest rates right

now.)

\*Interest costs are about to explode.

\*Something has to give. Markets, taxes, spending, or the dollar.

This is the kind of structural time bomb that doesn't hit immediately..., but when it does, it could hit everything.

Stocks. Bonds. Housing. Crypto. Just one more thing to pay attention to and prepare for because most people will see this sovereign debt wall after it's too late.

**I hate to end** on a Debbie-downer note. So, even though we have major obstacles to overcome, I believe 2026 has the potential to be the best year economically this country has seen in a long time.

That's all for this month. I'll see you at the sale.

## COUNTRY MEATS from page 10

in," Vorpagel says. "You realize it's something you enjoy, that you can take pride in and it's really pretty rewarding."

Vice President of Operations Marc Baillargeon is an LGCM poster employee: Hired out of high school to do the boxing — "I just needed a job" — he has worked in every department of the company, acquiring butchery and sausage-making skills along the way. Now marking 20 years with Lake Geneva Country Meats, Baillargeon crafts the products that have netted the company hundreds of local, state and international awards over the years.

"I was always told, 'Just stick with it and build through,'" Baillargeon says. "I know people who are always chasing a 50 cents-to-a-dollar raise hopping from job to job. Ten years

later, they're at the top of the salary range and haven't learned anything new."

For him, working at LGCM means "working for a good family who takes care of you and treats people fairly. Or," he jokes, "maybe I just don't like change."

Says Vorpagel: "I'm in a great spot — I've got Marc. Marc runs the stuff and I can work on the business. Most small business owners don't have that."

Like most meat companies, Lake Geneva Country Meats doesn't get a lot of applicants with experience in the field. When hiring, Vorpagel's make-or-break question is, "What's your favorite thing to cook?"

"If they say, 'I don't really cook a lot,' they probably are not a good fit here," he says. But "if

someone's eyes light up when they start talking about food, that person is worth a shot."

Many hires, such as lead retail butcher Christian Dantos, have a culinary background (learn more about Dantos in "Backbone," p. 144). Along with butchery-centric videos of meat cutting demonstrations and food safety FAQs, much of the company's YouTube channel offerings, for example, are culinary takes on favorite recipes and, often, wine-and-food pairings.

"There's a way that we do things, and in some ways, we prefer hiring people who don't have any (meat) experience," Vorpagel says. "If we do things the Lake Geneva Country Meats way, we've seen 60 years of a pretty darn good growth curve. I think we'll be okay."

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cattlemen@virtualimages.us**



Eastern Missouri Commission Company, Bowling Green  
Market Report for Friday, December 12, 2025  
Receipts: 2,383 Week ago: 1,178 Year ago: 2,274

Compared to last week, a much larger offering this week, with the best test on steers weighing 600-700 lbs sold mostly 20.00-40.00 higher, with all other weights of steers trading with a sharply higher undertone. Feeder heifers had the best test on heifers weighing 500-700 lbs selling mostly 10.00-25.00 higher and other weights of heifers also trading with a sharply higher undertone. Demand was very good on and offering of good quality feeders with several pot loads of top quality yearlings as buyers were very active to buy cattle before years end. Fed cattle market again closed the week with higher gains with live cattle trading mostly 5.00 higher at 230.00 to end the week. Several stick out sales included pot load of 615 lb steers at 429.00, pot load of steers weighing 716 lbs at 398.50, pot load of heifers weighing 663 lbs at 383.00, lot 20 hd of replacement heifers 716 lbs at 383.25, and 110 hd of 987 lb heifers at 282.50. Slaughter cows traded steady with last week.

## Market Reports

*Sponsored by Prairie Queen Transportation, LLC*



**Feeder Steers:** Medium and Large 1 – Few 400-450 lbs 450.00-487.50, 450-500 lbs 457.50-485.00; 500-550 lbs 425.00-462.00, 550-600 lbs 410.00-427.00; 600-650 lbs 395.00-429.00, 650-700 lbs 369.00-400.00, lot thin 653 lbs 413.00; 700-755 lbs 378.00-398.50; 800-850 lbs 330.00-337.50. Medium and Large 1-2 – 350-400 lbs 440.00-455.00; 500-550 lbs 403.00-416.00; 600-650 lbs 369.00-393.00, 650-700 lbs 347.00-354.00; 700-760 lbs 324.00-340.00; 800-850 lbs 311.00-315.00, lot 897 lbs 291.00. Large 1-2 – Pkg 634 lbs 346.00; lot 723 lbs 341.00.

