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Looking Toward the Future

Kentucky agriculture finding ways to move past the pandemic

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Alex Francke finds a new way to bring her message to students



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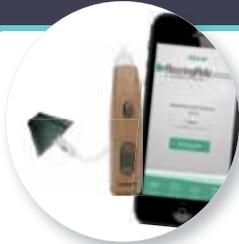
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KENTUCKY FARM BUREAU NEWS
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Cover photo by Tim Thornberry
An American flag flies over a farm in Franklin County.

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PRESIDENT'S COLUMN



It goes without saying, but the coronavirus pandemic has made the world we live in look very different than it did just a few months ago. We have had to learn to work remotely, meet virtually, and stay six feet apart from one another.

We're using the drive-up windows at our favorite restaurants more than ever before, washing our hands way more than we ever thought we would, and trying to get used to wearing a mask whenever we go out in public.

I understand how all this can weigh on a person's mind and create a lot of anxiety. Beyond the medical issues we have seen, the economic impact of COVID-19 has proven to be more significant than anything most of us can remember.

But with all the frustration and heartache this pandemic has caused, I'd like to think we are seeing a light at the end of the tunnel. We have witnessed people and companies stepping up in big ways to help others. We've experienced the true meaning of heroes as we watch all who are essential to our well-being keep moving forward to feed us, protect us, provide medical care, and sometimes, simply lend an ear and open heart.

From an organizational standpoint, I could not have been prouder than to see Kentucky Farm Bureau Insurance donate \$500,000 to the state's Hunger Initiative to help needy families. In addition to that, since so many of our vehicles are getting less use these days, the Insurance Company mailed relief checks totaling \$21 million to our auto policyholders.

That one action alone brought countless notes, cards, text messages and emails to KFB thanking us for being there for our members during this time of need. These messages came from all corners of the state, and I can't tell you how grateful I am to hear from so many of you. It has truly been an uplifting experience.

We may still be in the middle of a pandemic, but we are also in the middle of the greatest state, with the greatest people of any place I know. And, I'm blessed to be a part of this great organization.

As we move forward past this trying time, I hope we remember the positivity we've witnessed and experienced in our fellow man. The love we have for each other and for this state cannot be extinguished, no matter how difficult things may get. That light at the end of the tunnel does exist, and we are getting closer to it every day.

I would like to give a special thanks to our farm families throughout the Commonwealth. You have weathered this storm with great tenacity, and have continued to work, and plant, and grow the food we must have to survive, often with the odds not in your favor.

When this all began, agriculture was identified as one of the country's essential industries. When this is all over, let's remember that, and thank a farmer every time we have a meal. It wouldn't be possible without them.

May we all work together, even if it is six feet apart, to stay healthy, happy, and safe as we head out of this coronavirus pandemic and into better days ahead.

Mark Haney, President
Kentucky Farm Bureau



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COMMENT COLUMN

Coronavirus makes clear: we need rural broadband



Across the nation, the coronavirus has highlighted issues in our food supply chain, our reliance on foreign countries for medical supplies, and the difference between strong, data-driven leaders and weak ones. But for Kentucky families and workers, perhaps the largest problem is one we’ve attempted to solve for years: internet connectivity, particularly in our rural communities.

I spoke with many parents over the course of the pandemic about the difficulties of balancing their new work from home life and remote instruction for students in their households. While nontraditional instruction days gave parents a newfound appreciation for our hardworking teachers, it also gave them a new sense of frustration with their Internet providers as they balanced student work on the web and work meetings via web camera.

And, that’s if you even had a level of connectivity. In some areas of our state, connectivity is so poor that parents drove their students across the county to McDonalds’ parking lots in hopes of higher speeds. Many metro areas have experienced similar issues, but they are fortunate to have received generations of investment from well-organized business sector interests. I don’t fault those cities for having that investment, but we must do something to ensure rural Kentucky get its fair shake at connectivity.

Farmers know all too well how important technology is to their businesses. Contrary to popular perception in the press and media, farmers are always the earliest adopters of new technology. If you visit any of Kentucky’s 75,000 family farms, odds are people will be struck by the role technology plays from robotic milkers to tractors that drive themselves. Broadband is a critical tool for our farm families. It’s not just about being able to google something; it’s about being able to grow something.

The good news is that progress is being made. Earlier this year, U.S. Secretary of Agriculture Sonny Perdue’s “ReConnect” broadband program delivered \$55 million in grants and low interest loans to communities in rural Kentucky. The Kentucky Department of Agriculture also supported legislative efforts by Kentucky Farm Bureau to establish a framework for future investments to expand rural broadband. These actions and more are helping deliver on discussions I had with President Donald J. Trump as part of his Rural Prosperity Task Force meetings in the White House.

Internet connectivity will define the 21st Century and our state and nation’s ability to compete in the global economy. If we do not attack this problem with the same resolve we attacked rural electrification in the 1930’s, we will be woefully unprepared to compete with the technological advancements made by China or India down the road.

“Broadband is a critical tool for our farm families. It’s not just about being able to google something; it’s about being able to grow something.”

- Dr. Ryan Quarles

Dr. Ryan Quarles
 Kentucky’s Commissioner of Agriculture.



Seeing Agriculture from Two Different Perspectives

Hung Wei Yu was born in Taiwan, moved to America as a freshman in high school, and became a regional FFA officer before graduating from Seneca High School in Louisville, where he served as the FFA Chapter's Vice President. Those are not bad accolades for someone who came to this country speaking very little English, with little knowledge of agriculture and even less about FFA.

In fact, a school with agriculture classes was something he had never heard of until Seneca.

"I had no idea what agriculture was or anything about agriculture classes in school," Yu said. "We did not have that in Taiwan."

But after registering for a Principles of Ag class his sophomore year, Yu got a taste of ag-ed and was hooked.

"I thought, 'Oh this is cool' and I tried my best to be a good student," he said.

Kristan Wright, Seneca FFA's adviser, knew immediately that Hung Wei would benefit from being involvement in the organization.

"After his first year, he asked how to be more involved, and that's the thing; he wanted to learn more about it," she said. "So, he took home one of the FFA manuals that we have, and he read the entire thing over the summer and memorized some of it."

From there, Wright said Hung Wei's interest in FFA by leaps and bounds because of his dedication and personality.

"He wanted to gain as much knowledge as he could, so he volunteered to do everything," she said. "I mean, he's just a fun person to be around. He kind of draws people in."

“ I feel like we should be more appreciative towards our food supply, not only for ourselves, but out of respect for our farmers and for those people in other countries less fortunate than we are.”
- Hung Wei Yu

Even so, Hung Wei admitted he was a little nervous when he joined FFA. But that didn't last long.

"I was kind of scared at first, because I was really quiet and I'm really shy," he said. "But after attending my first FFA banquet and watching old officers retiring and new ones being inducted, it inspired me, and I told my adviser that I wanted to try and become an officer. It really sparked my interest."

In addition to the valuable leadership skills be gained, Hung Wei continued learning about agriculture and came to some distinct conclusions about the food supply chain seeing the differences between Taiwan and the U.S.

"Taiwan is a small island with a high intensity population, meaning there's not a lot of land for farming, so agriculture is done differently there; different technology, and a different style of farming," he said. "On the other hand, in United States, we have a lot more land to grow food on, but there are many more people to feed here."

