

**NRHEG STAR EAGLE** 

THURSDAY, MARCH 24, 2016

## Making 'The butter that betters the bread'

### Ellendale's Victor Mrotz didn't want to see a good thing end

#### By KATHY PAULSEN Staff Writer

Thursday, March 24, 2016

Great, great-grandpas were farmers.

Great-grandpas were farmers.

Grandpas were farmers.

Dad was a farmer.

For Victor Mrotz, farming just came naturally. He bought his first cows when he was just 13 by saving money from a summer job at the school in Ellendale.

After graduating from Ellendale High School in 1980, he went on to Dunwoody Institute. In 1982, he graduated from Dunwoody with a degree in machine design and drafting.

Victor went on work in the engineering department for Wolf Associates in Mounds View, designing conveyors. He later designed high-speed packing equipment, but his interest was always farming.

He used the acquired knowledge he acquired and, when the opportunity to "go home" to the family farm came, he took it.

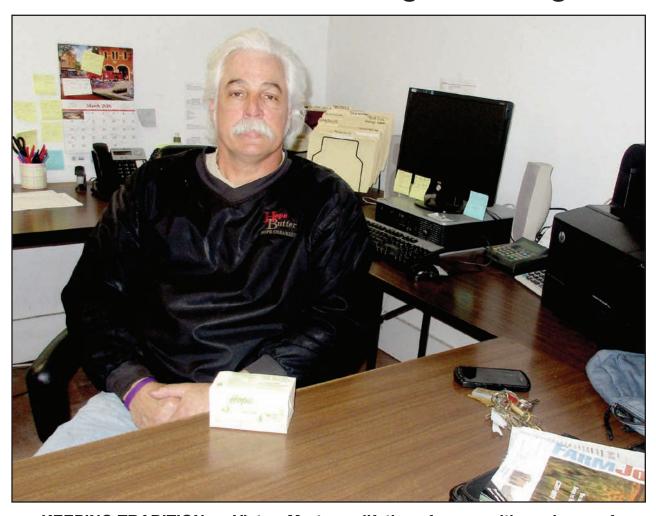
Victor's, parents, Dale and Barbara Mrotz, purchased their farm from Irish sisters Sedate Stearns and Hattie McFarland.

These two ladies, better known as "The Finch Sisters," sold their farms to Dale and Barbara in 1965 and '77. The ladies sold their farms with the assurance that Barb and Dale were good people who would maintain their precious land with the utmost love and care.

The Mrotz family didn't let the ladies down and have gone on care for this land for 50 years now. Like most farmers, they really do love the land!

Victor met his wife, Kellie, at the Green Mill in Minneapolis while she and her family, the Richard Currans of Burnsville, were enjoying a night on the town. Kellie approached Victor, asking him to help play a joke on her brother, and the rest is history.

Victor and Kellie were united in marriage on May 29, 1993 and Victor and his brother, Monty, decided to start farming together, renting land from their father and grandfather, Ethan Langlie. The boys farmed together for two years and in 1995 Victor took over. Victor and Kellie bought the family farm in 1997, living on the land where Victor grew up and still lives today.



KEEPING TRADITION – Victor Mrotz, a lifetime farmer with a degree from Dunwoody, devoted himself to keeping the Hope Creamery alive and doing things the old-fashioned way. Hope butter is now a sought-after premium product.

Star Eagle photo by Kathy Paulsen

Agriculture has changed considerably over the years, but has continued to be an interesting occupation. There is also a great deal of risk. Getting into the "field" of agriculture is not as easy as it once was. Costs are higher and financing is a major challenge. Equipment is much larger and more expensive and the mechanics of it all has changed a great deal since those old "horse and buggy days." Despite all that, there are those who still love being in the fields and watching those crops come to maturity. Agriculture in Minnesota is still a major industry, driving the economy of both rural and metropolitan areas.

Victor continues to grow corn, beans, sweet corn, peas, oats and alfalfa on the farm. He raises a few beef cattle, some young stock, has one horse and two dogs.

As a consumer, it is easy to forget about the

entire process that goes into producing the many products we purchase in our local supermarkets. How often do we think about what it takes to produce that gallon of milk or make a loaf a bread? Like a good many other farmers today, Victor's day is filled with a variety of typical farm chores, raising crops and cattle. Victor bales not only hay but other forage material, recycling and making use of fodder and bedding.

