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KENTUCKY FARM BUREAU NEWS
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contents

**Water Quality
Program** 6

**Roadside Markets
Feature** 8

**Beef Grading
Program** 10

**County
Corner** 16

Markets 20

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Kentucky's legislature has done a commendable job responding to agriculture's needs. Our historic agricultural development initiative, research and educational services, the role of the state Department of Agriculture, conservation programs and tax policy are just a few areas where the General Assembly has provided resources to help farmers move forward.

We also need to give a nod to the Executive Branch for its continued support for these major initiatives. The concept of utilizing tobacco settlement funds to boost our farm economy has been strongly supported by each of the three governors who have served since the agreement was reached 17 years ago.

Kentucky has invested far more of its tobacco settlement funds in agricultural development than any other tobacco state. This has proved to be a wise decision as our farm economy is more diverse than ever before.

The 2015 General Assembly continued the tradition by enacting House Bill 510, which continues funding for the popular Soil Erosion Water Quality Cost Share Fund while also strengthening the state and county agricultural development accounts. The new money comes as a result of last year's resolution of a dispute over the Master Settlement Agreement. House Bill 510 appropriated \$21 million of the \$57 million to agriculture programs.

The FY 2016 appropriation of \$5 million to the Soil Erosion Water Quality Cost Share Fund is an important development. Since the program's inception in 2014, more than 13,500 farmers have received financial and technical assistance in implementing "best management practices." KFB should be proud of this because we led the effort for the legislation in the 1994 session and then had state and county leaders, along with staff members, involved in developing the program.

Our thanks go to House Appropriations and Revenue Committee Chairman Rick Rand, who was the primary sponsor of HB 510. Co-sponsors included two lawmakers with extensive Farm Bureau backgrounds: House Agriculture Committee Chairman Tom McKee and Representative Wilson Stone.

A key ally on the Senate side was Agriculture Committee Chairman Paul Hornback, who formerly served on our Board of Directors.

An overwhelming majority of our state lawmakers have been strong supporters of agriculture over the years -- particularly as we have reshaped our farm economy in response to tobacco's decline. Kentucky farmers are fortunate to operate in a state that has not lost sight of its rural landscape.



Mark Haney

President

Kentucky Farm Bureau

Scott County FB celebrates new Bevins Motor site



Posing at the Scott County FB booth were (from left) Jimmy Bevins, Scott County FB President Jimmy Richardson, Dianne Dawson, Darcy Smith, Roger Quarles and agent Eric Parker.



The new facility on U.S. 25 south of Georgetown has nearly 50,000 square feet of space.



Jimmy Bevins cut the ribbon at the grand opening.

It also was a grand day for Scott County FB when the Bevins Motor Company farm equipment business held a grand opening celebration on April 24 at its new facility on U.S. 25 just south of Georgetown. The 69-year-old business has been an integral part of the area's farmscape, which is why Scott County FB and other agriculture interests stood with the Bevins family through a zoning dispute that had threatened the move to a modern facility.

Bevins Motor Company is one of the oldest continuous businesses in the county and is the only farm implement dealer that offers full service on all brands. Scott County FB got involved in the zoning battle not only because of the importance of the business to farmers, but also to support Bill Bevins, the company founder who had become a pillar of the community through his business, activism and philanthropy. Mr. Bevins passed away last August at the age of 95. But not before shoveling the first dirt at the groundbreaking, which took place exactly a year prior to the grand opening.

His son, Jimmy Bevins, and staff put on quite a show for a good numbers of visitors that included many local leaders such as Scott County Judge-Executive George Lusby, Georgetown Mayor Tom Prather, State Senator Damon Thayer and State Representative Ryan Quarles. Mayor Prather praised the facility for "blending our past with our bright, economic future." He added: "This belongs to all of us. This is agribusiness at its finest."

The new 49,000-square-foot facility is on land the family has owned for years.