Hung Wei emphasized how he was taught from an early age that food should not be wasted, and he is amazed at the amount of food that can be found here in the many different grocery stores.

"After getting into FFA, I started learning about how farmers work so hard to produce food for everyone, and it's amazing, seeing that," he said. "I don't know how they manage to produce all that food to meet the needs for our citizens; it's amazing!"

In marveling at the production ability of the America farmer, Hung Wei also sees that a lot of food goes to waste in this country.

"I feel like people are starting to lose their consciousness of having all this food, or maybe

they are used to having so much they don't think about it ever running out," he said. "But that's a thing in other countries that don't have enough. I feel like we should be more appreciative towards our food supply, not only for ourselves, but out of respect for our farmers and for those people in other countries less fortunate than we are."

Hung Wei is now a student at the University of Louisville and has brought his message to many of his friends there.

"Sometimes while I'm with my friends in the cafeteria, or out eating pizza, or fast food, I'll see them toss away something, and I'll ask them if they know how much sweat and tears were put into those products, not only by farmers, but people who prepare all that food," he said. "So, I do find myself talking about our farmers and praising them for producing our food."

Hung Wei has taken his message to other students and family members and credits his time in FFA with bringing him out of his shyness to be able to do so.

"FFA brought me out of my shell and made my comfort zone bigger and bigger, until I basically had no comfort zone," Yu said. "I'm comfortable doing things I wouldn't have dreamed of as a freshman in high school. The organization is like a family or a tree with many branches that will connect us through life, and it's an experience I would never trade for anything."

KFB Farming Footnote:*

Kentucky Farm Bureau Studios and the Kentucky FFA partnered to create a one of a kind story, *IBelieve/Kentucky FFA*. The documentary follows the FFA journey of three students from diverse backgrounds, including Hung Wei Yu, as they explore agriculture. The video has aired nationally on RFD-TV and will soon be online airing on various social media platforms.



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KFB Insurance Donation to Hunger Initiative Being Put to Good Use

Ag community partners are coming together to combat hunger in the Commonwealth

For anyone raised on a farm or involved in the agriculture industry, the idea of “neighbors helping neighbors” is more than a notion; it’s a way of life. Kentucky Farm Bureau Insurance is no stranger to being there for the local community when the going gets tough, and this commitment to helping fellow Kentuckians was shown in a big way recently when the company donated \$500,000 to the state’s Hunger Initiative, spearheaded by Agriculture Commissioner Ryan Quarles.

It took little time for those donated dollars to go into action. In May, Feeding Kentucky, the organization which oversees the food bank system in the Commonwealth, purchased 10,080 pounds of Kentucky Proud pork sausage from the iconic Purnell’s “Old Folks” headquartered in Simpsonville, Kentucky. The purchase was funded by the KFB Insurance Company donation.

“When we started the Kentucky Hunger Initiative years ago, the goal was to build a network to connect farmers and agribusinesses to Kentucky’s food bank system,” said Commissioner Quarles. “Today’s announcement, bolstered by Kentucky Farm Bureau’s historic donation to the Hunger Initiative, is the perfect culmination of this work. Vulnerable Kentuckians affected by this global pandemic now have more access to the one and only Kentucky Proud Purnell’s ‘Old Folks’ Sausage.”

KFB President Mark Haney said the desire to lend a helping hand is inherent in Kentuckians, especially those who work in the agriculture industry.

“For those of us in the agriculture community, the concept of ‘neighbor helping neighbor’ is second nature; it’s what we do when a need arises,” he said. “Thanks to Purnell’s ‘Old Folks’ Sausage, the Kentucky Department of Agriculture and Feeding Kentucky, we see a wonderful example of what it means to lend a helping hand as a collective community. Kentucky Farm Bureau is proud to have been able to be a part of the effort in feeding needy Kentuckians, especially during this time of uncertainty caused by the pandemic. Together, we will get through this by continuing to help our neighbors.”

The process by which this purchase came about began with a call to KDA from a local pork producer who was facing a tough decision in what to do with hogs that were ready to go for processing. But that market was lost due to processing plant slowdowns across the state and nation. KDA put the producer in touch with Purnell’s.

“Like many Kentuckians, I am saddened by the crop destruction and commodity waste we are seeing due to our economy being shut down,” Quarles said. “While we cannot promise a solution for every producer, this story illustrates how Kentucky’s ag community is committed to doing the best we can, with the resources we have, to maintain the supply chain for our farmers and consumers.”

Purnell’s “Old Folks” reduced the product’s cost, allowing Feeding Kentucky to purchase more

pounds of sausage. Feeding Kentucky requested the sausage be packaged for easy distribution through the food bank system, and the Kentucky company was happy to package the product into 10,080 one-pound rolls.

“This story – well, I guess there is only one way to say it – it’s gooo-od,” said Todd Purnell, president of Purnell’s. “We were happy to work with Commissioner Quarles and Feeding Kentucky to make this possible. The need is great, and I would encourage other agribusinesses in Kentucky to consider donating what they can to help out those who need us most right now.”

Haney emphasized the need for Kentucky’s agriculture community to remain committed in finding ways to help each other and consumers across the state.

“Getting through this pandemic has not been easy, but it is a challenge our ag community is up for and is taking head-on,” he said. “It’s more important than ever to work together and look for ways to help our industry and the consumers we serve. By doing this, we will emerge from COVID-19 much stronger and more grateful for the farm families who have continued to move forward and do what they do best; raise the safest, most abundant, and most affordable food supply in the world.”

Additional food purchased by Feeding Kentucky through the use of the KFB donation, includes 5,000 pounds of cheese, all of which came from Country View Creamery, and 3,408 pounds of Kentucky ground beef, which was bought from Beef Solutions, a limited liability company owned by the Kentucky Cattlemen’s Association.



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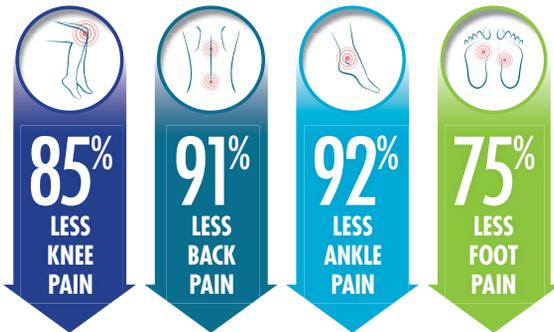
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Miss Kentucky, Alex Francke

In what has turned out to be an unusual year, the current Miss Kentucky has found new ways to complete her mission

Since 1935, there has been a Miss Kentucky pageant held every year (with the exception of the World War II years). That changed, however, for the 2020 pageant due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

And while the idea of missing a year is very disappointing to so many young women who have worked hard in hopes of being a part of this prestigious event, the reigning Miss Kentucky, Alex Francke, will now have the honor of being the first winner ever to serve for two consecutive years.

“When I found out, I had mixed feelings about it knowing how much work goes into preparing for the Miss Kentucky pageant,” she said. “I feel for those young ladies who will have to wait another year, but I am blessed to be able to continue on for another year in this role that I love so much.”

As Miss Kentucky, Francke said one of her responsibilities is that of spokesperson for the Kentucky Proud label, through the Kentucky Department of Agriculture (KDA).

“Since about 2000, Miss Kentucky has been an official spokesperson with KDA, and I absolutely love my job,” she said. “It has enabled me to go and visit all of the schools and do my entire school tour talking to children about the agriculture industry and the goodness of fresh, locally grown foods.”