**Feeder Heifers:** 400-500 lbs 407.00-430.00; 500-550 lbs 382.00-387.50, 550-600 lbs 359.00-386.00; 600-650 lbs 359.50-375.00, 650-700 lbs 351.00-383.00; 700-750 lbs 344.00-346.00, lot Replacement 716 lbs 383.25; lot 822 lbs 311.00; 110 hd 987 lbs 282.50. Medium and Large 1-2 – Pkg 395 lbs 392.50; 400-500 lbs 380.00-400.00; 500-600 lbs 325.00-360.00; 600-700 lbs 325.00-348.00; 700-780 lbs 310.00-327.00; pkg 845 lbs 295.00-480-500 lbs 396.00-415.00; 510-590 lbs 381.00-

383.00; pkg 772 lbs 285.00.

**Slaughter Cows:** Premium White (65-70% lean) Average dressing, 158.00-164.50; and low dressing, 150.00. Breakers (70-80% lean) Average dressing, 150.00-160.00; high dressing, 161.50-170.50; and low dressing, 140.00-148.00. Boners (80-85% lean) Average dressing, 149.00-159.00; high dressing, 160.00-171.00; and low dressing, 136.00-145.00. Lean (85-90% lean) Average dressing, 138.00-151.00; high dressing, 155.00-157.00; and low dressing, 122.00-135.00. Shelly 100.00-117.00.

**Slaughter Bulls:** Yield Grade 1-2 – 1300-2400 lbs, 185.00-198.00; 207.00; 166.00-181.00.

**Slaughter Steers and Heifers:** (20 hd) Choice 2-3 – Few 1140-1250 lbs 225.00-226.00. Select and Choice 1-2 – 215.00.

Source: MO Dept of Ag-USDA Market News Service, Bowling Green, MO, Greg Garrison, Market Reporter 573-751-5618. 24 hour recorded report 1-573-522-9244 [www.ams.usda.gov/mnreports/JC\\_LS156.txt](http://www.ams.usda.gov/mnreports/JC_LS156.txt)

# LAND GRAB from page 11

over my crops and that I've never stolen any water."

Ecology personnel place blame for the permitting rejection on Greiff and Reierson.

"They sent us something and we reviewed it and got back to the Conservancy Board and said, 'Hey, you don't actually have the information you need to make this recommendation,' explains Jaime Short, Section Manager for Ecology's Water Resource Program in the Eastern Regional Office. "Like, just the ingredients aren't there."

"So, they decided, and this was all in consultation with Mr. Greiff's consultant (Reierson), to withdraw their recommendation. He was going to get them some additional information. And then that did not occur," Short adds. "So, eventually we kind of kicked the applications back to him because we didn't have what we needed to process them."

Brook Beeler, Eastern Regional Director of Ecology, echoes Short: "I think the crux of the issue here is when Mr. Greiff looked at his quantity or how much he'd been using, he wanted to put it in a different place than was identified in his right. And he started to work through that process with his Conservancy Board application. And then again, following up with us."

And that's where we told him, 'We do not have enough information from you to be able to make that change for you to expand your acreage or to put this water that you claim you have on additional acreage.' ... He may have had enough to do what he was attempting to do, but he didn't share that information with us in a way where we could make that approval. Instead of working with us, he chose to ignore us and continue to irrigate illegally."

Reierson contradicts the claims made by Short and Beeler.

"The only ingredient missing was Ecology as a good faith partner. It was a continual process trying to answer endless objections. Not saying all their comments were wrong but on fundamentals it was baseless. Ecology management parroted staff instead of putting them in line on the nonsense. We didn't have time for games but it was never enough, so then it all just tasted bad. And I felt sick knowing the original approvals were completely valid and I'd fallen for a trap going along with them being withdrawn."

In many conservation quarters, Greiff's desire to spread his water allotment over greater acres—yet

**As Greiff faces the prospect of farm and legacy loss, a solution is maddeningly just out of reach. All Greiff needs to legally spread his water onto his farmland on the south side of the road is a paperwork change from Ecology. Otherwise, his water rights can only be poured onto the north side of the road.**

still maintain yield—would be applauded.

"Not with Ecology for Mr. Greiff," Reierson says. "They said different, but in reality they resisted Bob's efforts to comply. Jaime Short told me Bob didn't have enough water rights to cover the spreading acres. Another staffer said Bob's crop rotation explanation was 'weak'. It's all in their emails."

