

Kentucky

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President's Column

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One of the most important issues facing the agriculture industry today is the ability to pass a farm on to the next generation either by inheritance or through selling. It sounds easy enough but often tax laws can make the process cumbersome and expensive.

We have been fortunate in Kentucky to have some specific legislation to help in the matter. The bill that created the Kentucky Selling Farmers Tax Credit (KSFTC) Program passed during the 2019 General Assembly and is a prime example of how Kentucky Farm Bureau's advocacy efforts can pay off when working with our legislative members.

Kentucky Senate President Pro Tempore David Givens was instrumental in getting this legislation through to fruition. The KSFTC Program promotes the continued use of agricultural land for farming purposes by granting tax credits to selling farmers who agree to sell agricultural land and assets to beginning farmers.

We are thankful to Senator Givens for his devotion to agriculture and his help in getting this legislation passed.

However, there is much work that needs to be done to continue this forward progress when it comes to helping with the passing of farmland along to a new generation of farm families. All too often we see production farmland turn into housing developments because so many young and beginning farmers just don't have the capital to make the purchase, and an oversized tax bill only makes the situation worse.

There is currently national legislation that has been introduced in the U.S. House and Senate that would eliminate the estate, or "death" tax which would be of considerable help as it relates to this issue.

But there is also the discussion of lowering the current estate tax exemption to a level that would be detrimental to many farm families. Lowering the exemption below current levels would cause an increased tax burden on many of them looking to take over the family farm after a death.

The last thing a family needs to worry about at a time like that is how to transfer their property when losing some or all of it because of an undue tax burden. This isn't rocket science folks. Simply put, we must have farms to eat, therefore we must do all we can to ensure existing farms can be passed on to the next generation without breaking the bank.

Another issue that has surfaced when it comes to inheriting farmland is the announcement of a new proposal to end stepped-up basis when calculating capital gains taxes on inherited income, which would include inherited farmland.

Current stepped-up basis law allows heirs to step up their cost basis in inherited property to match the value on the date of the previous owner's death, meaning that only capital gains above that point could ever be subject to income taxes.

Removing stepped-up basis would require the heir of the property to pay tax gains based on the original purchase price of the farmland rather than the market value on the date of inheritance. Farm Bureau opposes this, and we must continue our efforts, at all levels, to ensure sound legislation is passed that would help farm families, not penalize them for wanting to continue a tradition which we all depend upon.



Mark Haney, President

Kentucky Farm Bureau

Kentucky

FARM • BUREAU • NEWS



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Kentucky Farm Bureau is a grassroots organization dedicated to serving our membership family and their communities. As the Voice of Agriculture, we identify problems, develop solutions, promote economic success, and enhance the quality of life for all.

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Comment Column

The Zipline: Family Farm Legacy Threatened by Proposed Tax Increase

If you work in agriculture, you know it's not just a way of life – it is life. The farms we live on and operate become as much a part of our identity as our last name or our ancestry. I, myself, am a third-generation farmer. I have tried to uphold my family's legacy with hopes that my children will do the same after I'm gone.

But the next generation of farmers faces a severe challenge if a proposal in the U.S. Senate is passed. The Sensible Taxation and Equity Promotion (STEP) Act would eliminate the stepped-up basis tax provision and tax capital gains at death.

Tax issues can be complicated, and many people's eyes glaze over when taxes are discussed, but this is important. This could mean the difference between a thriving farm or your children being forced to sell off that farm bit by bit.

This is how stepped-up basis works. When you pass away, your children inherit your farm. As it stands now, the value of the farm is set at the time of the inheritance. If your children choose to sell, they face capital gains taxes on the increase in value since they took ownership. If stepped-up basis is eliminated, they would be forced to pay taxes on appreciation from the previous generation plus appreciation during the time they've owned the operation. In some states, that could mean taxes of more than \$1,000 per acre.

What's worse, there is talk of instituting a "tax at death," which would force your children to pay capital gains taxes once they have inherited the farm. Imagine dealing with the loss of a loved one and then being forced to take out expensive loans, or worse, sell the farm your parents spent their lives protecting, just to pay the taxes. "Tax at death" would be in addition to any estate taxes due, so the impact would be especially damaging.

The senators who proposed the STEP Act call stepped-up basis a "loophole" that provides "an unfair advantage to the wealthy heirs every year." But, make no mistake, collecting capital gains taxes at death amounts to a tax increase on the middle class. Wealthy Americans have teams of attorneys and accountants who can figure out how to protect assets. Middle-class Americans don't have those resources. The value of a farm is tied up in land and equipment and very few of us have the available cash to pay these increased taxes while keeping the farm running.