The event included exhibits, door prizes, a petting zoo and a free cookout lunch. Scott County FB was among the exhibitors, operating a booth promoting membership. Kentucky Sports Radio with host Matt Jones did their daily broadcast from inside the sales center and nearly every seat was filled. Jones began the broadcast by exclaiming "this is like a county fair!"

Bevins Motor Company has other stores in Mount Sterling, Paris and Richmond.



Kentucky Farm Bureau is a voluntary organization of farm families and their allies dedicated to serving as the voice of agriculture by identifying problems, developing solutions and taking actions which will improve net farm income, achieve better economic opportunities and enhance the quality of life for all.

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comment

C O L U M N

During my career with the Kentucky Division of Conservation it was gratifying to see how our agriculture community responded to ever growing environmental challenges. I watched Kentucky farmers adapt and make great strides in implementing practices that limit soil erosion and improve water quality. I also had the honor of being involved in the development and implementation of our historic Agriculture Water Quality Act.



Farm organizations and agencies have been supportive all along the way over the years, and most have implemented some type of program to encourage cooperative leadership on environmental issues, particularly in regards to water quality issues. Kentucky also has a wide range of resources to help farmers meet these challenges.

Each year a good number of our farmers utilize federal, state and local technical and financial assistance programs to put in place conservation practices that protect soil, water, and air quality resources. The recommended "best management practices" include such steps as maintaining vegetative covers and buffer strips that control soil erosion or install stack pads for handling livestock waste. There are dozens of other BMPs that enable producers to be good stewards of our resources.

Kentucky is among the top states in spending on conservation programs, as well as in the use of conservation tillage practices. Our agricultural water quality law, adopted in 1994, has long been regarded as a model for other states to follow. Under the Kentucky Soil Erosion and Water Quality Cost Share program, more than 13,500 Kentucky farmers have upgraded operations to ensure that their production practices do not impair waterways. The state cost share program has been invaluable to Kentucky in leveraging additional federal, state, local and private conservation program funds to assist in protecting out valuable resources.

Safeguarding land and water isn't an easy job, but it's something that farmers cannot, and will not, neglect. And thanks to their efforts, we all benefit from a better place to live.

Presently I have the privilege of chairing Kentucky Farm Bureau's Water Management Working Group. This 20-member group is charged with developing recommendations for enhancing water resources in Kentucky. This is no small task, and no trivial undertaking. Not only for farmers, but rural communities as well and requires us all to work together to find the solutions.

After four meetings we have identified goals, obtained a wealth of information on available resources and have formed our first subcommittee to work on improving Kentucky's State Drought Mitigation Plan and its response to agricultural drought issues, which is badly needed.

I look forward to learning more and working with these working group members to continue our efforts to assist farmers on natural resource issues.

Steve Coleman

Legislation rescues



Bruce Quarles has used the program for three improvements on his farm in Franklin County, including on a "heavy use" area pictured in the background.



Bruce Quarles used the cost-share program to improve a pasture where his sheep graze.

With deep roots in Kentucky's 20-year-old Agriculture Water Quality Law, KFB is praising a bill from the 2015 legislative session that continues funding for an associated cost-share program.

House Bill 510 appropriates \$5 million to the Soil Erosion and Water Quality Cost Share Program for Fiscal 2016, which begins in July. Without the legislation, the program would not have had appropriated funds for the first time in its formidable history.

Administered through the Kentucky Division of Conservation, the cost share program helps farmers comply with their required Water Quality Plan by providing up to 75 percent funding for recommended "Best Management Practices." The program has been wildly successful, with more than 13,500 Kentucky farmers receiving more than \$130 million in assistance. Applications have far exceeded the available resources over the years, which agriculture interests say affirms that farmers are committed to preserving their natural resources.

The cost-share program hit a home run in its first at-bat back in 1995, when the first participant used the assistance to fix a runoff problem at his dairy farm. Without taking action, he was facing a shutdown and a heavy fine from the Division of Water.

That farmer was among 499 who applied for assistance during the first sign-up period. Today, the program has assisted thousands of projects aimed at addressing the loss of topsoil, sediment, animal waste nutrients and other non-point source pollutants going into streams and other water sources.