When the creamery in Hope was about to close, Victor looked at the situation. Not only did he feel empathy about the closing of such an authentic old creamery, but the loss would be felt in the local community as well. He felt that maybe with Kellie's support they could keep the operation going. It was a courageous gamble

Mrotz continued on 3

#### ■ Mrotz

from Page 2

that required a lot of work and intelligent organization, plus someone who knew something about being a buttermaker.

Gene Kruckeberg, who had been the head buttermaker in Hope, agreed to stay on. Jay Logan, a former classmate of Victor's, had worked at the Union Creamery and joined Victor, and they all worked together to make that famous Hope Butter. They continue to make butter the old way, using the old recipe and the original equipment with a slower method of processing than most companies do today.

In what started as an unnamed milk stop on the railroad, well over a hundred years ago, the dairy business and the Hope Creamery have gone on to be an integral part of this agricultural community. Three batches of Hope Butter are churned each week, which amounts to 7,500 pounds of that great Hope Butter.

Victor and his crew — Jay Logan, Gene Kruckeberg, Cody Blouin, Brandon Nicholson, Curt Johnson, Brian Nelson, Tim Sammon, Samuel Pfenning, Bill Wagner and Ethan Johnson — help create the butter. Kellie runs the office in Ellendale, with the help of Katie Winzenburg, and Tim Christman works as a salesman in the Twin Cities area.

AG SPECIAL

Purchasing the Hope Creamery was also an answer to a desire to augment his farming experience for income and satisfaction and save the creamery at Hope, one of the last small-batch creameries in the state.

"The butter that betters the bread," is now found not only in Minnesota but in several other states. Victor used his marketing experience, personality and integrity and has taken his butter to prestigious restaurants and markets in the Twin Cities.

Once he got his foot in the front door and they tasted Hope Butter,

they were sold. Victor distributes his Hope Butter as far north as Minneapolis, St. Paul, Northfield and Faribault, as well as to Rochester, Mankato and Iowa. He received requests from places in Chicago who had heard about his butter and wondered how they could be included in his clientele. Always accommodating, he told them he could specially wrap the butter and pack it in ice and Styrofoam, double box it and then send it on its merry way, parcel post.

Discriminating people buy it by the case and share it with friends and family. He is exporting a bit of our part of the world to others.

A relative of mine from Arizona, visiting Minnesota, was going to make an apple crisp and was looking for margarine in her sister's refrigerator. Her sister said, "No, use the Hope butter. The price difference doesn't matter, but the flavor does."

She took her sister' advice name. He is a "victor."

and was amazed at the difference.

Victor donates and delivers four cases of Hope Butter each year to the Geneva Cancer Auction. It is auctioned by the pound, and they have no problem getting bids.

This year marks the 15th year he has been making that great Hope Butter.

Victor and his famous butter were featured by Rick Nelson of the Star Tribune in the Variety Section of the newspaper a couple of times in January. Victor recently attended a book signing of Lenny Russo of the Heartland Restaurant in St. Paul. Lenny featured Victor in a cookbook.

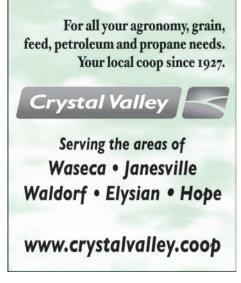
Victor and his wife, Kellie, live west of Ellendale and are the parents of two children, Hudson and Sophia. Hudson graduated from NRHEG in 2015 and is going to school in Duluth pursing a degree in engineering. Sophia is in ninth grade.

Victor Mrotz lives up to his



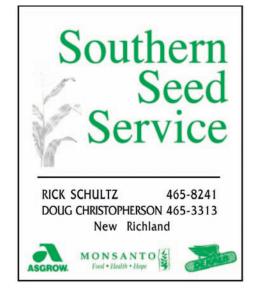


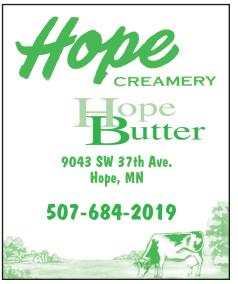












(Ag Connection) - The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) Wednesday announced awards totaling more than \$4.5 million to support college and university faculty who develop innovative projects that advance agriculture and science education. An additional \$4.5 million will also be available for new projects that will prepare the future agri-science workforce. These awards are made through the Higher Education Challenge (HEC) grants program, administered by USDA's National Institute of Food and Agriculture (NIFA).