This isn't just an agriculture issue. Eliminating stepped-up basis will affect small, family-owned businesses across the country—from the local pizza shop in town to the homebuilder, and really any American wanting to pass on family assets to the next generation. In fact, a recent study shows eliminating stepped-up basis would cost the economy \$10 billion and 80,000 jobs a year.

The American Farm Bureau is working with lawmakers to help them understand that this plan will kill small business, lead to more consolidation and ultimately force people out of their jobs. We urge you to get involved, too. Contact your senator and representative and ask them to protect hardworking Americans who want to pass their success on to the next generation.



Zippy Duvall, President

American Farm Bureau Federation





Bees on the Farm: There's More to it than Just Honey

HONEY BEES ARE SERVING IN MULTIPLE WAYS ON THIS SIMPSON COUNTY FARM

Chip Willingham's farm in Simpson County is really two different entities; one with traditional row crops such as corn and soybeans, and the other is a Kentucky Farm Bureau Certified Farm Market known as "Just Piddlin' Farm."

The market side of his operation consist a variety of small crops, as well as a pumpkin patch and corn maze which are the two mainstays of the business. And it was the pumpkin business that actually got Willingham into the bee business.

"When we first started raising pumpkins, I knew that pollination was going to be pretty critical, and so I bought my first two hives back, I guess it's been 20-plus years ago, and we've just had honey bees each year after that," he said. "And the honey bees have been such an important part of our farming operation, and then of course the nice fringe benefit of having bees is the honey production. We sell our honey each fall at our market but the main thing that we rely on our bees for is pollination."

Willingham said there are obvious advantages to having his own pollinators on the farm, but there is quite a bit of work that goes into it, as well.

"There's a lot of management in honey bees, and it's more than just sticking your beehives out and collecting honey at the end of the year," he said. "You've got to take care of your bees throughout the year, and that's why a lot of (producers) will let other beekeepers come in, because it is somewhat time-consuming."

Much of that time includes things like checking for mites, which is a major cause of beehive failures from year to year. Willingham also spends a lot of time just checking on the hives; making sure the queen is active and laying her eggs and that there is plenty of food.

"I've had a lot of the same heartaches and trouble that many other beekeepers have experienced, and I have had hives that failed," he said, "But we've had several different beehives over the years with many successes."

Willingham has also moved his bees before to help a friend with strawberry pollination.

"I've actually taken my hives to a good friend's place to help him pollinate his strawberries and then I'll bring them back and use them for my pumpkin crop, because the pollination timing is different."

Willingham said you can rely on natural pollinators for pumpkins, but having the bees is somewhat of a security thing for him to make sure that pollination occurs like it should.

"I think, to be a good pumpkin producer, you need to have pollinators available," he said. "I can always rent hives or contract with a beekeeper to bring bees in, but I've always just done it on my own."

Having the bees on site has also allowed Willingham to incorporate an educational component to the market as many school groups make their way to the farm throughout the school year.

"We do take advantage of that opportunity to educate when we have school groups come out by having an observation hive, which is basically bees that are in-between two sheets of plexiglass, and you can see all parts

of their life cycle, from the egg-laying, to the larva, to the actual hatching, or the pupa coming out of the frame," he said. "The education side is so important, because most kids and even a lot of adults are scared of bees. They think bees are out to get them, and that's really the last thing a bee wants to do, is sting you, because once they sting, that pretty much ends their life."

"I find myself a lot of times just standing there watching them... There's a language that bees have that you don't understand, but it's fascinating to watch."

Chip Willingham

Willingham likes all aspects of having the bees on the farm from their work as pollinators to the educational side of beekeeping. And he encourages others to get involved if it's something they really want to do.

"I get a lot of questions from people about raising bees, and I always encourage them to do it, but it's not something you want to get into for the money, unless you're going to get big and try to do mass pollination," he said. "But it's a great hobby that produces local honey which is in high demand."

While there is a great demand for local honey, Willingham warns that there's a lot of cost in getting the hives to the point of producing honey to sell. However, he emphasizes that it's a great experience and it is captivating just to watch the bees.

"I find myself a lot of times just standing there watching them; how the different bees have different jobs, and how they communicate with each other by the wagging of their tail, and how they flap their wings," he said. "There's a language that bees have that you don't understand, but it's fascinating to watch."





Kentucky has the largest beef cow herd east of the Mississippi and the eighth largest nationally, with approximately one million beef cows.

May is Beef Month!