Franklin County farmer Bruce Quarles has watched the program succeed from both the administrative and implementation perspectives. He serves on the Conservation District Board that reviews and determines eligibility of applications before forwarding them to the Kentucky Soil & Water Conservation Commission. In his farm opera-

cost-share program

tion, Quarles has utilized the cost-share program to install BMPs for pasture improvement, well protection and controlling runoff from a "heavy use" area for his cattle.

The cost-share program also is linked with technical assistance from the U.S. Natural Resources and Conservation Service (NRCS). Quarles says that was especially helpful to his operation.

"The expertise is valuable too; farmers don't have these ideas," said Quarles, a past president and current director for Franklin County FB. For example, he cited a complicated process of grading, graveling and installing filter fabric to reduce waste runoff and erosion in an area where his cattle congregate.

Quarles says the most common applications he has seen are for pasture improvements and animal waste control.

"This has been a big help to the cattle industry," he said.

Row crop operators benefit from a variety of erosion control BMPs.

The concept of a state Ag Water Quality Law surfaced amid mounting public concern about agriculture's impact on water quality. At that time in the early 1990s, the relationship between farmers and regulatory agencies was often adversarial. The situation prompted KFB and other farm groups to work with regulatory agencies, environmental groups, academia and others to develop the legislation. Media reports say the effort involved more than 250 representatives from agriculture, agribusiness, forestry, research, technical and regulatory agencies.

KFB leaders and staff then were involved in developing the BMPs and program guidelines under the new law, plus the cost-share program. The legislation specified a KFB representative to serve on the Kentucky Agricultural Water Quality Authority overseeing the program. That appointment is held by KFB Director Larry Thomas of Hardin County,

who is chairman of KFB's Natural Resources Advisory Committee.

Over the years KFB has lobbied strongly for funding, which has ranged from \$9 million annually to \$2 million.

"This has been a big help to the cattle industry."

"We certainly consider the Ag Water Quality Law as one of our most significant accomplishments," said KFB Executive Vice President David S. Beck, who at that time was the organization's chief lobbyist. He and his public affairs team spent many hours working on the legislation with government agencies, environmental groups and other farm organizations.

At KFB's 1996 annual meeting there wasn't an empty seat at a special confer-

ence on the Ag Water Quality Law and Cost-Share Program. Several farmers said the program was much-needed to resolve conflicts and correct problems. One farmer told the Owensboro

Messenger-Inquirer: "Often farmers don't know they have a problem or, if they have a problem, how to correct it."

State Representative Rick Rand of Trimble County was chief sponsor of both the legislation (SB 241) that created the program and restored its funding (HB 510). In each case he was well positioned -- in 1994, as chairman of the Senate Agriculture and Natural Resources Committee, and in 2015 as chairman of the House Appropriations and Revenue Committee.

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Country Corner grows with urban sprawl



Since starting a greenhouse and nursery operation near Shepherdsville 34 years ago, Ted Vowels Sr. has been steadily growing the business while watching urban sprawl grow his customer base.

The Highway 44 corridor between the Bullitt County communities of Shepherdsville and Mount Washington has been transformed over the years by migration from nearby Louisville. Vowels has seen many neighborhoods sprout up from farmland as he has grown his business to 12 greenhouses at the five-acre site on KY 44. Ironically, when he bought the land in 1980, there was a tobacco patch where his current market

building sits.

While Country Corner Greenhouse and Nursery isn't so "country" anymore, the business of producing perennials, nursery stock and seasonal flowers remains a bountiful use of that property. Country Corner, which is operated by Ted Sr., his son, Ted Jr., and daughter, Ann, is a fixture in the area's horticulture industry, as evidenced by its recent four-day "Spring Fling" customer appreciation days that attracted thousands of customers to stock up for the season at 20 percent discounts.

The Vowels jokingly track the popularity of the "Spring Fling" by the number of free hot dogs they serve during the

Saturday celebration. It has gone from 400 to more than a thousand, they say.