While some members of her family have farming backgrounds, Francke said she was definitely surprised by how little she actually understood about the scope of the agriculture industry.

“It’s so much more than just farm production and food production,” she said. “In my role of working with so many of our Kentucky Proud partners, it has been so cool to see just how much agriculture affects everyday life. And to meet kids who are excelling in 4H, and FFA, and really just making a future for themselves in the world of agriculture, it has been really inspiring to me.”

Unfortunately, her school tours were cut short due to the COVID-19 outbreak, but Francke doesn’t focus on the negative side of the situation.

“I got to spread all kinds of positivity, love, and encouragement to students who may have needed it more than I ever could have known.”

- Alex Francke

“I got to talk to thousands of students about the importance of Kentucky agriculture, of buying local foods and taking care of one another,” she said. “It was really a dream come true.”

Like so many others who have been staying home in an effort to slow the spread of the coronavirus, Francke has been doing the same. But she has not slowed down on her agricultural work.

“Being quarantined has certainly shifted my year of service more than I thought it would, and I have tried to find lots of new and innovative ways to continue connecting with students and sharing information about agriculture and ag education,” she said. “So, I actually started a video series,



Alex Francke is finding new ways to teach children about the importance of agriculture.

of which I am the director, and writer, and producer, and costumer, and editor. I have done it all. It’s called “Miss Kentucky Proud,” kind of a play on Kentucky Proud and Miss Kentucky.”

The video series touches on many agriculture-related topics, from doing ag-science experiments at home, to something called the “Ag Aspirations Virtual Career Fair Series,” in which Francke interviews different people from a variety of agricultural occupations.

“I’m trying to do everything I can to continue serving the ag community,” she said. “Even if I am stuck at home, I can utilize all of my marketing and digital media skills that I learned in college.”

Francke recently graduated from the University of Kentucky with a degree in Business Management, and with the scholarship money she has earned as Miss Kentucky, she said graduate school is a possibility. But whatever she does, her passion for interacting with young people will undoubtedly be a part of it.

“I absolutely love children, and I think they are amazing because they have so much curiosity and such a passion for life and excitement,” she said. “It has been a great opportunity to go out to schools and talk to kids about the importance of taking care of yourself, setting yourself up for success by putting good things in your body, like farm fresh foods, fruits and vegetables, as well as setting goals for yourself and treating others with respect and kindness to make our communities better places to live.”

Francke also got to spread her mission, “Adopt an Art,” which is a non-profit that she started to connect kids in schools to art resources and mentors.

"I want to show kids that even if you're not planning on being a professional actor or a professional tuba player, being a part of the arts can benefit you, and will benefit you, in the long run," she said. "I got to spread all kinds of positivity, and love and encouragement to students who may have needed it more than I ever could have known."

KFB Farming Footnote*:

Kentucky Farm Bureau (KFB) is one of the many sponsors that participate in the Miss Kentucky Scholarship Foundation program. KFB President Mark Haney said supporting such a worthy organization ultimately helps to bring important information about agriculture to people across the state.

"In seeing the great job Alex, and many other Miss Kentucky winners, have done in getting the word out about agriculture, we are proud to support such a program and look forward to the contributions Alex will make to our industry as she continues to serve in this role for another year," he said.

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The Importance of Revenue Protection for Dairy Farms

COVID-19 proved to be an eye-opener for many dairy producers

Risk is inherent in most agricultural ventures, and no one knows that better than today's dairy farm families.

But, like most businesses affected by the COVID-19 outbreak, dairy farms are taking a strong hit from an economic perspective in an already tough market environment.

And while there may not be any easy answers for the many issues dairy farmers face, there are ways they can proactively manage their risk.

American Farm Bureau Federation's chief economist Dr. John Newton said it is always good to be prepared for the unexpected from an insurance perspective, even when the unexpected is nowhere in sight.

"When we look at the dairy industry, at the end of 2019, we saw some of the highest prices that we'd seen in some time, but we can't let that lull us into a false sense of security," he said. "We need to protect against potential downturns, and there are a variety of programs available to help producers manage that risk through the farm bill*."

According to information from the USDA's Economic Research Service, U.S. dairy cash receipts were forecast to be nearly \$42.5 billion this year. If those calculations had proved to be correct, it would have represented a more than \$7 billion increase over 2018 numbers. Unfortunately, the unexpected happened; the coronavirus hit, markets closed, and prices declined, creating the perfect storm to justify the need for risk management tools.

A couple of those tools include the USDA's Dairy Margin Coverage (DMC) and Dairy Revenue Protection (DRP) programs.

"We saw some producers putting insurance in place through these two programs into 2020, and at that time you didn't think you'd need it, but you got it just in case," said Newton. "Now, in the face of significant price declines related to the coronavirus, those producers who were proactive and managed their risks are going to have an easier time weathering the downturn."

Statistical information included in a recent report from AFBF noted that current price expectations (at the time the report was written) indicate that a farmer covering five million pounds of milk, and covering milk at the maximum \$9.50 coverage option, could receive nearly \$100,000 during 2020. The challenge is that very little milk – only 28 billion pounds – was enrolled in DMC at the maximum protection level. As a result, few producers will actually receive this safety net protection.

A recent study by the University of Minnesota, "Impact of COVID-19 on Dairy Margin Coverage and Dairy Revenue Protection Projected Indemnities in 2020," estimated that as of April 2, "DRP was likely to make nearly double the indemnity payments to dairy farmers than USDA's DMC program would. DRP was projected to pay more than \$900 million to dairy farmers, and DMC was expected to make payments totaling nearly \$500 million."

One key difference between the two programs is that DMC has a yearly opportunity to sign up while DRP is sold every day, according to



Newton. New prices are posted every day, and because milk prices have seen some recent increases, he said now's the time to grab that insurance and protect against a potential downturn later in the year.

"For our crop producers out there, insurance is a key component of their business, and it's slowly being adopted by the dairy industry," said Newton. "But we finally have something that I would consider to be one of the best insurance tools ever delivered for the dairy industry, and now's the time to use it."

KFB Farming Footnote:*

According to information from the Congressional Research Service, "The farm bill is an omnibus, multiyear law that governs an array of agricultural and food programs. Titles in the most recent farm bill encompassed farm commodity revenue supports, agricultural conservation, trade and foreign food assistance, farm credit, research, rural development, forestry, bioenergy, horticulture, and domestic nutrition assistance. Typically renewed about every five or six years, the farm bill provides a predictable opportunity for policymakers to comprehensively and periodically address agricultural and food issues. The most recent farm bill—the Agriculture Improvement Act of 2018, P.L. 115-334—was enacted into law in December 2018 and expires in 2023."

"Most people involved in the industry of producing the nation's food supply feel the farm bill is the single most important piece of legislation related to agriculture and farm families across this country."