AS CELEBRATIONS TAKE PLACE ACROSS THE COUNTRY, KENTUCKY IS PROVING TO BE A NATIONAL LEADER IN BEEF CATTLE PRODUCTION

As campaigns to promote May as National Beef Month begin to roll out across the nation, it goes without saying that the Kentucky beef cattle industry has become one of the best in the country. The Commonwealth has the largest beef cow herd east of the Mississippi and the eighth largest nationally, with approximately one million beef cows.

And recent studies have shown that U.S. beef production has reduced its carbon footprint by 40 percent since the 1960s while producing approximately 66 percent more beef.

University of Kentucky College of Agriculture, Food, and Environment Extension Specialist Kenny Burdine said there are many reasons for the success the state has seen in its cattle industry.

"Kentucky has outstanding beef producers who are

constantly working to improve the quality of our cattle," he said. "Our producers have made improvements in genetics, nutrition, forages, facilities, marketing and many other aspects of their operations."

Burdine added that there is also an excellent forage base, good water resources, and strong marketing networks across the Commonwealth.

"There are always challenges, and we should also be striving to improve profitability, but I think Kentucky is an excellent feeder cattle producing state," he said.

Kentucky Farm Bureau's (KFB) Beef Advisory Committee Chair and State Director Shane Wiseman said, as a cattle producer, he has seen an availability of resources in this state that have helped position the beef cattle industry to the point of where it is today.

"Over the last several years, we've really been able to

improve genetics, and the quality of the cattle in Kentucky, in general, thanks in part to the investments made from both the state and county funds from the Kentucky Agricultural Development Board," he said. "Those dollars have also assisted in purchasing handling facilities and share the cost in buying such things as chutes, pens, and building fences."

Wiseman also said that the state's cattle producers have access to learning resources through programs provided by state universities, extension, commodity groups and the networking opportunities through the KFB Beef Advisory Committee.

"There are people from all over the state on that advisory board with us, and they can let us know what issues they're facing in their areas," he said. "I think that's as helpful as anything because we're learn what's going on in different parts of the state. What's going on in Paducah might not be the same thing that's going on in Winchester, where I live."

And geography can play a big role for those looking to get into the agriculture industry. Wiseman said there are many areas of the state especially from the central region eastward that are favorable for cattle production.

"There's good grazing land and we've got a lot of shade and a lot of water; the things it takes to be successful with cattle," he said. "Exports and the demand for U.S. beef is as high as it's ever been and the cattle business is a good business, there's no doubt about it."

Getting a new generation interested in the cattle industry could well begin with the state's agriculture education teachers. Garrard County High School's agricultural educator Shelbi Clark said the first thing to do is bridge the gap between those involved in farming and those who are not.

"Garrard County is very rooted in agriculture, but a lot of our high school students don't have that ag connection; that ag background that we think that they would have," she said "So, as teachers in an ag program, we're able to provide that opportunity for them to see the value and have an appreciation for the industry where they live and where they've grown up and hopefully, many will want to continue with that agriculture passion."

Clark said getting involved in the cattle sector could provide that connection to the agriculture culture so prevalent there and across the state.

"I grew up on a beef cattle farm, and it provided some wonderful opportunities for me as it could for these students," she said. "There's a future for beef in this state especially in our region. We can't grow a lot of grain here so, students who want to

"Exports and the demand for U.S. beef is as high as it's ever been and the cattle business is a good business, there's no doubt about it."

Shane Wiseman

become involved in agriculture, cattle could be their best bet."

Like any farming venture there are challenges in the cattle industry. Wiseman said prices need to increase in order to allow producers to continue to improve needs on the farm.

"I feel that's our biggest struggle as a producer, especially the cow-calf producer, we're really struggling on the price right now," he said. "But, if the futures predictions are right for later in the year, we should have a good fall to sell cattle."

Burdine said there are certainly things that can negatively impact the market and feed prices are likely the most significant headwind that producers face.

"But the fundamentals do appear to be setting up for a much better year," he said.