"Bob knew how to navigate farming, but not how to navigate the hurdles they set up. Even I couldn't navigate them. In the end it about broke me to tell Bob, 'I can't help you anymore, I've tried everything. They're flat out against you, or me, or both.'"

Following Ecology's rejection, Greiff turned on the water. He began irrigating the south acres. "They left an old man no choice," Greiff says. "I'd been without water for several years because of all this craziness. So, I started irrigating south of the road—right where they said it was illegal, but that's where I make my money and that's where I survive. And the whole time, I never used a drop more of water than I was supposed to. Didn't matter. They wanted to cut my pocketbook in half, at first. Now, they want my farm. Their policy is, 'Comply or die.'"

## Bad Farmer

In response to his renewed irrigation, Greiff received a succession of letters from Ecology. Each time, he wrote "Return to Sender" and dropped the unopened envelopes back in the post.

"Hell, I even got letters from the Attorney General's office in Olympia and sent those back, too. I didn't know what kind of threats were in them, and I didn't care. I wasn't stealing any water. I wasn't looking for trouble. I just wanted to be left alone to run a farm like my father and grandfather did."

Freeman acknowledges that no theft of water theft by Greiff was alleged. "I feel Mr. Greiff's pain because a number of my clients in the lower Yakima Valley are dairy farmers. And the small guys are just getting roasted. And I get that Mr. Greiff is a small farmer. We never thought this was about him

pulling more than his legal amount of water—just that he's not spreading it right. This should never have developed the way it did."

Ecology issued a cease-and-desist order in June 2023, followed by a \$6,000 fine in June 2024; and a \$15,000 fine in August 2024, along with a press release regarding Greiff's irrigation, telling the public: "attempts to help Greiff comply with regulations were unsuccessful ... Additional unpermitted irrigation continued."

A year later, in September 2025, Ecology levied a \$100,000 fine, along with a judgement lien obtained by the Attorney General's Office in Spokane County Superior Court. Again, Ecology issued a press release: "For years, we've seen repeated violations and a disregard for bringing this property into compliance ... We've made multiple attempts to provide technical assistance and achieve voluntary compliance, yet illegal use continues."

However, neither of the two press releases noted that Greiff was not exceeding his water rights or stealing water. A neutral observer, lacking context, might assume Greiff was an environmental criminal. The releases also did not explain that Greiff hired professional help to comply with the law. Additionally, the releases made no mention of Ecology's involvement with Conservancy to block approvals for Greiff.

"These public portrayals of Bob Greiff as a bad actor and bad farmer are false," Reierson says. "I guided him through all the statutory requirements for receiving the approvals, and he did everything required. The only bad actor in this situation is the Department of Ecology. They influenced the Water Conservancy Board to help defeat Bob's plan for compliance with the law."

## Here I Will Be

As Greiff faces the prospect of farm and legacy loss, a solution is maddeningly just out of reach. All Greiff needs to legally spread his water onto his farmland on the south side of the road is a paper-

work change from Ecology. Otherwise, his water rights can only be poured onto the north side of the road.

Absurd, Greiff insists. "I can't thank Tim Reierson enough, but no matter what he did to help me and go by the book, the Department of Ecology dragged their feet. One thing for certain, this was sure as hell never about water or the environment for them. Think about it: I'm still allowed to use the exact same amount of water."

Freeman believes Conservancy made the right call. However, his confidence doesn't extend beyond: "I don't know what the mechanisms were regarding what happened after we were done with our review. Is Ecology making an example out of him? I felt like if everyone could sit down in a room together, this would have gotten done, but I don't know what happened, or how it's gotten to this extreme point. Ecology would say they're not being heavy-handed, but it now certainly appears that way to many people."

"I think there are things Ecology could have done differently and things Mr. Greiff and his consultant could have done differently," Freeman adds. "But for a situation that is supposed to only be about how Mr. Greiff is applying water to his fields to end up with a lien and potential seizure—that's extremely surprising, and I won't lay the blame at Mr. Greiff's feet."

The present impasse should never have developed, Reierson concurs. "Without Ecology's interference, Bob's first approval back in 2022 would have become final and he would have been irrigating just fine in 2023, 2024, and 2025—with no fines."

"As far as correcting this it's an easy solution because all the

work's been done. Ecology has the administrative power unilaterally, right now, to rescind its orders and fines, vacate the lien, reinstate and approve the applications. Done. It's a safe bet they won't do it on their own, so we'll need a state legislator to take up the cause. Bob would welcome an independent review. Then, I think Ecology, higher up the ladder, might see the light."