While they have a solid customer base within fast-growing Bullitt County, the Vowels also draw a good number from Louisville to the north and Elizabethtown-Radcliff from the south and west.

"Word-of-mouth has helped us a lot," says Ted Jr. "We've had people in here from as far away as Michigan who were told about us and stopped while traveling through here."

Ted Sr, 74, has had a green thumb all of his life, coming from a family that had a nursery business in western Jefferson County. Ted Jr. inherited the love of growing plants and has never done anything

else. Ann is the office manager and mom Carlene helps out at the store. They have 12 employees, including a couple who have been growing plants for decades.

Besides the 12 greenhouses on site, they have another nine on land that Ted Jr. owns.

Country Corner is open from March through the Christmas season, catering to all needs. The spring season is busiest with bedding plants, flowers and such. They also meet the autumn demand for pumpkins, gourds and mums, and then there's holiday poinsettias. An "Autumn Days" festival was started three years ago.

Ann says the most popular items are geraniums, petunias,



Ted Vowels Sr. started Country Corner Greenhouse and Nursery 34 years ago and now operates it with daughter Ann and son, Ted Jr.

Greenhouse

lantana, begonias and angelonias. They also sell in the wholesale market and under contract arrangements with other suppliers.

A long-time connection to the Chicago-based Ball Seed Company brought the Vowels some national television exposure in 2011, when Country Corner was chosen to provide a special selection of vegetable and flower seedlings for an urban gardening segment on the CBS Early Morning Show. Someone involved with the CBS segment approached a Ball Seed representative at a trade show, asking for a source to provide plants for the show. Ball, which had sold seeds to Vowels for many years and had featured his plants at trade shows, suggested Country Corner. CBS urban gardening specialist William Moss then hooked up with the Vowels, who made the trip to New York for the show.

That development also attracted a lot of Louisville-area media attention to Country Corner, which is a participant in KFB's Certified Roadside Farm Markets Program. It also is part of the "Kentucky Proud" program administered by the Kentucky Department of Agriculture.



The market center at Country Corner, which is on busy KY 44 a few miles east of Shepherdsville.



Spring plants abound in one of the 12 greenhouses.



KDA initiates beef grading program

By Ray Bowman

Not all cows are created equal. Considering the variability of beef carcasses, the grade of a cut sold at retail can be important to some consumers when it comes to selecting what's for dinner.

A new service being provided by the Kentucky Department of Agriculture helps both growers and buyers by providing a standardized assessment of beef being harvested and sold in the Commonwealth.

With funding from the Kentucky Agricultural Development Board, the Department has established a groundbreaking state meat grading program with federally trained graders to give Kentucky producers an added market advantage.

Todd Henning and Donovan Pigg are United States Department of Agriculture-certified carcass graders who work for the Kentucky Department of Agriculture providing services to Kentucky Proud members. The two usually work independently, Todd covering the Western section of the Commonwealth while Donovan works in the East. They share duties in Central Kentucky.

It's a new program wherein, at no cost, a producer can have his beef

Certified-grader Donovan Pigg inspects a carcass.

graded to provide a little edge when the product is direct marketed.

Under the Federal Meat Inspection Act, all meat sold in the U.S. is mandatorily inspected to assure its safety and integrity. After meat is inspected for wholesomeness, producers and processors may request that they have products voluntarily graded for quality by a certified Federal grader.

"We went to Michigan for two weeks training and certification at a USDA plant," Donovan explained. "Through Kentucky Proud, we want to help the producers, processors and slaughter facilities that sell retail cuts."

Donovan and Todd go to USDA certified and inspected facilities to examine carcasses and assess a grade of prime, choice, select or standard so that graded retail cuts may be sold.

According to the USDA, Beef is graded as whole carcasses in two ways:

- quality grades - for tenderness, juiciness, and flavor; and
- yield grades - for the amount of usable lean meat on the carcass.

There are eight quality grades for beef. Quality grades are based on the amount of marbling (fleck of fat within the lean), color, and maturity.

