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Luke Routh is ‘Diversified’
Local seed dealer also serves the area in ag consulting and racing fuel

By JIM LUTGENS
Publisher

One of Luke Routh’s favorite words is “diversified,” and that’s probably a good thing. He wears more than just one hat at his building on N. Broadway Ave. in New Richland.

Ask Routh for a business card and you’re likely to get three: one for Pioneer Seeds, one for RGC LLC Grain Marketing & Risk Management Solutions, and one for VP Racing Fuels.

The Pioneer Seed business, with which Routh partners with Scott Routh and Layne Janike, is headquartered at the Corn Palace in New Richland, and it takes up 80 to 90 percent of Routh’s time.

“The seed program is the focus,” said Routh. “That’s where our growth is focused.”

He said they currently have upwards of 100 customers in the area.

They primarily work with farmers to ensure they’re planting the right variety of seeds.

“The exciting thing about Pioneer is the new varieties,” said Routh. “The new hybrids coming out that are changing agriculture.”

Routh is the sole owner of RGC Solutions and he has one employee, Colton Schlaak.

“It ties in perfectly with the seed company,” said Routh. “They are, hand-in-hand, the best one-two program I can come up with for agriculture.”

RGC’s intent is to develop a diversified portfolio of disciplined solutions for forward-minded farmers.

RGC’s philosophy:

- There is a strong need for diversification and discipline in grain marketing with today’s producers.
- Challenge producers to be more professional in every aspect of their operation.
- Create a marketing plan and working limit orders at profitability levels.
- Successful marketing requires taking action, especially when faced with an emotional decision. One may avoid the hesitations during short-window market opportunities by removing the anxiety of making impulsive decisions.

“E”) We’ll help diversify row-crop producers from seed placement through scouting and agronomy, all the way through harvest and delivery,” said Routh.

They also work with farmers regarding cash flow, lines of credit or other monetary decisions.

Routh has 13 years experience in risk management.

So how is it to be a farmer these days?

“It’s always good to be a farmer,” said Routh. “2019 has its challenges, but our Waseca County producers will have some variability. It will be an O.K. year, an average year. But it feels like another year where we were given the opportu-

LUKE ROUTH wears three hats, not just the Pioneer hat but an agribusiness consulting hat as well as a fuel seller hat.

Star Eagle photo by Jim Lutgens

Routh continued on 3
These days every farming decision is crucial, according to Routh. “To balance the risks is difficult,” he said. “You’ve got to play defense in agriculture very well in order to make it to that next generation.”

VP Racing Fuels, according to Routh, “Scratched an itch I’ve had since I was young.” That’s because he raced motorcycles from the age of 15, and from 2001-2008 was a professional motocross and supercross rider.

The racing fuel business has taken off better than expected. Focusing on ethanol-free, higher-octane varieties, VP can concoct up to 52 varieties of racing fuel. They also sell a lot of bulk fuel, small-engine fuel and made-to-order fuel. “We can make anything,” said Routh.

They must do a good business on it, evidenced by the rows of five-gallon racing fuel cans stacked in Routh’s building. The fuel can also be purchased in stores in Owatonna, Blue Earth and Mankato.

People can also get fuel 24/7 from the pump behind the building — but remember, it’s premium fuel. “If you want the most economical liquid that can still be considered gasoline, buy it at your local convenience store,” he said. “But if you want a product to help a machine operate at peak performance, that’s what we offer. And the price is what it is.”

Sometimes, you get what you pay for. is provided by Cargill. So they’re providing food ingredients that then are used to manufacture finished food products.”

There are now 55 Cargill Feed & Nutrition plants across the U.S., and, according to Severson, that division of Cargill employs a total of about 2,300 people, whereas Cargill, Inc. employs close to 160,000 people.

The New Richland Cargill plant is in the process of hiring four new people for a total of 20 who work at the plant. In the last four years, the plant has gone from running two shifts to round-the-clock production.