When the 2026 crop season arrives, Greiff intends to irrigate—on both sides of the road.

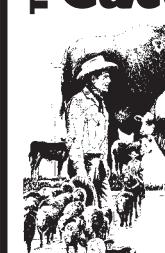
"We've been here since 1939. Come spring next year, just as my father and grandfather did, I'm going to plant like normal. And when May comes, I'm going to turn the sprinklers on again to survive wherever my crops need the water. I've always tried to do things right on this farm and I never dreamed my own state would treat me or anyone else like this."

"I don't believe the people in these departments know what irrigation, yield, crops, or rotation are," Greiff insists. "It's a big secret that no one is supposed to say: They don't understand what farming is."

Will Ecology shut down Greiff's operation? "We can't certainly speak for, you know, what lies ahead for him and how he continues to operate his farm or as a producer," says Director Beeler. "I will say if he continues to illegally irrigate those acres, I think we have to, we have to look at what tools do we have left in our toolbox to again ensure compliance."

"The state wants people to think I'm an outlaw," Greiff concludes. "They don't want people to know the true story. If they want to destroy a farmer because he put his water on unapproved acres, then I'm not gonna run and hide. Here I am. Here I will be."

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# Monthly Sheep & Goat Market Reports

*Sponsored by The Bank of Missouri*

## Montgomery County Livestock Auction, Montgomery City Market Report for Sheep & Goat Auction

Thursday, December 11, 2025

Receipts: 837 Last month: 800 Year ago: 780

Montgomery County Livestock held their Sheep and Goat sale Thursday evening Dec 11, with a nice offering of lambs weighing mostly 45-80 lbs and selling mostly 30.00-60.00 higher with instances 70.00 higher than last month's auction. Feeder Lambs traded mostly 30.00-50.00 higher and slaughter ewes 20.00-25.00 higher. Kid goats traded with a sharply higher undertone on a light comparison with last month. Demand was very good on a moderate to large offering. Montgomery County holds their Sheep and Goat sale the 2nd

Thursday of each month. All prices are per CWT unless otherwise noted.

### SHEEP (prices per hundredweight)

**Slaughter Lambs:** Choice-few Prime 1-3 – Mostly hair lambs 48-60 lbs 370.00-405.00; pkg Fancy 56 lbs 430.00, 60-

80 lbs 360.00-395.00, lot 85 lbs 335.00, lot 96 lbs 275.00. Choice 1-2 – 50-75 lbs 355.00-360.00.

**Feeder Lambs:** Small and Medium 1-2 – 28-43 lbs 380.00-420.00, pkg 34 lbs 440.00.

**Slaughter Ewes:** Utility and Good 1-2 – 90-165 lbs 125.00-155.00.

**Replacement Ewes:** Young 2-5 yrs to lamb 30-40 days 90-

135 lbs 155.00-225.00 per hd. Families - young 3-5 yrs w/baby lambs, 177.50-225.00 per unit/family.

### GOATS: (prices per hundred weight)

**Kid Goats:** Selection 1 – 45-95 lbs 380.00-430.00.

**Feeder Kids:** Selection 1-2 – Few 30-32 lbs 350.00-355.00, pkg 43 lbs 380.00.

**Nannies:** Selection 1-2 – Scarce.

**Nannies/Does:** Selection 1-2 – Replacement young bred 100-113 lbs 205.00-225.00 per hd.

*Source: MO Dept of Ag USDA Market News Service, Montgomery City, MO, Greg Garrison, Market Reporter,*



# Laugh Tracks in the Dust.....

## Rural loneliness

By MILO YIELD  
Special to The Advocate

Depending on circumstances, rural living offers up many ways for folks to experience loneliness. In some cases, the remoteness of the farmstead can cause loneliness. In other cases, having the children grow up and leave home can cause loneliness for their parents. In other cases, the relentless hours of work can cause loneliness.

However, for some folk, they choose to move to the country to escape the stress of urban living.

Such was the case of two single lady retirees who were the best of urban friends. Both had been career women. Each had lived alone in an apartment in the big city for quite some time. When contemplating their retirement future, they decided that in retirement they'd buy an acreage, move to a quiet rural area, and live together to cut expenses.

So, that's what they did. They bought 10 acres with a nice old farm house plenty big for them to share. On the farmstead they bought wuz a nice old-fashioned red tile chicken house.