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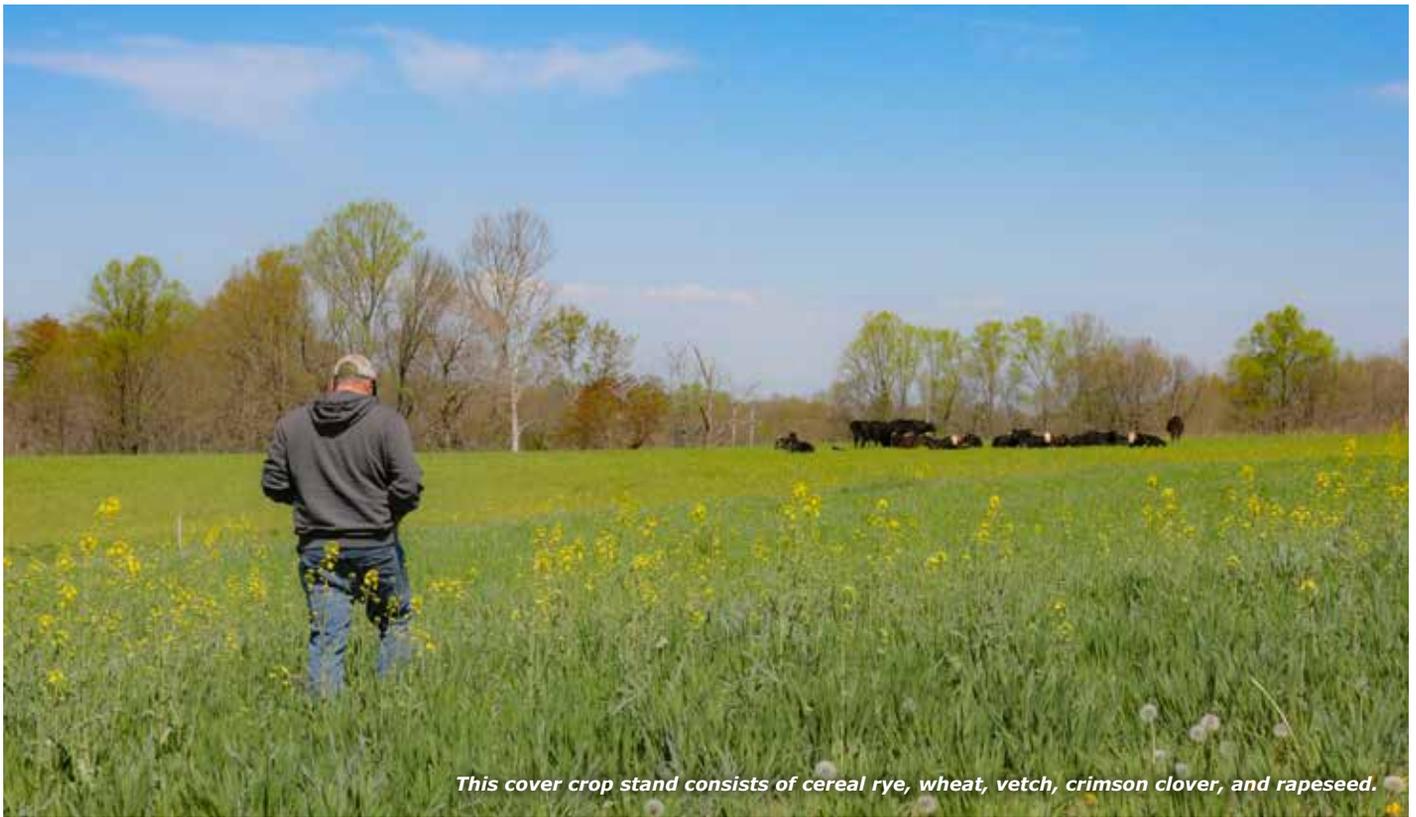


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This cover crop stand consists of cereal rye, wheat, vetch, crimson clover, and rapeseed.

The Value of Cover Crops to the Land and to the Farmer

AS THE AG INDUSTRY MOVES FORWARD IN CLIMATE DISCUSSIONS, COVER CROPS WILL PLAY AN IMPORTANT ROLE IN ITS STORY.

The use of cover crops to improve production farmland isn't new, however the story of just how important this agricultural practice is may be something the general population is not familiar with.

But Pulaski County grain producer Chris Pierce has made the practice as much of his farming operation as the row crops themselves. He began his journey into cover crop use nearly a decade ago and now utilizes a variety of them on all of the crop acres of his, and wife Rebekah's, cash grain crops operation.

"My wife and I began our farming operation here in 2007, and we originally started out farming around 500 acres," he said. "We've historically grown corn, soybeans, wheat, and some canola in the past, and we've started to do some custom grazing work, and we also do some co-op grazing in our community with cover crops we grow on our farm."

Over the years, Pierce said he has transitioned from being very much a commercial ag model to more of a soil health model in their farming system.

"We started planting cover crops for soil health purposes in 2012, and we progressed now to where we have cover crops on 100 percent of our acres," he said.