Mark Haney, President
Kentucky Farm Bureau

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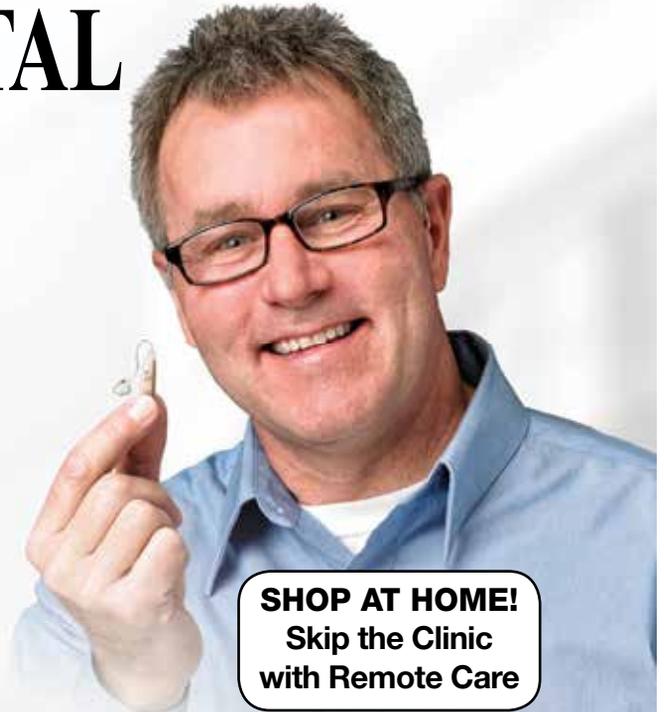
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Rowlett's Milkhouse Creamery in Campbellsburg uses fresh milk from their dairy to make the products sold at their off-farm store.

Value-Added Growth is Key to Success for Some Dairy Operations

Turning milk into profit-making, value-added products is helping some dairy farm families carry on multi-generational traditions

The dairy industry has a long and storied history in the Commonwealth; one that is steeped in tradition and can be traced back for generations. In fact, if you ask any dairy producer why they continue in such a demanding sector, they will likely list tradition as one of their deciding factors.

Taking that into consideration, coupled with the growth of value-added products and the local food movement, many dairy farm families are finding new opportunities by turning their milk into a variety of dairy products and selling straight from the farm.

Terry Rowlett and his family, who are long-time dairy farmers in Henry County, have taken the step of creating Rowlett's Milkhouse Creamery, finding new uses and customers for their dairy milk.

"My father and our family moved to this farm in 1974, and it was a dairy at that time," he said. "In addition to the dairy, we also grow about 50,000 pounds of tobacco, about 100 acres of corn for silage for our dairy, and we cut approximately 1,500 rolled bales of hay each year for our cows. With what we own and what we rent and lease, we're farming close to 1,000 acres."

Most Kentucky farms have operated in a diverse manner for years. But as the tobacco-growing economy shrank, the need to find new ways to sustain family farms has become more prevalent.

Rowlett is simply adding to an operation that was already diversified,

but this venture brings customers a little closer to products from the farm; a trend that has seen growth over the past several years and has significantly expanded in the wake of COVID-19.

"In December 2019, things started looking up for the dairy industry, and prices began to improve," he said. "It seemed like some of the trade negotiation deals had come through, and we were moving more milk and dairy products offshore. Plus, dairy farmers had cut back a little bit."

But things changed for most of the agriculture industry when the virus struck, and the economy slowed to a crawl.

However, the decision made about the expansion of their dairy business by Rowlett, his sister Sharon, who is co-owner of the farm, and wife Sandra, came well before the coronavirus.

“We are taking milk that may not have made a profit and are turning it into products that will.”

-Terry Rowlett

“We decided by the end of 2017 and early 2018 that we had a choice; we either had to add some value to our milk somehow, or we were just going to have to quit the dairy,” he said. “For lack of better words, our bills were a lot higher than our milk check.”

The Rowletts decided to create their off-farm store where customers could buy such products as cheese, ice cream, and butter. As part of that decision, they invested in pasteurization equipment to ensure they could use the dairy milk coming straight from their farm.

“We are taking milk that may not have made a profit, and we’re turning it into products that will,” said Rowlett.

Carl Chaney and his family saw the need to diversify their dairy operation many years ago and are continually striving to improve upon what likely turned out to be a farm-saving enterprise.

“This dairy was started in 1942 by my father, James Riley Chaney, who milked over 20 cows a day by hand,” he said. “And over the years, he grew the dairy as technology advanced. He loved the Jersey breed and won many awards for his efforts in breeding top Jersey cows.”

That love for the breed and the industry was passed on to Carl, who bought the herd from his father in 1985. But the dairy industry hit some difficult times, and Carl, along with wife Debra, and their three children, all of whom were – and still are – very involved in the farm, knew something had to change.

“With more housing developments pushing toward the farm, doing business as usual with the dairy was just not going to be sustainable, and we felt like we didn’t want to have to struggle as we did when we were just milking cows,” he said. “Milk prices are so cyclical: they’re up, and then they’re down for quite a while, and then they’re up a little bit, and then they’re down again, and it’s just frustrating to work every day, as hard as you work, to just continue pushing uphill.”

In 2003, the decision to start Chaney’s Dairy Barn was made, which created a farming destination of sorts complete with farm tours, local food, and what has now become world famous ice cream.

Eversince, the Chaney family has continued to move forward, first investing in a new barn to optimize cow comfort, then adding a state-of-the-art Lely A4 robotic milking system. But the latest change could prove to be the biggest so far.

Chaney’s youngest daughter, Elizabeth, made the move in 2017 to begin the process of being able to pasteurize the milk on their farm



Chaney's Dairy Barn in Bowling Green has created a farming destination with tours, events, and world famous ice cream.

allowing them to sell fluid milk, make value added products, and most importantly, provide an ice cream mix to Chaney’s Dairy Barn.

This latest investment to the business has yielded great results so far. Chaney said there have even been times when local groceries have sold out of their milk.

“We’ve been so blessed that people have continued to support us and help us,” he said. “We’re open at the Dairy Barn, and things are going pretty well. We’re running about 45 to 50 percent of the sales from last year because of the situation with the coronavirus, but we’re excited to be open. We’re tickled that our employees have jobs and that they can count on that money to help with their families.”

Chaney sees a chance for better days ahead with milk prices on the rebound and the world opening up again, but it has been the hard work and dedication of his family (and families like his) that has helped the dairy industry continue to be a vital part of the Commonwealth’s agriculture industry.

KFB Farming Footnote:*

Both Rowlett’s Milkhouse Creamery and Chaney’s Dairy Barn are members of the Kentucky Farm Bureau Certified Farm Market program, a directory of farm market operations that are committed to providing customers with locally grown, quality products, and service. Participating markets adhere to program requirements and have developed a reputation for meeting the highest standards of quality, freshness, and market appeal set forth by Kentucky Farm Bureau, an industry leader with over 100 years of agriculture experience. For more information, go to <https://www.kyfb.com/federation/certified-farm-market/>.



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Ballard Memorial High School Senior Colton Baker and family

Ballard County Farm Bureau Recognizes Local High School Seniors in a Special Way

BCFB changed their scholarship process to include all graduates at the local high school

Kentucky Farm Bureau has a long and storied history when it comes to awarding scholarships each year to local high school graduates. Even in the wake of COVID-19, which led to students finishing the school year from home, this tradition continued as usual, or at least as normally as it could.

For Ballard County Farm Bureau (BCFB), however, a decision was made to change the standard procedures for awarding scholarship money. Instead of granting scholarships to a handful of students, BCFB chose to honor each graduating senior at Ballard Memorial High School (BMHS) with a special gift of \$100.

BCFB President Todd Williams said that with students working away from their classrooms, the idea of honoring each senior seemed like the right thing to do.