After getting settled in, they came to a mutual decision to put the chicken house to good use and go into the egg-selling business.

They decided to buy 500 hens and 500 roosters to start their egg bizness. But, before they made their purchase, they visited the local ag extension agent, ol' N. O. Wittall, for poultry advice.

When they told the agent their plan, he quickly said they'd seriously misjudged the number of roosters they'd need for 500 hens. He said, even 50 roosters would be plenty for that many hens.

That's when the retirees chimed in together, "No. We're going to buy 500 roosters because we're experts on how it feels to be lonely."

It's been quite awhile since I've related an Ole and Sven joke. Since winter is just ahead for us all, this story is apt.

Ole and Lena had lived all their married lives on a little farm located on the Minnesota side of the state line with Iowa.

One day, Ole's friend Sven, who wuz a county commissioner, stopped by and told Ole that he had something important to tell him.

Expecting really bad news, Ole's plunked down in his recliner, not far from the blazing fireplace, and said, "Lay da' bad news on me, Sven."

Sven told Ole that surveyors doing advance work on state line highway improvements had found a monumental old surveying error. "They've confirmed that da' original survey of the state line is off a hunert yards to the south," Sven told a dispirited Ole. "The truth is dat all these years you and Lena just t'ought you were a'living in Minnesota. From now on, you'll officially be living in Iowa."

After the shocked Ole absorbed that news, he broke

into a big smile. "Dat's great news, Sven, I don't t'ink Lena and me could a'stand a'living t'rough another tough Minnesota winter again."

begin getting your meds. How do you want to arrange financing?"

My column last week about Brittany bird dogs that I've owned and hunted over, prompted a kindly Nebraska reader to volunteer his own dog story.

He told me that his first bird dog years ago was mixed breed - a "Cocker Scandal."

I'll shift to a little shop talk now. All summer and fall, my grandson and son-in-law have been working some weekends on a 28 x 36-foot shop/man-cave toward the back side of Damphewer Acres.

Although not finished, the finish line is coming into sight. The building is weatherized, insulated, electrified, heated, cooled, and paneled. I've even got a nice fescue lawn growing around it.

What's mainly left to do is put up the old barn tin wainscoting, and complete the bathroom.

The Man Cave is going to be really nice when it's completed.

My son-in-law, Harley Ryder, has a lot of shop tools that's he's going to move into the shop when it's done. I'm anything but a handyman, but I'm still pretty good at hosting parties and card games. So, I'm guessing that's about all I'll do in the new Man Cave, and Harley will be the one

who puts the tools to good use.

My wise words for the weed-kare: "A lot of folks are like rocking chairs -- a lot of action, but nary a bit of progress."

Also, "A 'hick town' is where if you see a girl sharing a meal with a man old enough to be her father, he is!"

Buckle up for winter. It's coming. Let's hope it's a mild one.

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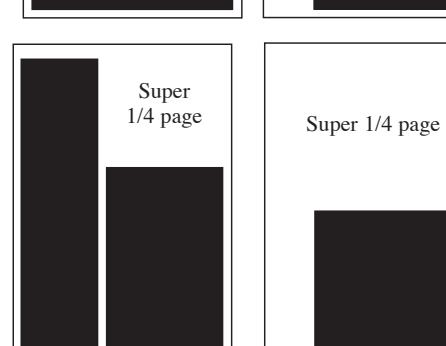
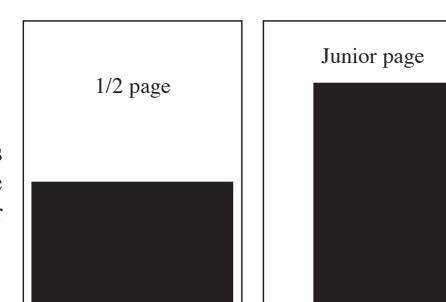
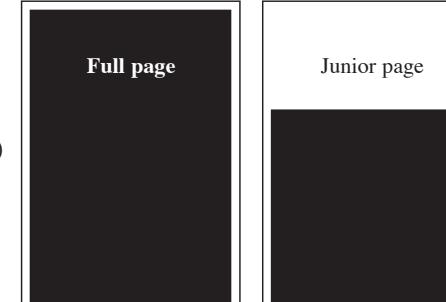
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**COLUMN WIDTHS**  
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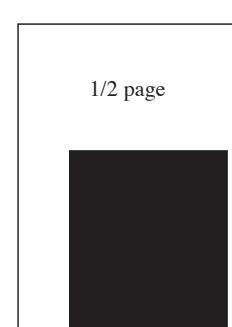
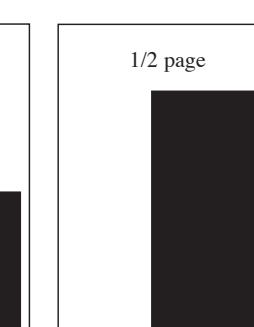
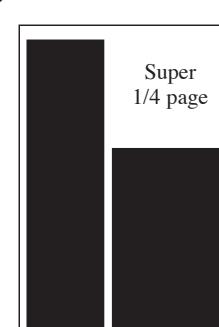
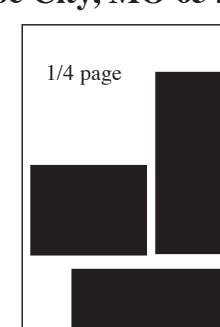
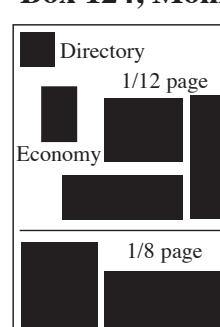
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# Missouri producer enjoys continued success with milo grazing