Thursday, March 24, 2016

"With more than 60,000 jobs opening up in the agriculture industry in the next five years alone, funding higher education projects and programs that increase the skill and preparation of students is an essential step to filling those jobs with the next generation of agriculture professionals," said Sonny

Ramaswamy, NIFA director.

Projects and research that receive HEC funding address a state, regional, national, or international educational need; involve a creative or non-traditional approach that may serve as a model; encourage and facilitate better working relationships in the university science and education community and the private sector; and result in benefits that last beyond the project duration and USDA support.

NIFA has awarded more than \$34 million to the HEC program since 2009 to ensure that quality training and education continues and progresses for higher-education agriculture and science students. Fiscal year 2015 awards include University of Minnesota, Minneapolis, which will receive \$626.856.

Texas Tech University will conduct research to develop curricu-

lum models at three universities for agriculture communications graduates, and share these models nationwide for other programs. A project from the University of Delaware will address textile industry concerns about a lack of qualified employees with expertise in sustainable textile and apparel design to reduce environmental impact of during production, development, and sourcing. A complete list of this year's project descriptions is available on the NIFA website.

Applications for \$4.5 million in available HEC funding for the next fiscal year are due April 22. Please see the request for applications for more details. An informational webinar will be held on March 23, 2:00-3:00 p.m. EST to provide an overview of the program.

A May 2015 report released by NIFA and Purdue University showed that there is tremendous

demand for recent college graduates with a degree in agricultural programs, with an estimated 57,900 high-skilled job openings annually in the food, agriculture, renewable natural resources, and environment fields in the United States. Meanwhile, there is an average of 35,400 new U.S. graduates with a bachelor's degree or higher in agriculture related fields, 22,500 short of the jobs available annually. The report projects almost half of the job opportunities will be in management and business. Another 27 percent will be in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) areas. Jobs in food and biomaterials production will make up 15 percent, and 12 percent of the openings will be in education, communication, and governmental services.









### Video examines tax options

(UofM) University of Minnesota Extension has created a 10-part video series on the basics of taxation in agriculture, discussing the impact of farm liquidation, debt forgiveness and bankruptcy on farm taxes.

order to defer federal and state tax liability. A deferred tax liability is the amount of tax that the producer would owe if the operation was liquidated today.

According to the University of Minnesota farm financial database (FIN-

We anticipate 2015 will be the third consecutive year that Minnesota farmers experience low net farm income due to poor commodity prices and a high cost structure. This downturn has led to financial stress in the agricultural community.

Most farm operating loans are renewed in March. As renewal time approaches, producers need to be aware of all options if they find themselves in financial difficulty. They may need to liquidate some assets, restructure existing debt, or possibly restructure the entire business to maintain financing for the operation.

"It is very important for producers to understand some of the basics of farm taxation in order to successfully negotiate with lenders," said Rob Holcomb, Extension educator in agricultural business management.

From 2003 through 2012, production agriculture experienced high profitability. During this time, many producers deferred sales and increased expenses in

order to defer federal and state tax liability. A deferred tax liability is the amount of tax that the producer would owe if the operation was liquidated today. According to the University of Minnesota farm financial database (FINBIN), in 2000, the average deferred tax liability for Minnesota farmers was \$87,000. In 2014 that deferred tax liability had swelled to over \$283,000. This growth is a result of a number of factors, including increased land prices, increased levels of prepaid expenses and deferred commodity sales.

The video series begins with a basic discussion of how everything is taxed in the farming operation. The videos also address the sale and taxation of depreciable and non-depreciable assets, installment sales, cancellation of debt and bankruptcy.

"When dealing with farm financial stress, the manager with good data for his or her operation combined with a tax and financial management skill set is well equipped to make quality management decisions," Holcomb said.

The video is available here: http://www.extension.umn.edu/agriculture/business/taxation/2016-tax-implications-videos/index.html







## Labeling Act is big part of Farm Bureau conference

### By CHAD SMITH

agrinews

Farmers and ranchers from across Minnesota held face-to-face conversations with elected officials in Washington, D.C., as a part of the American Farm Bureau's National Advocacy Conference from Feb. 22-24.