That is a tall task considering the farming operation has grown to now include 6,000 acres. But Pierce has seen, first-hand, the benefits of using cover crops not only to enrich the soils on his land but to be a better steward of his natural resources.

"I think by using cover crops, we're farming more like my great grandparents did and these soils should grow crops for thousands of years, the way Lord created them," he said. "We have found ways that we cycle nutrients better, our land is absorbing water more readily, and we're managing weeds easier from the residues that cover crops leave."

In looking specifically at his carbon footprint, Pierce also sees definite improvement.

"Prior to 2012, we probably were averaging three to four chemical applications per acre, per year, and depending on the crop, more than that," he said. "Since then, we've been able to reduce chemical applications to maybe two or even less per acre. So, we've probably cut them in half."

One of the external benefits Pierce didn't expect to see was nutrient management.

"The way we cycle nutrients and the way that nutrients

are becoming available naturally in the soil, we've lowered fertilizer applications," he said. "We have always been a no-till farming operation and what we've seen by using cover crops, we're lowering our machinery costs, we're lowering our fuel costs on the farm, and that's allowed us to take our working capital and farm more acres. For us, it has been an economic decision, as well as a choice of doing the right thing for the land."

Pierce is in a unique position, in that he has also taught the Adult Agriculture Education Program with the Kentucky Community and Technical College System since 2004 working within communities, working closely with young farmers and beginning farmers.

"We are helping them in making better decisions and to establish their farming businesses that would provide a better quality of life for rural communities and themselves," he said. "The farmers that I serve are looking for answers that may not be provided to them from a parent or a grandparent, or another senior community member, so we're providing access to agricultural experience in a local group setting."

Having a more community wide farming economy is important to Pierce, who said that what farmer families want the most is the ability to farm another year, and the years after that.

"We want to continue to farm, and with young farmers, the one thing that I've seen over my tenure at KCTCS is that transition or ideology of being responsive to their environment," he said. "The generation that I'm servicing right now has been aware of environmental issues for most of their life; it's been part of their raising, and with the discussions present in the media, they're conscious of it."

Pierce said this newer generation is in tune with smart environmental practices for a couple of reasons.

"Number one, they want to take care of that farm and they're trying to establish their business," he said. "And secondly, most of them have limited resources, so things like rotational grazing and water resource development and protection, is important to them because they have a limited amount of land, and they want to maximize it. By using these best management practices that are environmentally friendly, they're able to better maximize the use of the resources they have on their farm."

Pierce is a strong advocate for the agriculture community and is active in explaining to non-farming neighbors some of the practices that occur on his farm.

"We can use cover crops in a way that leverage



Cooperative cover crop grazing at Terrill Roy Farm



15 inch row wheat trial at Paul Roy Farm

economic resources, we're putting the seeds out there that are improving nutrient availability in the soil, and with a diversified farm, we're able to graze that cover crop and incorporate livestock into their cropping system," he said. "We want to be good stewards of the land and what we have to do as Farm Bureau members, and as agriculturalists, is be proactive," he said. "We need to be on the offense of telling our story, because we've got a great story to tell."

Farm Bureau Footnote:*

"As the agriculture industry moves deeper into environmental discussions, it's important to hear from producers like Chris, who are making great strides in reducing the carbon footprint of their operations while sharing practices that farm families are already involved in," said Kentucky Farm Bureau President Mark Haney. "There is so much our industry is doing to take care of the natural resources that take care of us. What we must do now is have our voices heard at all levels to ensure our governmental leaders understand these practices on the farm are part of the solution to climate issues."

Kentucky Selling Farmers Tax Credit Program

THIS RELATIVELY NEW PROGRAM HOLDS PROMISE FOR THOSE LOOKING TO SELL AGRICULTURAL LAND TO BEGINNING FARMERS

Beginning farmers have faced a very familiar obstacle for years, possibly decades, this being the ability to obtain the production farmland they need to be competitive and profitable; the ole, "You can't make money without land to farm, and you can't get the land to farm, without money," issue.

Unless you are a generational farmer able to inherit the family farm, which comes with its own set of difficulties, beginning farmers have had to be creative at best in buying needed farmland to get started.

But the issue isn't just related to those looking to purchase a farm. Landowners have issues, as well, especially when it comes to tax issues and whether to sell to other farmers or property developers.

However, thanks to a law passed in the 2019 session of the General Assembly, there is an option for those selling farmers which also holds an advantage for those buyers by way of the Kentucky Selling Farmers Tax Credit (KSFTC) Program, which the bill created.