Prime Grade has abundant marbling and is generally sold in restaurants and hotels. Prime roasts and steaks are excellent for dry-heat cooking (broiling, roasting, or grilling).

Choice Grade is high quality, but has less marbling than Prime. Choice roasts and steaks from the loin and rib will be very tender, juicy, and flavorful and are, like Prime, suited to dry-heat cooking.

Select Grade is very uniform in quality and normally leaner than the higher grades. It is fairly tender, but, because it has less marbling, it may lack some of the juiciness and flavor of the higher grades.

Standard and Commercial Grades are frequently sold as ungraded or as "store brand" meat.

Utility, Cutter, and Canner Grades are seldom, if ever, sold at retail but are used instead to make ground beef and processed products.

Yield grades range from "1" to "5" and indicate the amount of usable meat from

a carcass. Yield grade 1 is the highest grade with the greatest ratio of lean to fat; yield grade 5 is the lowest yield ratio. Though yield grades are not something consumers normally see, they are most useful when purchasing a side or carcass of beef for the freezer.

Grading can also be an important production tool for growers looking to improve the retail cuts they sell. The graders want to be able to go to a farm and look at someone's cattle before they're killed and provide some ideas as to what it might take to get the carcass to a better grade.

"We don't have to put a stamp on a

cow to be beneficial," Donovan notes. "We want to provide information to the producers as to what might make their product a little better, maybe just holding them and feeding them a little longer, whatever these calves need to grade a little better on the rail."

With more emphasis being placed on locally sourced meats, having grades on their cuts might give producers a little added value and give the consumer the satisfaction of knowing the quality of their purchase.

To take advantage of the program, Contact: Donovan Pigg - (502) 573-0282 or email donovan.pigg@ky.gov

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UK Ag College Field Day



More than 1,600 FFA and 4-H youth flooded onto some soggy grounds at the University of Kentucky College of Agriculture, Food and the Environment for the annual “field day” which serves as a significant recruitment vehicle for the college. The young folks not only got to see some facilities and learn about all the college has to offer, but they did a little work, as well – participating in a variety of contests held in and around the E.S. Good Barn.

KFB was among the sponsors of the 45th annual field day.

Dean Nancy Cox and State Representative Ryan Quarles (a former field day participant) gave welcoming remarks to the energetic FFA and 4-H members before they scattered off for the various contests. Quarles noted that he was involved with FFA and 4-H in Scott County

Clockwise from top, the students compete in contests involving soils, dairy cattle, forestry and sheep.

More than 1,600 FFA and 4-H students participated in the annual event.

before earning a degree in Ag Economics at UK.

“I’m here to tell you that the experience you have here today can show you that you can do anything,” Quarles said. “This college is home to any (agriculture) field you could want to pursue.”

The third-term legislator urged the youngsters to be strong advocates for the agriculture industry.

A wide variety of contests included horse industry knowledge, livestock

judging, quiz bowl, forestry, dairy judging, meat judging, land and soil evaluation, veterinary science, tractor driving, agronomy, job interviewing, nursery evaluation, farm business management, welding, auctioneering, seed identification and floriculture. Livestock judging attracted the most participants, with about 14 percent of the attendees.

Besides dozens of Kentucky chapters, there were groups from Orleans and Scottsburg, Indiana.

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County Corner

Snapshots of County Farm Bureau activities

HARRISON COUNTY

Agency Manager Dustin Rose celebrated Ag Literacy Week by reading to a second grade class at Northside Elementary School.



FLEMING COUNTY

A women's safety seminar was held, with Mary Jane Cannon, who serves on KFB's Women's Committee, providing an overview. Topics included farm equipment, electricity and grain augers.



FLOYD COUNTY

Floyd County FB was among the sponsors of a gardening program held at the county extension office. Participants were given seeds.



MERCER COUNTY

Agriculture Commissioner James Comer was the featured speaker at a Farm-City Breakfast sponsored by Mercer County FB.