“This year has certainly been unique for our graduating seniors. Like everyone else, their worlds have been turned upside down because of COVID-19, and they were missing out on a lot of things they would have normally been doing,” he said. “I think, because they have been out of school, we weren’t getting a lot of response for our scholarship applications. So, in light of all that was going on, we decided to do something special. We doubled the money we normally devote to our scholarships and gave each graduating senior a gift of \$100.”

BMHS Senior Colton Baker was one of the students who received

the gift. He said the money given to each graduate will help in many different ways.

“I was excited about the gift because it’s going to be helpful in going into college,” he said. “I have been working about 40 hours a week, but I’m not going to really be able to work when classes start. So, I’m trying to save as much money as I can. But I also think this money will benefit other students in many ways. I know there are a lot of kids that need the money a lot worse than I do, and at the end of the day, they may need that money to eat for a couple of weeks. It will make a real impact, and you couldn’t ask for better folks here to do something like that for all of us.”

“ In light of all that was going on, we decided to do something special. We doubled the money we normally devote to our scholarships and gave each graduating senior a gift of \$100.”

- Todd Williams

BMHS Principal Leslee Davis echoed those sentiments. “I am blessed to work in a community that supports our students,” she said. “This gift will help each of our seniors as they graduate from Ballard

Memorial and transition to college and/or the workforce. BMHS would like to thank the Ballard County Farm Bureau board members for their generous support of the Class of 2020.”

Jennifer Howle is the mother of graduating senior Jacob Howle. She said living in a rural community has its benefits, especially during this time of uncertainty.

“It’s extremely beneficial because you know everybody, you know those kids who may need that extra little bit, you know the families who might need an extra little boost, but you always know, no matter what’s going on, that your community’s going to be there to support you,” she said. “We were excited to hear about the Farm Bureau gift. I’m also the Project Graduation president, so to know that we possibly weren’t going to be able to do everything from that perspective, it was nice to know that our community was stepping up once again to help support these students.”

BCFB Agency Manager Justin Puckett said the idea of giving something to each student came about when the county Farm Bureau board realized that most folks are facing uncertainty these days.

“As scholarship time rolled around this year, we, like everyone else, found ourselves in a very unusual situation,” he said. “I sit on the scholarship committee and pitched the idea of doing something different during this very difficult time,” he said. “Without hesitation, our Board of Directors approved, via telephone, a \$100 gift for each graduating senior.”

Puckett added that each student likely has different needs, and this money could help on many levels.

“For some seniors, this may be a new pair of shoes, but I’m convinced that for others, this will buy them food or gas as they begin the journey of trying to figure out the next chapter of their lives,” he said. “It’s our hope that we have planted a seed to help grow the next generation of leaders. The one thing that I love about the agriculture community is that when business is good, we give, and when business is bad, we give; it’s who we are, it’s what we do.”

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“ CANDID CONVERSATION

KFB Candid Conversation presents a discussion about the topical issues facing the agricultural industry and rural communities in a question and answer format. In this column, Kentucky Farm Bureau Federation Executive Vice President Drew Graham and KFB Insurance CEO and Executive Vice President John Sparrow discuss the functions of the organization, the big topics affecting the Federation and Insurance Company, and what it has been like operating during a pandemic.

For those readers who may be new to the Farm Bureau organization, could you explain a little about both the Federation and the Insurance Company?

Graham: I oversee the day-to-day operations of the KFB Federation, which is the agriculture advocacy side of the overall organization. The Federation got its start in 1919 and was created to serve as a voice for farm families across this Commonwealth. And while so much has changed since those days, we still stand for those farm families and the agriculture industry, just as Farm Bureau did more than 100 years ago. Perhaps the most unique thing about our organization is the grassroots approach we take in deciding policy and priority issues for the Federation's advocacy efforts. Every county in the state has a local Farm Bureau organization, and those county members are the ones who decide policy ideas for the Federation which ultimately become our priority issues by way of our state Board of Directors. It is this grassroots way of doing things that makes Farm Bureau so unique and so effective.

Sparrow: Kentucky Farm Bureau Insurance was created out of the Federation in 1943, and was done so to serve members and underserved people in rural Kentucky communities who weren't getting competitive insurance opportunities. Working with a myriad of other insurers, including Indiana Farm Bureau Insurance and State Farm, we launched and started opening offices in what would eventually be all 120 counties. We also started recruiting people to work for us in those communities; people living and serving there. As a grassroots organization, our governance comes from these communities across the state. That's a strength we have, and I believe it to be our competitive advantage in Kentucky.

Today, in 2020, we have 182 agent offices across the state with 15 claims offices located regionally throughout the Commonwealth, and we service well over 1.3 million policies. Putting that into greater context, we're now the number one writer of property and casualty insurance in Kentucky, and we are the only Farm Bureau that holds that position nationwide.

While KFB is comprised of its agriculture advocacy Federation and the flagship member benefit Insurance Company, the two operate



Kentucky Farm Bureau Federation
Executive Vice President Drew Graham



Kentucky Farm Bureau Insurance
CEO and Executive Vice President John Sparrow

together in many ways on a daily basis. Could you elaborate on the importance of being “Stronger Together?”

Graham: While KFB is comprised of two entities, we operate as one organization. There is not a day that goes by that the leadership of both the Federation and the Insurance Company aren't in constant contact over ideas or issues that are affecting one side or the other. Because we work so closely together, this organization is well-positioned to serve our members. And at the end of the day, serving our members to the best of our abilities is what is most important. The idea that we're "Stronger Together" is not just an empty phrase that we use as part of a public relations effort. Rather, it is a philosophy we live by when it comes to operating this organization.

Sparrow: As an organization that has both a for-profit and a not-for-profit entity, our agencies and local volunteer leaders work hand-in-hand every day. The same is true of the employees in our state office. We advocate for each other. Because of that service to each other, and because we have each other's best interests in mind, we can conquer a lot of things. Now, for that to really work, you have to have leadership that buys into it and believes in it. I feel wonderful about our executive committee, our board members, our Federation division directors, and Insurance vice presidents, all of whom really want to invest in each other's success. We are much stronger together because we all believe in each other.

What are some of the main issues the two of you are currently involved with as it relates to both the Federation and Insurance Company?

Graham: As with most companies right now, we are making our way through the COVID-19 situation. In doing so, we have discovered what we really knew all along; the people who work for Farm Bureau are some of the most dedicated people I know. They have taken this pandemic by

the horns and never missed a beat when it comes to getting their work done, serving our members, and keeping this organization running as smoothly as possible. In doing so, we still are advocating for our agriculture industry. Farms didn't shut down during this pandemic. In fact, the necessity of the American farmer has never been more apparent, and because of that, we are more determined than ever to do our part in ensuring our farm families and rural businesses stay in business and continue the job they are doing to provide the necessary food, fuel, and fiber we need and depend on every single day, pandemic or not.

Sparrow: You know, you can buy insurance anywhere. So, one of the things vitally important for Kentucky Farm Bureau is to maintain what got us here. Why are we so relevant in Kentucky when it comes to insurance and membership? I believe it to be our grassroots. I believe it to be our governance. We have to be well-grounded. We have to be financially secure. We have to be conservative, but yet we have to compete in a world that's very aggressive in terms of pricing and competitiveness. But we believe our value proposition is right here, doing things similar to the way we've always done them. Being in every community, meeting the customer where they want to be met; our challenge is how do we do that in an ever-evolving world?