According to information from the Kentucky Cabinet for Economic Development, "The purpose of the program is to promote the continued use of agricultural land for farming purposes by granting tax credits to selling farmers who agree to sell agricultural land and assets to beginning farmers."

Kentucky Farm Bureau 1st Vice President Eddie Melton said the program is gaining ground as more farmland owners seem to be taking advantage of it.

"We are beginning to see the number of farmers taking advantage of it increase which means there is farmland staying in production, and beginning farmers getting a chance to carry on the tradition of the agriculture industry," he said.

Melton added that tax issues on both sides of a sale can become cumbersome and expensive so having a program of this type in place, spells a win-win for seller and buyer.

Melton also said keeping agricultural land in production is critical to the success of the ag industry and those who benefit from it.

"We have to keep as much farmland in production as possible if we are going to meet the food, fiber, and fuel needs of the future," he said. "This program is helping us to recognize this issue as we make strides to do more to help ease some of the concerns of buying and selling agricultural land."

Specifically, the KSFTC Program allows for a tax credit of up to five percent of the purchase price of qualifying agricultural assets subject to a \$25,000 per calendar year cap, and a \$100,000 lifetime cap. To be eligible, those selling farmers must sell to a beginning farmer who has not owned agricultural land used for a farming operation for more than 10 years.

Beginning farmers get the advantage of being able to buy land they may not have otherwise had the change to obtain which could ultimately enable them to make future investments in their farming operations.

Kentucky Senate President Pro Tempore David Givens was instrumental in getting the legislation moved through the legislative process. He said one of the hardest things for a new farmer to do, is find production land he or she can afford.

"One of the biggest obstacles to entry (into farming) is going to be the cost of land, and finding that financing," he said. "They want to start farming and they face this huge challenge of how to get the capital necessary to purchase a farm."

The other side of the issue is that of the selling farmer who could easily make more money subdividing the farm but would rather see it remain as production farmland.

"In working with Farm Bureau leadership, we looked at this issue and thought what if we just created an opportunity for that farmer who would love to see his or her farm, being production agriculture, but can't take the financial hit of not subdividing it," he said. "In asking, how we could incent them to think about keeping it together, we rolled around to an existing tax credit conversation and said, 'Look, let's set up the chance for a selling farmer to keep that farm in production agriculture, and not take such a tremendous hit.' And was effectively done at zero cost to the state."

Givens said he thinks the desire to keep farmland in production is part of the attraction that selling farmers see in the program; something that could lead to some type of mentorship between the selling farmer and the new buyer.

"If we can also cause that conversation to happen, it's just so very important, because there is such a wealth of knowledge in our older farm population that our younger farm population could benefit from," he said.

Givens added that when that type of relationship occurs, the effects are not only beneficial for the buyer and seller but for the farm community, as a whole.

But advocacy remains a top priority to make programs like this a reality.

"We are fortunate to have a substantial amount of direct farm knowledge in the General Assembly and there's still a tremendous amount of allegiance to our farms," Givens said. "One of the things we've got to continue to do as advocates for agriculture, is be that ambassador that connects people back to the farm in some way. And we've got to continue to have an awareness of production practices that are required to grow crops, to grow livestock, and it's a role that we all need to play."

National Affairs Update: Stepped-Up Basis Reform

President Joe Biden recently announced his American Jobs Plan, which is a \$2.7 trillion infrastructure package. President Biden proposed a sharp increase in the corporate income tax rate as one way to help pay for the proposed infrastructure package. President Biden is also expected to introduce the American Families Plan, this proposal will include spending for health care, education, and childcare. Details of other tax increases have been vaguely mentioned, and one potential proposal is eliminating stepped-up basis, which would be detrimental to farmers looking to pass down their farmland to future generations.

The same week that President Biden released his infrastructure proposal, Senators Cory Booker (D-NJ), Chris Van Hollen (D-MD), Bernie Sanders (I-VT), Sheldon Whitehouse (D-RI), and Elizabeth Warren (D-MA) announced a new proposal to end stepped-up basis when calculating capital gains taxes on inherited income, which would include inherited farmland. The proposed legislation, labeled the Sensible Taxation and Equity Promotion (STEP) Act would drastically increase tax liability for individuals that recognize a gain on inherited farmland.

Current stepped-up basis law allows heirs to step up their cost basis in inherited property to match the value on the date of the previous owner's death, meaning that only capital gains above that point could ever be subject to income taxes. Removing stepped-up basis would require the heir of the property to pay taxable gains based on the original purchase price of the farmland rather than the market value on the date of inheritance. The proposal does provide an exemption on the first \$1 million of gain if the transfer occurs at death.