Severson summarizes: “Our business has continued to grow pretty well. It’s been Cargill since it was built, and it’s been here 40 years, and we plan to be here another 40.”

Routh raced motocross and supercross from when he was 15, so he knows a thing or two about racing fuels. Star Eagle photo by Jim Lutgens

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Perdue comments at World Dairy Expo trigger reactions

By NOAH FISH
(MADISON, Wis.) At the country's premier dairy event of the year — of all places — U.S. Secretary of Agriculture Sonny Perdue expressed doubt that smaller farms will survive in the dairy industry.

While speaking at a town hall meeting on Oct. 1 with farmers and dairy industry officials at the World Dairy Expo in Madison, Perdue made comments that sparked reaction from across the dairy industry.

"Big get bigger, and small go out," said Perdue of industries in America. "It's very difficult on economies of scale with the capital needs and all the environmental regulations and everything else today to survive milking 40, 50, 60 or even 100 cows."

Without ramping up production and scale, Perdue said small dairy operations will struggle to stay afloat. No small business in America has "guaranteed income or guaranteed profitability of survival," he added.

When asked directly if he believed small dairy farms would have to get bigger in order to survive, Perdue said "that remains to be seen."

Rochester dairy farmer Jeannette Sheehan has participated as a coach, judge and competitor at the World Dairy Expo for the last decade and a half. Last year, she was named Dairy Woman of the Year.

It was a questionable setting for Perdue to share his input, said Sheehan, who serves on the board for the World Dairy Expo. She said she was excited when the board secured Perdue's attendance for the expo, but they didn't know what his message would be.

The Census of Agriculture showed a steep drop in U.S. dairy farms in the last 10 years. Minnesota lost more than a thousand dairies over that time. But for Sheehan, Perdue's comments ignore that the success of a farm of any size is contingent on the operator and management.

"We can survive as small farms, you just have to be a really good manager and have a plan," said Sheehan.

Hours after the town hall event, Minnesota Farmers Union shared its disappointment in the secretary's latest comments. This comes just two months after MFU took public opposition to statements made by Perdue at Minnesota Farmfest, when the secretary joked about farmers being "whiners."

"It's incredibly frustrating to hear things like this from someone who's supposed to represent all family farmers," said MFU President Gary Wertish. "The 'get big or get out' business philosophy hasn't worked. Rather it has caused consolidation in the agriculture industry that's driven too many family farmers off the farm and hurt rural communities."

The response to Perdue's comments from the Minnesota Farm Bureau showed the contrast of views between the state's two largest farm organizations.

"I think it's important that the ag secretary expresses his views in public, whether it's at the World Dairy Expo, Farmfest or congressional hearings," said Paap. "In all of agriculture, there's a lot of serious financial and emotional challenges out there."

"It's getting harder to get by," he said. "I would say the same thing as the secretary did, and I don't think it's dairy specific, it's all of agriculture."
Tips for dealing with home insect invasions

(StatePoint) While a pest problem can cause embarrassment and concern, you can take comfort in the fact that not only is the problem more common than you may think, but there are new ways of dealing with insects that can help you manage the problem without using harsh chemicals.

Finding a roach in the home ranked number one in terms of “Grossness,” beating out cleaning the toilet, cleaning the gutters and removing hair from the shower drain, in a recent survey conducted by Zevo, a maker of bug killer sprays and traps that are safe for use around people and pets when used as directed. But beyond the “ew” factor, households will want to manage pest problems for health and safety reasons.

“Cockroaches and filth flies can serve as mechanical vectors for diseases,” points out Dr. Josh Benoit, an entomologist at the University of Cincinnati Department of Biological Sciences. “And ticks, mosquitoes, and kissing bugs can transmit pathogens that cause diseases.”