Recruiting is something else companies like ours are always challenged with. We've got 700 employees, 400 agents, and 600 customer service representatives out there, and making sure you get the best, service-focused people is critically important. We want to provide our customers and communities with the best service we can. We've been very fortunate in doing that for more than 75 years now, and that track-record keeps us energized every day.

KFB is the fourth largest Farm Bureau in the country. In your opinions, what did it take for the organization to get to this point and why is that important to members?

Graham: First and foremost, we have become the fourth largest Farm Bureau because of the work the entire organization has provided to its members. Our flagship member benefit is our Insurance Company which has helped grow this operation over the decades to become one of the best in the country. But our dedication to the very industry that gave us our start over a century ago has been key to developing leaders in this state who have gone on to be nationally recognized as outstanding agriculturalists. Because of this, Kentucky has a seat at the table when ag policy is being developed at all levels and again, it starts at the county level. Serving our members is the heart and soul of this organization, and because we see it that way and live it every day, we can count ourselves as being blessed to stand as one of the top Farm Bureaus in the country.

Sparrow: I'll say it over and over again: The reason we're so relevant is because we built a strong structure around leaders in our local communities, and we invest in these communities. This makes people want to be a part of our organization - either as a volunteer, an employee, or a customer buying insurance from us. The irony in this is that Kentucky is smaller in population than some of the other Farm Bureau states but even so, we're competitive with them. We've been able to stay relevant and price competitive, and, because we are so strong in this state, some might suggest that we actually drive the price in Kentucky. The national brands have to meet us in price and we don't necessarily, historically have to meet them. That's a neat place to be and certainly good for our members.

Operating during COVID-19 has got to be very challenging. How has the organization adapted to that and how are things going so far?

Graham: From the Federation standpoint, we often operate away from the state office in many different capacities. So, we already have a bit of a head-start when it comes to working remotely. But, in order to abide by state and federal regulations regarding the pandemic, our staff has been working from home since early March. In doing so, I can honestly say we have not missed a beat. While we have had to cancel some events, the day-to-day operations have continued as usual. We may meet in a different way, but the end result is the same: We are serving our organization and members to the fullest extent. I can't thank our staff enough for their efforts and the dedication they have displayed every day.

Sparrow: Our number one priority through this pandemic is our people. And when I say our people, I'm talking about our customers, our employees, our agents, and our contractors. We have not wavered on that. From the onset, we emphasized that we were going to make sure we took care of our folks. In doing that, it's caused us to work differently and think creatively. Not surprising to me, our employees, our agents and our volunteer leaders, were all in. Kentucky Farm Bureau is still producing, we're still serving, and our staff is still working nonstop. We're just doing it differently. There has never been a doubt from anybody here - our executive committee, our board members or our staff - that the safety of each member of the Kentucky Farm Bureau family, including our customers, comes first.

“ We will move forward together as an organization, as united communities, and as people who genuinely care for each other no matter what the day brings.”

- Drew Graham

In looking past this pandemic, is there anything you would like to share about future endeavors?

Graham: As is the case with everyone, I look forward to getting back to a day of normalcy. As humans, we need that interaction between each other. And as farm folks, we have an inherent need to be neighborly, to help each other in times of crisis, to support each other during the good and bad times we face. I do believe this time of uncertainty has given all of us the opportunity to pause and count our blessings, to find new ways to interact, and to continue to serve in ways we may not have realized before. We will move forward together as an organization, as united communities, and as people who genuinely care for each other no matter what the day brings.

Sparrow: Through all of this we have discovered we are able to do some things we didn't think we could do before. But I feel strongly that we're absolutely delivering on the needs of our customers and members when they need us the most. As always, our eyes are open to opportunities as we continue to think and grow and develop how we serve those customers, while always being mindful that our core value is having relationships in communities. And though we may not be seeing our customers face-to-face through the pandemic, I don't believe any of them feel unserved or that they aren't getting the help they need. One thing this organization does very well is it finds unique solutions when it comes to solving problems. If there's a way we can provide value through what we do, I believe we can make it happen.

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Mark Newhall, Editor, FARM SHOW: "My dad, who is 93, goes through about 6 bottles of Pain Formula a year. He uses it on his knee every day. He tells me he's never found anything else that works even a fraction as well as Steuart's. The direct quote from my dad is, 'I don't know how I would get by without Steuart's Pain Formula.'"

Davey Peterson, Mabel, Minn.: Davey had been experiencing very sharp pain in his left knee for several months. His job as a welder kept him on his feet; his work day was painful and it was difficult to sleep. He started using Steuart's Pain Formula each morning and is able to work pain free. His sleep is uninterrupted by his pain. He says "I am so glad I tried this product and I recommend it to others!"

Mike Kirik, Union City, Penn.: Mike was introduced to Steuart's Pain Formula upon discharge for open heart surgery by a staff person at the Pittsburgh VA hospital. Mike was told to use the product on his chest for pain relief during the healing process. He was able to get relief from the post-surgical pain in his chest plus he now uses it on his arthritic knee.

Thomas Lindberg, Two Harbors, Minn.: He says, "I have arthritis pain in my shoulders and back and was having trouble sleeping through the night because of the pain. I read about Steuart's in a magazine and was a bit skeptical at first but thought I'd give it a try. I was absolutely amazed at how well it worked and now use it every day. It works better than anything on the market."

Daniel Poray, Alexandria, Va.: "I was diagnosed with arthritis in my right leg and knee. I use Steuart's Pain Formula 2X/day and the pain has dramatically gone away and my movement, flexibility and range of motion have increased. The doctor recommended a cortisone shot but I was skeptical. Then I found Steuart's and glad I did!"



War broke out in Eastern Ukraine in 2014 between Ukraine and Russia backed separatists. In April of 2015 Gary Steuart reached out to the Ukraine military in the war zone, and was able to introduce Steuart Lab's products to the medical personnel and soldiers.

One person who became familiar with Steuart's products was a Special Operations soldier named Andre. In 2018 Andre was injured in a vehicle accident. He had multiple fractures to his left leg. He started using Steuart's Pain Formula. He applied it topically twice daily. He experienced significant pain relief. Steuart also advised him that the product would stimulate healing because it contains Comfrey, a recognized healing agent.

One year later, Andre's leg is healed and he has returned to active duty. His doctors in Kiev told him his expected recovery time was shortened by using Steuart's Pain Formula.

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Betty Brooks, Buhl, Idaho: "I put Pain Formula on my knees about 10:00 a.m. this morning, and it's now 9:00 p.m. and I'm still pain-free. I've had knee surgery - and tried just about every product on the market - and this works. I've had a very good day! I could feel it working as soon as I put it on."

Tom Donelson, Fargo, N.Dak.: He has been using Steuart's Pain Formula for over 2 years. "I give samples to anyone I meet who complains of joint or muscle pain. I've had minor knee surgery and a torn meniscus, as well as a degenerating disc. I originally used to take 2 to 3 ibuprofen a day. But now, after using Steuart's, I'm down to 2 to 3 a week. This product is great for anyone that doesn't want to or can't take drugs to manage pain. One woman I gave a sample to had jaundice in her liver from taking pain medication for arthritis. She's off medication and completely satisfied with this alternative. It's a wonderful product!"

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Keeping up with the Joneses

Gallatin County brothers are continually working to improve on their farming success

When Kentucky's agriculture industry took a big turn away from a one-crop economy more than 20 years ago, Taylor and Zac Jones were still very young. They have since watched agriculture in the Bluegrass State evolve into one of the most diversified ag sectors in the country using investments made by the Kentucky Agricultural Development Board.