Farm Bureau research shows the most effective way to communicate with elected officials is actually in Washington. Agriculture faces a lot of challenges, and as Minnesota Farm Bureau President Kevin Paap said, "If you're not at the (policy) table, you're probably going to be

on the menu."

"It's a yearly conference we do out there primarily geared toward state leadership," he said. "On



Papp

he said. "Our e n t i r e

(Minnesota) state board of directors was out there, and they talked about the issues. Prior to that, the issue advisory committees met. They deal with things like organic farming, water, energy, trade and ag labor."

Marlin Fay, a Mower County farmer who sits on the Energy Advisory Committee, went along. One of the biggest things they work on in that committee is regulatory reform.

"It really shows up in energy policy," Fay said, "specifically with the EPA and what they've done to try to get things passed. The big one with the EPA is they used Twitter, Facebook and other social media to try to propel the Waters of the U.S. bill into passing."

Fay feels the problem with the EPA trying to get around the nolobbying rule is no one is holding them accountable, and it's extremely expensive to do so. In order to sue the government, you have to

use Washington lawyers, which he said will "about double the cost."

"We kind of parted with regular Farm Bureau policy on the Energy Advisory Committee," Fay said, "and urged the Farm Bureau to push for the abolishment of the EPA in the FERC, which is the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission."

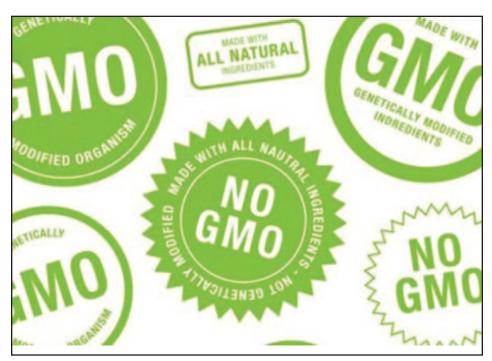
During conversations in the offices of state representatives and senators, Farm Bureau members stressed the need to deal with a lot of issues but really pushed three issues to the forefront.

"The issues we need to be the most timely with is the Biotech Labeling Bill," Paap said, "with the July 1 Vermont deadline. We also released our study on the Trans Pacific Partnership and analyzed how it would affect each state. We also talked regulatory reform, including the Waters of the U.S. Rule and the Endangered Species Act."

Vermont is at the core of the food labeling debate. In 2014, the state passed a law that says foods that have, or might have, genetically modified organisms in them need to be labeled as such. Connecticut and Maine passed similar laws, with the caveat it wouldn't go into effect unless nearby states enacted similar laws.

"The House of Representatives voted overwhelmingly for the Safe and Accurate Food Labeling Act," Paap said, "and we're waiting for action on the Senate side. Ag committee chairman Pat Roberts has put a package together, and they're trying to line up support."

The goal of the act is to make the Food and Drug Administration the sole decision maker regarding what needs to be labeled and what doesn't. Proponents argue haphazard state labeling requirements will make it difficult for food companies to do interstate business, thus driving up the cost of food for consumers.



SOME SUGGESTED product labels for food products.

Graphic: FoodFacts.com

Trade was another topic of discussion, particularly as it relates to the Trans Pacific Partnership Agreement. Paap said the U.S. became a player in the negotiations after Congress gave President Barack Obama fast track authority last year.

"Negotiations on the TPP are done," Paap said. "It's gone back to the 12 member countries for them to take a look at. We probably won't see any action on it here until after the next elections."

Minnesota Farm Bureau expects the TPP to add 1,750 jobs to the Minnesota economy, as well as increase cash receipts and next exports from the state by \$425.1 million and \$231.6 million, respectively.

Risk management tools, specifically the Federal Crop Insurance program, are in the target sites of budget cutters for the upcoming discussions. Paap said the harvest price option is the most targeted part of crop insurance.

"Crop insurance will always be at risk, even though we've got a contract," Paap said. "Through appropriation talks and budget deals, crop insurance will always be at risk because that's where the money is."

Farm Bureau members also discussed the importance of regulatory reform as it relates to the Endangered Species Act, specifically as it relates to the gray wolf and the long-nosed bat.



## Commodities, USDA leaders chat GMO labeling

#### By JEFF CALDWELL Agriculture.com

STAR EAGLE

Labeling is a hot topic on the consumer-facing side of the food and feed production industry. Now, the side closer to the producer has putt more of an emphasis on it, if talks at February's Commodity Classic are an indication.