An example of how removing the stepped-up basis under the proposed reform would work towards tax liability for inherited farmland is by having a son or daughter inherit 500 acres of cropland worth \$7,000 an acre which was purchased in 1980

for about \$2,000 acre. This would be an increase in value of about \$2.5 million, \$1.5 million of which would be taxable under the proposed STEP Act. Current stepped-up basis law would allow you to use the valuation at the time of inheritance instead of the time of purchase, which in this example was 1980.

Eliminating stepped-up basis would negatively affect numerous farm families and small businesses that plan to pass down farmland and businesses to the next generation. However, it would generate billions of dollars annually to help fund some

of the top priorities of the current administration. According to a 2017 tax expenditure report by the United States Department of the Treasury, elimination of stepped-up basis would generate roughly \$40 billion annually and more than \$400 billion over the next decade.

For more information from American Farm Bureau on the hazards of eliminating stepped-up basis visit: <https://www.fb.org/market-intel/elimination-of-stepped-up-basis-poses-hazards-to-family-farms>



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Candid Conversation

WITH RENEE CARRICO

KFB Candid Conversation presents a discussion about the topical issues related to KFB priorities, the agricultural industry, and rural communities, in a question and answer format. In this column, Kentucky Farm Bureau Federation's newest member, Renee Carrico discusses her role as Livestock and Environmental Field Specialist and some of the things she will be doing in this new position.

First, welcome to the KFB family. Would you mind sharing a little about yourself and some of your previous roles?

Thank you so much, I'm very excited to join the team. A little about me, I grew up in Princeton, Kentucky on our small family farm where we ran stocker cattle and raised show pigs. With both parents working off farm jobs in university extension, the five kids found ourselves involved in many livestock and youth development programs over the years that led me to want to pursue a career in agriculture. I attended the University of Kentucky and obtained degrees in Animal Sciences and Agricultural Economics. Upon graduation, I accepted a role with Corteva AgriSciences as the PhytoGen Cottonseed and Mycogen seeds territory manager in the North Delta of Mississippi. Fast forward 3 years and a lot of prayers later, we realized Kentucky was calling me home. I made the move back and worked as a project manager at the Governor's Office of Agricultural Policy in Frankfort until the end of March when I was blessed to have the opportunity to take on this new role at Kentucky Farm Bureau. My husband and I now reside in Springfield, Kentucky about a mile from the family cow-calf operation we help manage with goals of purchasing a farm of our own one day.

You have been involved in agriculture all of your life. What are some of the changes you have seen over the years, from a family farm perspective?

Kentucky farms, and family farms in general, never cease to amaze me with their ingenuity and resilience as the industry, consumer demand and markets change. Over my lifetime I have sadly seen the decline in tobacco contracts, which truly shaped many of the rural communities we have today. However, this change has pushed many to diversify and have new on-farm revenues that few people would've guessed would be sustainable 20 years ago. The local foods movement has done nothing but grow, whether that be farmers market sales, Agri-tourism or local brands in major retail chains, the consumers demand to know where their food comes from seems like it is here to stay. Seeing so many family farms embrace this change has been one of the most significant changes I have seen in my lifetime.



Renee Carrico, Livestock and Environmental Field Specialist

In your opinion, how important is Kentucky's livestock sector to the overall success of our agriculture industry?

I may be a bit biased, but I truly believe Kentucky's livestock sector is vital and absolutely essential for the Kentucky agriculture industry. Our state is so diverse with many acres suitable for a variety of agriculture practices, however, there are still many acres that aren't suitable for row crops. How lucky are we to have a strong livestock industry to utilize those acres? Livestock and crops truly work hand in hand. Livestock can utilize by-products/co-products of the ethanol industry, soybean processing plants, and distilleries as in feed rations. These facilities are able to build and expand in our state not only due to the volume of grain we produce but also the amount of livestock available to help utilize these by-products and lessen costs of disposal/waste. The diversity of Kentucky's agricultural landscape truly aids in the growth of all sectors of the industry.

Livestock and Environmental Field Specialist is a new position at KFB. What are some of the things you will be doing in your role at the organization?