By LINDA WHELAN GEIST  
University of Missouri Extension

**GREEN RIDGE, Mo. —** University of Missouri Extension specialists find that producers see up to \$300 savings in feeding costs per calf when their livestock graze standing milo through the winter.

This is the third year that Green Ridge livestock producer John Chamberlin has worked with MU Extension agronomist Rusty Lee and livestock specialist Gene Schmitz to find how milo can reduce winter feed costs and improve herd health.

Milo is a drought-resistant forage that can be used as a winter livestock feed to save time and labor. It also improves carrying capacity and returns nutrients back to the soil, says Lee.

## Saves labor, costs

By grazing the standing milo, producers eliminate grain harvest and transportation costs.

Strip grazing takes cattle to the feed, rather than feed to the cattle, to save time and money, says Lee. He has grown milo on his east-central Missouri diversified farm for over 10 years.

Producers control daily feed allocation by creating strips with polywire electric fencing. This encourages cattle to utilize the fodder leaves and portions of the stalk, in addition to the high-energy grain head of the plants.

Chamberlin says strip grazing saves him hours of feeding time daily for the approximately 400 head since it takes only 30 minutes a day to move the polywire instead of the hours it took to unroll hay and fill feed bunks.

Toxicity still a problem after frost

Like other Sorghum species forages, temporary, but toxic, levels of prussic acid are present in milo after frost injury. To avoid this, grazing should be delayed for about two weeks after frost to avoid cyanide poisoning in cows.

Chamberlin recently did in-field research to see if he could avoid this prussic acid poisoning window by mowing milo down prior to frost. "The idea was to start the 2-week clock for volatilization in an area that would then be usable once the remainder of the field was in the frost-induced grazing restriction," says Lee.

He left mowed stalks on the ground to dry and waited for MU Extension specialists to test the downed milo for prussic acid or cyanide. Eight days after mowing, their tests still showed that prussic acid levels were still too high to safely turn cattle in to graze.

Lee and Schmitz say that while the head of the plant may be dead,



**TEST KIT:** MU Extension agronomist Rusty Lee, right, shows livestock producer John Chamberlin a simple test kit he carries with him to make testing for prussic acid quick and easy. After frost injury, temporary, but toxic, levels of prussic acid are present in milo and livestock grazing should be avoided. (Photo by Linda Geist)

the stalk continues to create regrowth that appears to contain cyanide. While palatable to livestock, it can be deadly.

## Post-frost toxins

Risk is highest immediately after the first fall frost primarily due to the stress-induced breakdown of cyanogenetic compounds into prussic acid or hydrogen cyanide, says MU Extension veterinary toxicologist Tim Evans.

When Sorghum species like milo are stressed by frost, they tend to accumulate a compound called dhurrin. When frost-damaged plant tissues are broken down in the rumen, the dhurrin quickly converts to the highly toxic prussic acid.

Prussic acid interferes with the body's ability to use oxygen to generate cellular energy, with the oxygen remaining unused in the typically cherry red blood, leading to symptoms such as muscle twitching, staggering, and even death. Ruminants are more susceptible to prussic acid poisoning than other animals because cud chewing and rumen bacteria help release the cyanide from plant tissue.

Additionally, frost can cause nitrate accumulation in some plants by hindering their ability to convert nitrates into proteins.