American Soybean Association (ASA) and National Corn Growers Association (NCGA) leaders, as well as those from USDA, talked labeling at the get-together of the nation's major grain-producer associations in Phoenix, Arizona. It's a new take on an idea that's been around for a while, but this time, it's aimed at a different sector of the business. Labeling was discussed in several venues and contexts during February's gathering of corn, soybean, wheat and sorghum growers.

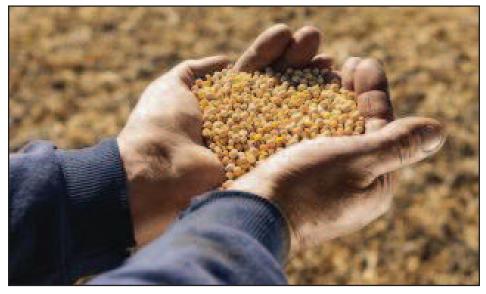
The labeling being discussed at Commodity Classic pertained to GMOs, but how they're labeled --

and what specifically those labels will say and, more importantly, omit -- was far from consensus among the major commodity groups gathered in Arizona.

Take the ASA approach. The group is pushing for a "non-GMO" label, one that would comprise a "positive message to the consumer" without tarnishing GMOs as staples of modern grain production. It's a "new model," ASA leaders say, but with USDA's full backing, the labeling standard could gain wide consumer acceptance, according to ASA leaders.

The NCGA's take on labeling is different in one key way: It essensupports Congressman Mike Pompeo's push for GMO labeling if those modified products are "ever found to be unsafe or materially different from foods produced without GM ingredients."

Now, enter USDA. The federal agency's stance on GMOs falls in



LABELING - "Positive message to consumer?"

line with ASA's and NCGA's, but the labeling talk at Commodity Classic comes at the issue from a different angle. It's more of an emphasis on traceability in the context of showing products containing genetically modified material is the same in its consumer safety as organic equivalents, according to Ag Secretary Tom Vilsack. The

USDA approach supports the creation of a standardized set of bar codes for grains and produce that, in addition to full traceability, could show the consumer the contents' genetic makeup, be it organic or genetically modified.

7

"There is no health risk or safety risk with GMOs," Vilsack said.



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## Watershed projects funded in Minnesota, Iowa

### By JEAN CASPERS-SIMMET agrinews

USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service announced this month an investment of \$25 million targeted to help agriculture producers improve water quality in high-priority streams and rivers across the country. Through the National Water Quality Initiative, NRCS will help agricultural producers in 187 priority watersheds apply conservation measures that contribute to cleaner water downstream. Three watersheds in Minnesota and five in Iowa, including one new watershed, are part of the initiative.

"Clean water is in everyone's interest and the best way to achieve it is through the types of partnerships forged by programs like NWQI," said Cathee Pullman, NRCS state conservationist in Minnesota. "When farmers, ranchers and forest landowners come together to improve water quality, we're able to achieve bigger benefits."

The goal of NWQI is to implement conservation practices in sufficient quantity within a concentrated area so that agriculture no longer contributes to the impairment of water bodies within these priority watersheds. NRCS and partners work with producers and landowners to implement voluntary conservation practices, such as nutrient management, cover crops, conservation cropping systems, filter strips, terraces and buffers, that improve water quality in high-priority watersheds while maintaining agricultural productivity.

For this year, NRCS added 17 new watersheds to NWQI.

Minnesota selected three NWQI watersheds for 2016, Gilchrist Lake Watershed, Elm Creek Watershed, and Seven Mile Creek. All three watersheds are impaired due to sediment and turbidity. Gilchrist Watershed is a tributary to the Chippewa River, located in the south-east portion of Pope County. Elm Creek Watershed is a tributary to Blue Earth River in the Minnesota River Basin and is located in the western portion of Faribault County and the northeastern portion of Martin County. Seven Mile Creek Watershed is in the Middle Minnesota River Basin in Nicollet County. The primary land use in the Gilchrist, Elm Creek and Sevenmile Creek is agriculture.