So, what are some smart, safe ways to prevent bug infestations and manage existing ones? Consider these tips to keep bugs in check this summer and beyond:

- Keep food sealed and stored properly. Get rid of crumbs around the kitchen or anywhere else you eat around the house. Regularly sweeping and wiping down counters can help.
- Prevent buildup of moisture on surfaces and remove standing water to prevent mosquito (and other bug) breeding around the home.
- Never bring in unwashed, used furniture and other objects. Before introducing such items into your home, inspect them carefully.
- Over 90 percent of people are concerned with having bugs in their home, but almost an equal amount are concerned with using traditional insecticide products, according to a Zevo survey, making sprays that don’t contain harsh chemicals a household essential. Made from friendly ingredients, Zevo Instant Action Spray, for example, features essential oils that target nerve receptors active only in insects, not people or pets.
- Bugs often enter homes through garages and open doors. Set up a line of defense by keeping windows, doors and garages closed as much as possible, and by placing chemical-free traps, such as Zevo flying insect traps, in your garage or other areas that get high bug traffic. The traps plug into outlets around the home and use multi-spectrum light technology and a body heat attractant to lure pesky flying bugs to their doom.

Pest management is always a challenge, but arming yourself with information and effective solutions can help prevent and combat infestations.

PHOTO SOURCE: (c) Sarah Lampley
Making organic certification more affordable
Rebates now available to farms and handlers

Minnesota organic farmers and processors can apply for a rebate of up to 75 percent of the cost of their organic certification through The Minnesota Department of Agriculture’s (MDA) Organic Cost Share Program. Applications are now being accepted until October 31, 2019.

Organic certification is a third-party verification system. It assures consumers the organic products they buy are produced in accordance with federal organic regulations. Organic operations must follow National Organic Standards and are monitored through review of their records and on-site inspections at least once a year.

Funds for the cost share program come from a cooperative agreement with the United States Department of Agriculture Farm Service Agency (USDA-FSA). Operations that received certification (or had ongoing certification) between October 1, 2018 and September 30, 2019 are eligible for reimbursement of up to 75 percent of certification-related expenses.

The maximum rebate available is $750 per category (crop, livestock, processing/handling, wild harvest). The MDA also offers a similar cost share program for transitioning to organic.

To qualify, applicants must be certified organic by a USDA-accredited certifying agency. The MDA has already mailed application packets to all certified organic operations in the state.

Any certified organic farmer or processor who did not receive a packet can obtain all the program details and necessary materials on the Organic Agriculture section of the MDA’s website or by contacting Cassie Dahl, Organic Agriculture Specialist, at 651-201-6134 or cassie.dahl@state.mn.us. Applicants that do not wish to apply with MDA may apply through their local USDA-FSA Office.

How your family can protect songbirds

(StatePoint) Songbirds are not only beautiful, they are a vital component of the ecosystems they inhabit. If you have a garden, you may have observed this in action. Unfortunately, millions of wild birds are killed annually colliding with windows in the U.S. alone. But your family can take action to prevent it from happening on your own property. Here’s how:

• Make windows visible to birds: Special decals that reflect ultraviolet sunlight to your home’s windows, particularly those windows that are highly reflective of open sky, have been proven to substantially reduce the likelihood of bird strikes. Those from WindowAlert feature patterns that give the appearance of slightly frosted translucent glass, but glow like a stoplight for birds, and the brand also makes a high-tech liquid called WindowAlert UV Liquid, which can be applied between decals for greater protection. More information can be found at windowalert.com.

• Be mindful of birdfeeder placement: Birdfeeders are a lovely way to attract beautiful birds to your yard, while giving them a place to rest and refuel. Remember though, bird strikes tend to occur near bird feeders, as feeding birds are easily frightened and are apt to take wild, evasive flight. To avoid this from happening, be sure to use window decals, as well as to position feeders closer than three feet or farther than 30 feet from windows. Surprisingly, the safest placement is attached to the window itself. Assess the birdfeeders in your yard and make changes as needed.

• Consider other hazards: Other ways you can protect birds on your property include gardening organically, keeping pet cats indoors or in an enclosure and growing native plant and flower species suited to pollinating birds.

“With a few small home updates this season, your family can save the lives of wild birds and be better stewards of the environment,” says Spencer Schock, founder of WindowAlert.
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