HARDIN COUNTY

More than 40 attended a Media Appreciation luncheon held by Hardin County FB. This has been a long-standing tradition to bring together farm interests and local media.



TAYLOR COUNTY

Taylor County Farm Bureau donated approximately \$5,000 worth of farm rescue equipment to Campbellsville Fire and Rescue. This equipment will be utilized in grain bin rescues in Taylor and surrounding counties. Pictured from left to right are Pat Hardesty, Bobby Kirtley, Brant Cox, Chris Taylor, Maurice Holmes, Chad Sullivan, Daniel Cook, Kyle Smith, Johnny Smith, Blake Corbin, Doug Cox, Jason Miller and Angie Miller.



Nominations open for leadership program

The Kentucky Agricultural Leadership Program is accepting nominations for its 11th class. Housed in the UK College of Agriculture, Food and Environment, KALP is an intensive two-year program designed for young farmers and agribusiness individuals.

Applicants must be U.S. citizens, residents of Kentucky or Tennessee, be involved in some phase of agriculture, and be willing and able to commit around 50 days over the two-year period. More than 150 financial supporters provide funding, including KFB, the Kentucky Agricultural Development Board, Kentucky agribusinesses and other farm organizations. Participants will be responsible for tuition of \$2,500 payable in two installments to help offset the \$15,000 individual program costs.

The program consists of 10 domestic seminars devoted to important agricultural issues. Sessions also focus on improving participants' communication, leadership and management skills. Class members will visit a variety of Kentucky agribusinesses, Frankfort and Washington D.C., and will travel to other states and nations to explore agriculture in different settings. The previous 10 classes have yielded 267 graduates (a good number of KFB leaders and staff members are program graduates).

The nomination form link and additional details can be found at the Kentucky Agricultural Leadership Program website, <http://www.uky.edu/Ag/KALP>.

All nominees will receive information about the program and procedures for submitting the required application, which will be due July 15. Interviews to select class members will be in mid-August, with the first seminar scheduled for Nov. 4-6.

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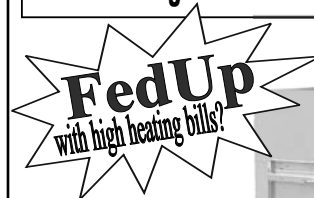
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China pushes U.S. sorghum exports

Following acceleration in March of U.S. sorghum sales to China, USDA raised its 2014/15 export projection by 50 million bushels, to 350 million bushels, a 54-percent increase from 2013/14. If realized, U.S. sorghum exports will set a new record, surpassing the previous record of 330 million bushels estimated for the 1979/80 marketing year. USDA economists said the 17-percent month-to-month increase in the export forecast is warranted despite tight domestic sorghum supplies as indicated by the March 1 stocks estimate of 119 million bushels, the third smallest on record. USDA's forecast for 2014/15 ending stocks is 18 million bushels, slightly above 2012/13's record low of 15 million bushels. Additional exportable supplies are expected to come from new-crop sorghum harvested in coastal areas of Texas by August 31, the end of the 2014/15 marketing year. Exports are supported by strong demand from China, where sorghum can be imported without a tariff-rate quota and competes with Chinese corn prices supported well above prevailing world prices. The forecasted U.S. season-average farm price midpoint is \$4.00 per bushel, or 30 cents higher than the season-average corn price. Since 1950, the season-average price of sorghum has exceeded that of corn only four times; the largest premium was 25 cents in 2006/07.

Honey prices hit record high in 2014

Honey production in 2014 from producers with five or more colonies totaled 178 million pounds, up 19 percent from 2013. There were 2.74 million colonies producing honey in 2014, up four percent from 2013. Yield per colony averaged 65.1 pounds, up 15 percent from the 56.6 pounds in 2013. Colonies were not included if honey was not harvested. Producer honey stocks were 41.2 million pounds on December 15, 2014, up eight percent from a year earlier. Honey prices increased to a record high during 2014 to 216.1 cents per pound, up one percent from 214.1 cents per pound in 2013. Prices reflect the portions of honey sold through cooperatives, private, and retail channels. The average sales price per pound of honey was 206.4 cents if sold by co-op or private and 406.6 cents if sold at retail.