In Iowa NRCS is offering financial assistance to landowners in the Headwaters Wolf Creek Watershed in Wayne and Lucas counties in southern Iowa to implement conservation practices that improve water quality. The signup deadline is April 15. Four other small Iowa watersheds will receive their third year of USDA-NWQI funding in 2016, Badger Creek in Madison, Dallas and Warren counties; Lost Branch-Chariton River in Wayne and Lucas Counties; Lower South Fork Chariton River in Appanoose and Wayne counties, and Wall Lake Inlet/Black Hawk Lake in Sac and Carroll counties.

Since 2012, conservation systems have been placed on almost 500,000 acres in priority watersheds through NWQI, supported by \$100 million in USDA investments. Now in its fifth year, NWQI has expanded to include more small watersheds across the nation, and it builds on efforts to

deliver high-impact conservation in areas such as the Mississippi River basin, Gulf of Mexico, Chesapeake Bay and Great Lakes.

In 2016, NRCS is bolstering its water quality efforts by introducing a new evaluation tool in selected NWQI watersheds. The resource stewardship evaluation tool will help producers assess how their farm or ranch is operating, the value of conservation already in place, and to identify areas they may want to improve and practices they may want to implement to get them there.

"As farmers and ranchers work to improve water quality while providing food and fiber for the nation, they also help provide their communities with clean waterways, safe drinking water and healthy habitat for fish and wildlife," Pullman said.

For more information visit the Minnesota NRCS website at www.mn.nrcs.usda.go or the Iowa NRCS website at www.ia.nrcs.usda.gov.

## 'Bird Flu' confirmed in MN commercial turkey flock

### By JORDAN ANDERSON

agriculture.com

According to the United States Department of Agriculture's (USDA) Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS), a serious strain of avian influenza, more commonly known as "bird flu," has been confirmed by in a western Minnesota commercial turkey farm where it has killed 15,000 birds since February 26.

Out of four barns on the farm, only one has experienced loss and tested positive for avian flu. The farm is being quarantined, and some birds will be euthanized to stop the spread of the virus. This is the only farm in Minnesota confirmed with the flu.

After noticing increased mortality, the turkey breeder sent samples from the replacement flock to the University of Minnesota Veterinary Diagnostic Laboratory and the APHIS National Veterinary Services Laboratories in Ames, Iowa to be tested, which then confirmed the presence of avian influenza.

"APHIS is partnering closely with the Minnesota Board of Animal Health on a joint incident response," says an APHIS report. "State officials quarantined the affected premises and the remaining birds on the property will be depopulated to prevent the spread of the disease."

This "highly pathogenic" H5N2 avian influenza strain has killed wild and backyard birds in Washington, Oregon, and Idaho (part of the Pacific flyway), but this is the first finding in the Mississippi flyway, which includes Minnesota.

Although APHIS and the Minnesota Board of Animal Health are following all protocol to keep the disease contained, U.S. poultry exports have halted, especially to China, says Minnesota Agriculture Commissioner Dave Frederickson.

"The United States has the strongest AI surveillance program in the world, and USDA is working with its partners to actively look for the disease in commercial poultry operations, live bird markets, and in migratory wild bird populations," says the report. "USDA will be informing OIE (the World Organization for Animal Health) and international trading partners of this finding."

According to a news report released from the University of Minnesota, in recent months 2.7 million birds have been killed by the disease or destroyed to prevent spreading an outbreak of avian flu in South Korea and Taiwan.

The Center for Disease Control (CDC) considers the risk to people as low. Workers handling the birds are the only ones at risk of infection. The Minnesota Department of Health (MDH) is monitoring the four workers who directly came in contact with the birds, and there have been no signs of illness thus far.

The MDH is also working with the other workers and the facility to make sure that proper precautions are being taken as to not spread the AI strain.

However, remember that the proper handling and cooking of poultry and eggs to an internal temperature of 165 degrees Fahrenheit kills bacteria and viruses.

Minnesota produces more turkeys than any other state (\$750 million a year with \$92 million in exports in 2013.)

# Pheasant Action Plan shows need for support

(Ag Connection) - Actions to improve grassland pheasant habitat and pheasant populations are off to a positive start, but much of the work remains ahead, according to a report card developed by the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources that tracks progress on the state's Pheasant Summit Action Plan.

"The report card highlights positive action and trends on a number of specific items that improve pheasant populations and pheasant hunting," said DNR Commissioner Tom Landwehr. "However, as the 2016 legislative session gets started, we are at a critical fork in the road for the pheasant plan that may decide whether we make meaningful progress or head on a downward trend."