So, having a diversified farming operation has come naturally to the Jones brothers. Today, the two grow a variety of fruits and vegetables, they have a large wholesale tomato operation, they have invested in a fairly new hemp business, and they also continue to raise more traditional crops, like tobacco and alfalfa hay, along with raising cattle on their 360 acres of farmland.

"We've been raising produce for years. But our bread and butter, I suppose, when it comes to produce, is the tomato operation," Taylor said. "During the summer between my sophomore and junior year of college, and Zac's first summer out of high school, we grew 278 tomato plants. That that went well, and the business just kind of took off from there."

Soon after, the Joneses added watermelons, cantaloupes, and sweet corn to the produce operation, and now they also raise pumpkins.

It is their love of raising produce that has led them to a new venture that could turn out to be their biggest success so far.

"Our wholesale buyers who have been with us for a decade are now operating at about 20 percent of their capacity due to the coronavirus," Zac said. "And we have enjoyed having these relationships that have allowed us to move 30,000 pounds of tomatoes in a week's time. But, if

they're operating at 20 percent, we had to get creative to figure out what we were going to do to sell our tomatoes."

That is when an earlier discussion between the two about selling directly to the consumer became more than just talk.

"There's no doubt the onset of COVID-19 caused us to try something new," Taylor said. "We were shouldering along just fine from a profitability standpoint. But I guess, maybe it's a blessing in disguise, forcing us to get out of our comfort zone, which is something we're very accustomed to doing."

It could very well be because of Taylor and Zac's ability to move away from traditional comfort zones and think outside the box that this new side of their farming business came about – and did so in a hurry.

"We decided that if we could get our produce to the customer, it would be like bringing the produce aisle in the grocery store directly to them," Taylor said. "Many people are worried about picking up germs from all of that food right out in the open at the supermarket, so we figured there would likely be a demand to bring the produce to them, but it came about quickly, and we quickly jumped on it. So far, it looks like we may be fortunate enough for it to work out."

That may be an understatement considering the kind of attention this new venture has gained in a relatively short period of time.

"It's been received, quite honestly, remarkably well, thus far," Zac said. "We're picking up, on average, about 100 subscription customers per week, since we've started. I don't know if we'll be able to maintain that, but you can't ask for much quicker growth than that."

The attention they are getting is coming mostly from a very traditional grassroots way of marketing; word-of-mouth and the good old-fashioned information flyer.

The two have a longer-term goal of 2,000 subscribers, and at the rate they are going, that expectation seems to be very realistic.

"I also believe that we can expand it to a 12-month long service, and it'll be a way to create a year-round cashflow on the farm, which is typically non-existent," Taylor said. The produce business is as traditional to the Joneses as is the tobacco crop they grow, the hay they produce, and the cattle they raise. Couple that with their hemp business, Jones Brothers Farm is a classic example of a new kind of farming diversity, but they are hoping the new to-your-door produce venture will be the big winner for their farm in the years to come.

"We have the opportunity to provide consumers with price-competitive products. We can put it on their doorsteps, and we genuinely believe that it will taste better, and be healthier. Best of all, they don't have to leave their home to get it," Taylor said. "I'm more excited about it than anything we've done, and yes, I think it has the potential to last long after the coronavirus is gone."

Deliveries for the new door-to-door service are set to begin July 1, and more information can be found at www.jonesbrothersfarm.com.



Fresh tomatoes from Jones Brothers Farms



One of the tomato greenhouses full of tomato plants.



Taylor Jones checks out the crops.

KFB Farming Footnote*:

Taylor Jones serves as the president of the Gallatin County Farm Bureau taking the position this year. He is also District 6 Young Farmer Chair. While he admits it is a tough time for farming operations across the country, the need for a strong agriculture advocate is greater now than ever before.

"I've learned a lot from the time I have been involved in Kentucky Farm Bureau," he said. "But the most valuable is, we are at a time when advocacy is as important as the soil we till. The question isn't, 'Are you a member of Farm Bureau?' but, 'How can you not be a member if you are going to farm?' The role this organization plays is far too great to be without it."

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Partners In Ag

Dr. Nancy Cox, Dean of the University of Kentucky College of Agriculture, Food, and Environment, recently joined Kentucky Farm Bureau News editor Tim Thornberry for a discussion about efforts being made by the college as the world continues to move forward through the COVID-19 pandemic

As we make our way through COVID-19, could you tell us a little bit of how things are going there at the college?

Dean Cox: *The college has certainly done a lot of adjustments with the COVID-19 situation, with one of the biggest being figuring out how to teach online for the rest of the semester. We had so many teachers and faculty who worked over spring break to move their courses online, and we think it has gone really well. In addition to teaching, we also had to think about research and extension to support agriculture, which meant that planting season happened when the university was working remotely. But those things still go on for agriculture. Foaling, calving, breeding, and other agriculture activities didn't stop because of COVID-19.*

I know extension is such a very important part of the college. How's that going for your agents out there in the county offices across the state?

Dean Cox: *We always call our extension agents heroes, but they really stepped up in heroism over the COVID situation. It gets complicated when you have an office in every county. You don't just follow the university guidelines; you also follow the local government guidelines. We were able to stay open with a reduced staff so we could collect soil samples, plant samples, and other things. Our staff members are so creative. They also made projects that parents could take home for their children to work on. They reached out in so many ways. I think we have new clients in extension because of this. We are also working more and more with people who want to have a home garden, and who want nutrition advice. We worked with emergency preparedness, and we've done what we always do, and even so much better.*

In the early days of this pandemic, we heard about essential industries, and of course, agriculture undoubtedly is and always has been one of these. Do you find yourself spreading that message even more these days than before?

Dean Cox: *Yes, and you know, it's interesting because we are experiencing a time that most people in this nation have not seen in their lives in going to the store and not finding what they wanted on the shelf. So, we think it's a real kind of educational moment for our citizens about where their food comes from and not to take it for granted. The other piece of this COVID-19 experience is related to another aspect of the College of Ag in that we believe in science. We had to let the science tell us, inform us on what we do and how we function. Our students, despite being off campus a lot, they've learned many things, including that the college is preparing them for what food is and what science is.*

One of the things that has been helpful during this period are the partnerships that we see with our universities and commodity groups. How important are those partnerships, especially now?

Dean Cox: *One of the great pleasures of being a land grant college of ag dean in Kentucky is that our commodity groups and ag leadership pulls together so well. And certainly, our partnership with your organization, Kentucky Farm Bureau, is longstanding and deep, and we serve communities in lockstep together. If Kentucky Farm Bureau is the*

voice of agriculture, I guess the college tries to be the unbiased source of information for agriculture, and we appreciate that relationship so much. We are also in lockstep with the Kentucky Department of Agriculture. We recently announced a partnership between extension and the Department of Ag regarding a new emphasis on victory gardens and helping people be able to grow their own food. We appreciate that partnership, too. We also work daily with our commodity groups, corn and small grains, soybean, forage and grassland, cattlemen, equine associations, poultry, and other organizations, such as the Community Farm Alliance. The fact that these partnerships were already established and already strong makes us able to move quickly in a pandemic environment, such as what we're in now.