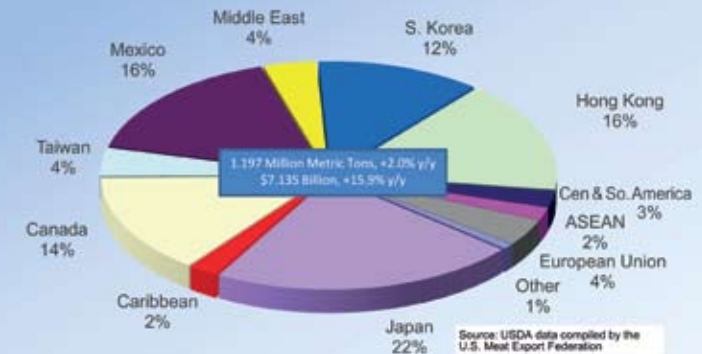
USDA estimated Kentucky had 5,000 honey-producing colonies in 2014, up from 3,000 in 2013. The yield per colony was 47 pounds, up 6 pounds from a year earlier. Honey production totaled 235,000 pounds, a 91-percent increase from 2013. The value of Kentucky's 2014 honey production was \$924,000, up 131 percent from the previous year.

Kentucky hay data released

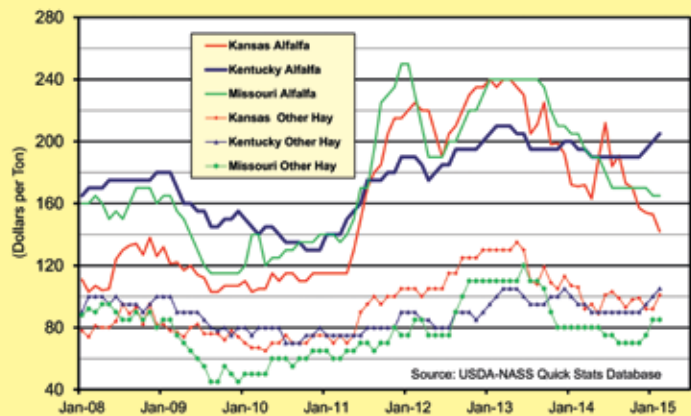
The Kentucky Field Office of USDA-NASS recently released 2014 hay production data by county. For alfalfa hay, the top three yielding counties included Owen with 4.40 tons/acre; Metcalfe with 4.05 tons/acre; and Meade with 3.85 tons/acre. The lowest alfalfa yield among the 18 counties reported was 2.55 tons/acre. The state average yield was 3.40 tons/acre resulting in production of 561,000 tons of alfalfa. Mason County is the state's biggest alfalfa producer, harvesting 19,800 tons, ahead of Owen County with 15,200 tons.

In the "all other hay" category, Breathitt had a yield of 2.70 tons/acre; Pulaski had 2.60 tons/acre; followed by several counties with 2.50 tons/acre – Greenup, Menifee, Wayne and Webster. The lowest average yield was 1.55 tons/acre. There were 23 counties with average yields of 1.70 tons/acre or below. The state averaged 2.00 tons/acre and produced 4.20 million tons of "all other hay". The top counties in total production were Barren, Pulaski and Grayson, the same as in 2013.

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Prices Received by Farmers: Alfalfa and Other Hay
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KFB accepting "Farmer of Year" applications

KFB is accepting applications for the 2015 "Farmer of the Year" program. Eligibility and guidelines are included with the application, and can be downloaded at kyfb.com, or obtained at county Farm Bureau offices. All applications must be postmarked by July 1.

Applicants must be nominated by a county Farm Bureau president (or designee) and the completed application must have a letter of support from the nominator. Entries will be narrowed down to the top three applicants and finalists will be announced in mid-August. Judges will visit the three finalists in mid-September to conduct interviews and see their operations in action. The winner will be announced at KFB's annual meeting in December.