Legislators currently have several pheasant plan action items on their agenda for consideration, including Outdoor Heritage Fund recommen-



An enhanced program to protect pheasant habitat is proposed.

dations, which support pheasant habitat protection and enhancement through a variety of state and nonprofit organization programs; Gov. Mark Dayton's bonding proposal, which increases funding for public land acquisition as well as provides funding for private land conservation through the Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP); and legislation that boosts the amount of roadside habitat available.

The report card is an important component of the Pheasant Summit Action Plan because it allows the DNR, partners, and the public to monitor progress on the ten strategies and associated action steps in the plan. It also highlights areas that need additional resources.

"Pheasant populations are an indicator of the health of the landscape," said Kevin Lines, DNR pheasant action plan coordinator. "Pheasant habitat is important not only for hunters, but also for all Minnesotans who care about clean water, healthy soils and our state's natural heritage."

While improving pheasant habitat and providing quality hunting opportunity require public land acquisitions from willing sellers, is more than 95 percent of the pheasant range is in private ownership. For that reason, private lands conservation programs, such as CREP, are an important component of suc-

"The proposed CREP would permanently protect and restore grassland and wetlands on the most environmentally sensitive and beneficial acres," said John Jaschke, executive director of the Minnesota Board of Water and Soil Resources (BWSR). "It's a multi-benefit approach that will yield significant progress both for Minnesota's water quality and wildlife needs."

9

The CREP proposal is a fiveagency effort led by BWSR that includes the Minnesota Department Agriculture, Minnesota Department of Health, Minnesota Pollution Control Agency and the DNR.

The 2016 Report available www.mndnr.gov/pheasantaction. www.bwsr.state.mn.us/ Visit crep/CREP Proposal Summary F act\_Sheet.pdf for facts and funding figures about the CREP proposal.





# Picking your garden plant portfolio

### How to calculate your ROI on your homegrown veggies

(MN Ag Connection) If you've ever asked yourself which vegetables make the most sense to grow in your garden, a study from the founder of Square Foot Gardening has the answer. And the results may surprise.

on investment. Using data from the U.S. Department of Agriculture and price surveys of produce costs in stores throughout the country, he was able to determine which garden crops offer the biggest paysurprise.

Mel Bartholomew, whose Square Foot Gardening books have sold 2.5 million copies, turned his calculator toward the food we grow in our gardens to see what gives the biggest bang for your buck.

"There are real costs involved in growing," Bartholomew says. "If you're going to make an investment in edibles, treat your garden the same way you treat your 401K. It all comes down to ROI."

Bartholomew, a former engineer, developed a mathematical formula for objectively calculating return

on investment. Using data from the U.S. Department of Agriculture and price surveys of produce costs in stores throughout the country, he was able to determine which garden crops offer the biggest payback. He analyzed the 59 most popular vegetables among home gardeners and, when the study was complete, some definite winners and losers emerged. The results of the study are detailed in, Square Foot Gardening High Value Veggies: Homegrown Produce Ranked by Value.

"Every gardener has favorites," Bartholomew noted, "so I was a little worried my list would offend some people. But the numbers are the numbers. In the end, of course, you should grow whatever you want for whatever reason you

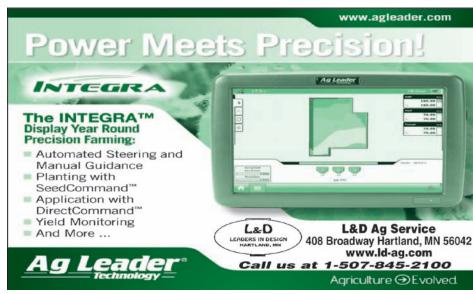


Herbs are a big winner in the veggie portfolio.

choose."

According to Bartholomew, the veggie with the highest return on investment is: Herbs, including favorites as cilantro, oregano and thyme, which finished at the top of the study offering a return of nearly \$70 worth of produce for every square foot planted. The runner-up and highest-ranked true "veg-

etable" is the parsnip at \$35 per square foot. At the other end of the scale are some popular crops, including bell peppers (you'll lose about \$2 for every square foot planted). At the bottom of the Veggie Value list are potatoes, with a return of negative \$6 per square foot, compared to the cost of buying them at market.









11