Despite the lack of success in reducing the two-week wait after frost to graze, Lee says MU Extension specialists continue to look for ways to move cows onto milo quicker.

## High production, high utilization

Strip-grazing standing milo eliminates the costs associated with harvesting and transporting feed grains. This results in lower daily feed costs compared to the traditional winter hay feeding program. Lee estimates the milo utili-

of 25% as the cattle graze, that leaves 5,040 pounds per acre into the mouths of cows. Allocating 12 pounds of grain per cow per day yields a possible carrying capacity of 420 cow days per acre.

Lee recommends putting cows on milo 2 weeks after a killing freeze, typically Nov. 1. This works well with fall-calving program of bull turn-in between Thanksgiving and Dec. 1.

## Nov. 1 to Valentine's Day

Chamberlin says he gets 400 cow days per milo acre, allowing him to run more cows per acre. He estimates that he reduces the acres/cow ratio from 4 to 3, a significant savings of resources.

His figures point to milo saving him \$300 per calf compared to hay. With a 400-head herd, that's about \$120,000 in savings, says Lee.

Chamberlin remains a firm supporter of grazing standing milo. "I have nothing but praise for this," he says. "If you're not already grazing standing milo, start."

## Breeding rates improve

Lee says milo provides a consistent, high-energy feed for breeding fall-calving cows or late spring-calving cows with calves at side when used with a protein supplement.

Calving rates improve when cows are moved from fescue fields to milo as little as 30 days before breeding season, he says.

## Available resources

Lee is an author of MU Extension publication Strip-Grazing Milo as a Low-Cost Winter Forage" available for free download at <https://extension.missouri.edu/publications/g2079>. and recommends the Grain Sorghum Planning Budget at <https://extension.missouri.edu/publications/g653>.

Lee was part of a University of Nebraska Extension webinar on grazing standing milo on at noon on Dec. 3. Email Aaron Berger at [aberger2@unl.edu](mailto:aberger2@unl.edu) or at 308-235-3122 for possible access to a recording of this free webinar.



**Got an idea for a story you'd like to see in The Advocate? Drop us a line and let us know at: [cattlemans@virtualimages.us](mailto:cattlemans@virtualimages.us)**

## Try black-eyed pea ribollita, a classic bread-based Italian soup

Made and reviewed by CHARLOTTE ANGELL  
Rated by JON ANGELL  
For The Advocate

**Jon's Critique:** I was surprised about this one. It just didn't sound very good. It was actually better than okay. It mostly involved cheesy bread with the occasional bunch of soggy greens. I hardly saw the black-eyed peas.

The cook said it needed more collard greens and she wasn't sure she would make it again.

I have no strong feelings about this one. What do you think? Does this look like something you would try?

## 'Bat Man' foils gang of meat thieves in Philadelphia

Thieves stole four pallets of meat from a truck before the baseball bat-wielding driver chased them off in a recent incident in Philadelphia, which has been plagued with cargo heists in recent years.

The driver, Kurt Landry, told media outlet WPVI that he was sleeping in his truck, parked outside Quaker Valley Foods, when he woke up at 2 am to noise from the back of the rig. "I felt the truck and trailer moving, so I pulled the curtain to look to see what was going on, and sure enough, there was four vehicles sitting back there, and a bunch of guys pulling stuff out of the trailer," he said.

Landry said he confronted the masked group with a bat, and "they took off like cockroaches." He was due to make a delivery from Nebraska for Tyson Foods to the Quaker Valley

**— Meatingplace.com**

## U.S. beef industry takes aim at Japan's Wagyu beef segment

The popularity of domestic Wagyu beef in Japan is being challenged by U.S. beef producers with support from the U.S. Meat Export Federation (USMEF).

The non-profit trade association that develops international market opportunities for U.S. beef, pork and lamb is turning its attention toward positioning U.S. Prime grade beef as an alternative to high-end Wagyu cuts among consumers in Japan. For example, USMEF recently held its first-ever seminar in Japan for 30 "upscale club members of a high-end lifestyle magazine" to increase awareness of U.S. Prime beef cuts as a "premium product in Japan," the organization said in a news release.

In addition to hearing from U.S. beef producers on how feeding and animal welfare practices result in top-quality U.S. beef products, the head chef of a

Winter is a good time for soup, and this isn't a distant change from the other soups in our menu rotation.