We've always appreciated those partnerships. I know, having written about them and worked with them for so many years, but it's almost like we appreciate it even more now. Maybe we're noticing it more than ever before. Has that been the same case for you?

Dean Cox: *I think so. And you know, you don't start a relationship once the emergency starts. If you don't have a good one, you're not poised, but we have moved into the problem-solving phase related to COVID-19 in a most fluid way.*

It certainly puts Kentucky and the ag folks in this state in a good position because of the foundation we'd already set, don't you think?

Dean Cox: *Yes, and I can't overemphasize how gratifying it is to work in a state where all of the ag leadership works together.*

As we move forward toward what we hope is some form of normalcy, we've seen the challenges that we face in agriculture, and I've always been the person to believe that with challenges come opportunities. What do you see ahead of us as we move forward past this time?

Dean Cox: *The coronavirus will not listen to us at all, so we have to build in resilience and flexibility as we go forward, and we say that at UK all the time. We can plan all we want, but the virus sort of controls us, it seems. But I do think a few things have come out of it, such as people being more willing to grow food at home. The emphasis on local food and locally produced food has been a boon to the beef industry that supports the local environment. We also hope that we'll be in a position in Kentucky to grow the dairy industry's ability to support a local market as well. And as I mentioned before, we have a heightened awareness about food and how important it is.*

That's ironic that you say that. I've been talking to several people over the last couple of weeks about the attention that our local markets and direct sales from the farm have gotten since this pandemic began. It has really sparked an interest in people, and I know that our local markets certainly hope that continues long after COVID-19 is gone.

Dean Cox: *I truly hope it does. And I think the Kentucky Agricultural Development Board in the Governor's Office on Ag Policy, another crucial and pivotal partnership, is taking an opportunity to move and secure a future for locally produced food.*

Student Organizations Going Virtual, for Now

Summer events are still happening thanks to technology and persistence

Teachers and students alike had their fair share of challenges finishing the school year remotely via computer screens and prepared lessons sent home to those with connectivity issues.

But overcoming challenges is something in which teachers have become experts. And while the school year came to a close, learning opportunities and events continue for many of those young people involved in student organizations.

The summer months usually include many state conferences, training events, and officer elections for the thousands of Kentucky students who are members of a variety of organizations, including FFA, 4-H, and Family, Career and Community Leaders of America (FCCLA).

Matt Chaliff, executive secretary of Kentucky FFA and an agriculture education consultant with the Kentucky Department of Education said, while a virtual state conference is being held along with online general sessions and leadership opportunities, there is disappointment that so many of the usual summertime activities, including camps, won't happen this year.

“I think people have all been very willing to help and share ideas and figure out what can we do to make this a good experience for students.”

- Matt Chaliff

“For the officers, there is probably disappointment in terms of, they don't get to be together,” he said. “There is something special about that experience of seeing everybody again, being around people, and right now everybody is craving contact with human beings. But they have been positive in realizing that we're doing the best we can, given the situation.”

Chaliff added that many people have come together to help with ideas of how to make as many of the conference-related activities happen, but it's still not the same.

“I think people have all been very willing to help and share ideas and figure out what can we do to make this a good experience for students,” he said. “I've been encouraged by FFA members' response to this. Our officers have come to the table with ideas on how to engage FFA members during this time. While FFA members are disappointed in not getting to be together, I think everyone understands the situation and is working to make the best of it.”

Extension Specialist for Kentucky 4-H Youth Development Rachel Noble said agents and specialists across the state worked to adapt programming, which will reach new audiences as well as meet the needs of traditional audiences.

“This has been a really interesting time for us,” she said. “A lot of things have been canceled, but we've really reinvented 4-H programming in some ways, and that has been kind of cool.”

The annual 4-H Emerald Gala, the state 4-H Foundation's premier fundraising and recognition event, fell victim as an in-person event, but virtually, Noble said it also provided opportunities.

“I think we were able to really capitalize on reaching as many people



as possible through (digital platforms and streaming services,)” she said. “Some people who may not have gotten to attend the gala beforehand were able to view it, and see what it's all about, and hear from people about where the funds go, and the programming that we're able to do with sponsor funding.”

Many of the annual events that take place this time of year for 4-H will still move forward in a virtual way, and that seems to be the message from the student organizations, as a whole. They may be doing things virtually, but moving forward, just the same.

Reeca Carver, Kentucky FCCLA state adviser, said the national organization is celebrating its 75th anniversary this year, and while it's being done in a different way than was planned, it is still a celebration.

“Despite the disruptions we've had due to the coronavirus, what we do is still about the students, and this is a student-led organization,” she said. “Of course, we had to cancel our state conference, which is the time we always elect officers, hold our annual business meeting, and take care of duties as far as voting on dues or bylaw changes or anything like that. All those things still need to be done. So, we are doing them virtually, as best as we can.”

The National FCCLA Conference will also be held virtually, something that could enable more students to attend.

“It sounds very exciting, and I think that it's kind of cool in the fact that all our members have an opportunity to actually be at the national conference because of it being virtual,” she said. “We'll just keep looking forward to what we can do this year and prepare for next year.”

If anyone can take lemons and make lemonade, it is educators and state organization advisers. They have made this year unforgettable in many ways and continue to seek opportunities in the midst of challenges.

“I think we're all figuring out, and there's a lot of figuring out to do, on how you use virtual platforms, but I think there's some opportunities to make opportunities,” Chaliff said. “But, there's value to having human beings in the same room, working together, and I think we all have to find a balance of that when this is over.”



DOWN THE BACKROADS

By Tim Thornberry

We're a Huggin' Bunch

So much of how we act as an adult comes from what we learned as a child. I realize that is not an earth-shattering statement, but stay with me for a minute.

The things we experienced growing up often stay with us. For instance, my dad was a big outdoorsman, and I have grown up loving the outdoors just as much. My mom was a nurturer, always making sure us kids were okay, showing how much she loved us.

In doing so, she provided daily hugs, which were the best in the world. My dad was somewhat of a hugger, too, more of a side hugger, though. You know, the kind of hug you get standing shoulder to shoulder.

My mom, however, gave the full-blown, both arms around you, kind of hugs that would last forever, or so it seemed.

She must have learned that from her dad, who would squeeze you till your eyes bugged out.

I remember well my grandfather's visits and how I would look forward to those monster hugs of his.

And it was because of all of this huggin' I got from my family that it passed on to me and my suppose. I'd like to think I have much of the same kind of love and kindness in my heart that they possessed, as well.

Now, don't get me wrong. I don't reach out to hug everyone I see. That would just be wrong, and besides, some people just aren't huggers.

But for my family and close friends, giving and getting those embraces is a way we show our love for each other. It's comforting to me to get a hug from someone I care about.

However, this coronavirus has made us all a little leery of getting that close to someone, even members of our own family, and it's almost impossible to give a hug from six feet out.

We can't even shake hands! It's an elbow bump at best. I'm certainly not advocating to break the rules and practice unsafe actions. We all need to get through this pandemic thing, and if giving up hugs is part of it, so be it. I can knock

elbows with the best of them.

But in hearing from others who are also experiencing this hug withdrawal kind of thing, I feel like there are many of us who long for the day when we can all be together, unafraid to reach out and hug the ones we love.

For now, I'm glad to use technology to visit with friends and family, I'm willing to keep my distance when I see loved ones in person, and I'm saving up a ton of hugs when the day comes that we can hug till our heart's content, as we travel down the backroads.

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