KFB's "Farmer of the Year" will receive \$1,000 from KFB Federation and will be presented with a commemorative award. The other state finalists will receive \$250. The winner will represent Kentucky in the Swisher Sweets/Sunbelt Ag Expo Southeastern "Farmer of the Year" contest in October of 2016.

Specialty crop grants available

Farmers and other eligible applicants in Kentucky may seek funding from the Kentucky Department of Agriculture for producing and marketing "specialty crops," which are defined by the U.S. Department of Agriculture as fruits, vegetables, tree nuts, dried fruits, horticulture and nursery crops.

Eligible producers, commodity groups, agriculture organizations, colleges and universities, municipalities, state agencies, and nonprofit organizations may apply. The maximum award to any applicant is \$50,000, but the KDA encourages applications for lesser amounts.

Applications must be postmarked no later than June 1. Grant awards are expected to be announced this fall.

To download the application form, rules, eligibility requirements, and guidelines, go to www.kyagr.com/marketing/crop-block-grant.html.

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“Be authentic” with social media

By Cyndie Sirekis

Director, Internal Communications
AFBF

Through social media, America's farmers and ranchers explain why they do certain things when raising animals for food. This communication is not just one way. Facebook posts from the farm, tweets from the tractor seat and blogs from the “back 40” allow members of the non-farming public to ask questions on everything from how today's food is grown to how it is processed and eventually brought to market.

Although a growing number of farmers use social media to interact with consumers, trepidation about answering tough ag-related questions causes some to shy away from using this valuable communications tool. But it doesn't have to be that way, according to a couple of social media experts who teamed up recently to share time-tested tips with Farm Bureau members.

“Be authentic in telling your story,” says Lyndsey Murphy, digital media specialist at the American Farm Bureau. “Speak for you and your farm, not the whole of agriculture,” she advises. If you're not sure how to answer a question, it's perfectly OK to say you don't know but will find the answer.

Murphy finds that using social media to build relationships yields great rewards because everyone is on the same playing field with similar opportunities for interaction. But it does take time. “People's viewpoints are unlikely to be changed after interacting with you just once,” she cautions.

“Using beautiful visuals and an authentic voice to share what we as agriculturalists know and love” is the sweet spot for many farmers active in social media, Murphy says. She's found that visuals are a tremendous help in telling one's farm story because “people might not always believe what they read but they always believe what they can see with their own two eyes.”

Photos, videos and fun infographics are all proven effective at helping tell a farm or ranch story.

For many in agriculture, deep connections to the farm make it hard to hear some comments without feeling judged or that the other person is misinformed. This happens online and in person, notes Janice Person, director of online outreach at Monsanto.

“Reacting the wrong way can shut down any opportunity for dialogue but when we listen from a place of truly trying to understand others, we learn a lot and others notice that we are open to their thoughts,” Person says. She tries to ask three broad questions to gain understanding before offering her experience or perspective. Often, she finds someone that she may have written off as a staunch critic may only have some criticism and talking through that and discussing experiences can result in a new openness to other perspectives.

When you choose to use social media, understanding the public nature of it and the possibilities for controversy can be useful in shaping your presence, Person says. She's found that being proactive on a few key components can be helpful.

Having a comment policy on your blog or Facebook page can help establish “rules” to be referred to if controversy surfaces. Person advises social media newbies to always consider who they want to share information with before posting. Utilizing friends' lists on Facebook rather than broadcasting across multiple social media social platforms is one option to consider.

If controversy surfaces in response to your posts, Person says how you respond should depend on your goals, not your emotions. And keep in mind that not everyone who lobbs criticism your way is a troll. When criticism is honest, it is important to step back and listen to different perspectives, she says.

You can also take time to respond rather than allowing the perceived need for immediacy drive you into an emotion-driven, fast-paced back and forth. Taking time to think through how to reply is acceptable. Talking through how to respond with a trusted friend can help provide perspective and clarity.



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