### Black-Eyed Pea Ribollita *Real Simple Magazine*

Ribollita is a classic Italian bread-based soup that hails from Tuscany.

#### Ingredients:

15-ounce block Parmigiano-Reggiano with rind  
1/4 cup olive oil, divided  
1 yellow onion, chopped  
1 1/4 teaspoons kosher salt, divided  
4 cups stemmed, chopped collard greens (from 1 bunch)

1 28-ounce can crushed tomatoes

4 cups low-sodium vegetable or chicken broth

1 15-ounce can black-eyed peas, drained and rinsed

1/2 loaf Ciabatta bread, torn into 2-inch pieces, divided (about 12 ounces)

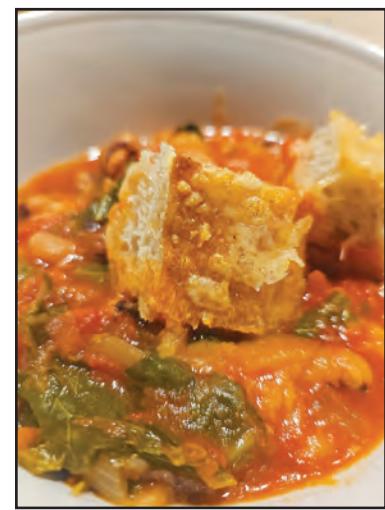
2 teaspoons red wine vinegar

Remove rind from cheese; reserve. Heat 2 tablespoons of olive oil in a large oven-safe pot over medium-high heat. Add onion and 1/4 teaspoon salt; cook until onion softens, about 3 minutes. Add greens; cook until wilted, about 3 minutes. Add crushed tomatoes, broth, and rind; bring to a boil over high heat. Add

black-eyed peas, half of bread pieces, and remaining 1 teaspoon salt. Reduce heat to medium-low. Cook, stirring occasionally, until slightly thickened, about 10 minutes. Meanwhile, grate cheese using the large holes of a box grater to equal 1/2 cup.

Preheat broiler with oven rack 6 inches from heat. Discard rind. Stir in vinegar. Scatter remaining bread pieces over soup; sprinkle with grated cheese. Transfer to oven and broil until edges of bread start to crisp and cheese melts, 3 to 4 minutes. Drizzle with remaining 2 tablespoons of oil.

This soup contains one of the main staples we require our



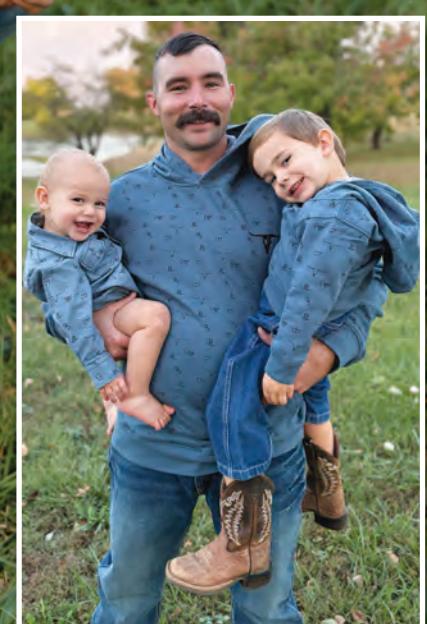
household to eat on New Year's day, black-eyes peas. The greens, to me, were just an added bonus. Our girls had to eat one pea before leaving the table, literally that is all they would eat.

## Ring in the New Year with style and quality!

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**Whether you're working outside or heading out on the town, we've got you covered. Stay warm and look good with our great selection of outerwear, felt hats, shirts, jeans, and boots. Start the new year, dressed for whatever it brings your way!**



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**Thanks to all our sellers and buyers, we appreciate your business and your support.  
Merry Christmas and Happy New Year.**

— Mike and Lori VanMaanen, owners since 2000

**Friday auctions can now be viewed in real time online at:**

**www.dvauction.com**



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### EMCC Friday start times

9:00 a.m. start time for fed cattle & pound cows, followed by bred cows  
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Friday, December 26 .....	NO SALE — MERRY CHRISTMAS
Friday, January 2 .....	NO SALE — HAPPY NEW YEAR
Friday, January 9 .....	Special feeder sale with regular Friday sale
Friday, January 16 .....	Bred cow sale with regular Friday sale
Friday, January 23 .....	Special feeder sale with regular Friday sale
Friday, January 30 .....	Regular Friday sale

**We would like to thank all our customers. If anyone needs anything, please give one of us a call.**

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