That's a great question that we are honestly still working through. The main goal is for this role to serve as livestock and environmental specific liaison between members and the KFB state office. As situations arise locally, in Frankfort or in D.C. we want our members to have a direct link to know where KFB policy stands and find out what more we can do. I also would like to be a source of information for producers across the state. 2020 was a tough year and although we stayed in touch as much as possible through Zooms and Webinars, what we have missed is being on farms and learning what others are doing around the state. There have been improvements by so many in marketing their local meats, upgrades to processing facilities, improved finishing barns, and the list goes on. My goal is to be a dispatcher of information to producers across the state. Many times what works in Eastern Kentucky can work in Western Kentucky but connecting those producers is what is needed to start the conversation to make it happen. That being said, my favorite word in my title is "field" which gives me the option to constantly be out and on farms finding out what members needs are and finding ways to address them.

Do we still find that most family farms in Kentucky have some form of livestock on their farms, as part of their operations, and if so, what do you see as the importance of that?

It's funny you ask this because I was just telling someone this week how I keep learning about crop and produce farmers I have known for years have added cattle, sheep, or poultry barns to their farm. From a farm family perspective, I will always say I learned more from caring for animals than almost anything I did growing up. Understanding an animal's needs, addressing the diet, managing the forages; there are just so many life skills to be learned while caring for your livestock. I would also note that it keeps our farmers connected to all aspects of the industry. High crop prices many times mean lower cattle and hog prices and vice versa. Having livestock on the farm whether they are the primary enterprise or not, keeps us informed and aware of how each sector of the industry is connected and spreads out risk for the venture operation.

Kentucky has seen marked growth in its livestock sector over the past two decades, especially with beef cattle. What do you see in the future for this sector, more specifically, how do we keep that momentum moving forward?

Marketing, marketing, marketing. I have seen multiple groups over the last year post the question "What do you need as a beef cattle producer to better your operation?" and the number 1 answer is always marketing. Kentucky's cattle quality has improved tremendously over the last 20 years, which can be attributed to so many things including KADF cost-share programs, hands-on extension

“This state is blessed in that our agriculture groups are willing to sit around a table together to hear out producer needs and help take steps forward.”

Renee Carrico

staff and markets developing and promoting special sales for their producers. However, all of these groups hear the producer's push to take a step further. Some county groups are doing this through comingling of cattle and marketing in larger groups to obtain the additional dollars. Others are retaining ownership through the feedlots, while still others see the demand for local foods warrants a large-scale processing facility and feedlot structure within our state. I personally see power in all of these options. The question is how do we strike a balance and help those across the state take home those additional dollars without excluding a type or size operation in our state? What helps one size producer doesn't always help another. This state is blessed in that our agriculture groups are willing to sit around a table together to hear out producer needs and help take steps forward. I believe to keep the momentum moving forward will be continuing to bring these groups together. It has been over a year now since some of these ideas have been hashed out across a table in person. A lot has changed and happened in that time and I know many are itching to get back, hear the updated information and keep working to enhance markets for our livestock producers.

Speaking of beef, May is Beef Month and many promotional events are taking place across the country. What is your message to those folks who are both on and off the farm, about our beef cattle industry in Kentucky?

I urge those both on and off farm to remember that the juicy hamburger you eat during Louisville Burger Week or that celebratory New York Strip you grilled during this warm weather is the product of year-round animal care and hard work by farmers across the state you reside in. Kentucky farmers are doing more to produce the highest quality animals and products with the least environmental impacts than ever before. Farmers find a way to share your story and tell people why you love what you do. Consumers, meet your local farmers, ask them questions and learn where your food comes from, you may be surprised by how practical and relatable the ag community truly is.



INCREASED CATTLE MARKET TRANSPARENCY SOUGHT BY MANY

Possibly based on your own experience and demonstrated in the chart below, entitled "Choice Beef Prices", the producer's share of the average retail value of beef has been highly variable, and has trended lower the past six years. Likewise, the spread between the farm value and the wholesale value of choice beef has widened over this period. The spread was severely impacted a year ago as COVID-19 affected cattle processing plants. In the following months, producer organizations, including Farm Bureau, have been working on achieving increased cattle market transparency to ensure cattle prices and wholesale/retail beef prices are better aligned. The American Farm Bureau Federation's Cattle Market Working Group produced a report in 2020 outlining its research and possible solutions (available at fb.org). Presently, there is legislation introduced in Congress, the Cattle Market Transparency Act of 2021, which focuses on ensuring robust negotiated cash trade and providing producers with more pricing information. Recently the CME Group (cmegroup.com) launched the CME Boxed Beef Index as an additional tool for managing the price risk associated with fed cattle and beef production. The Boxed Beef Index reflects the prices paid for Choice and Select beef as reported by USDA; it is a 5-day volume-weighted measurement. The index is currently just for information and is not tradeable. In the future, CME Group could possibly introduce Boxed Beef Index futures, like its new Pork Cutout Index.

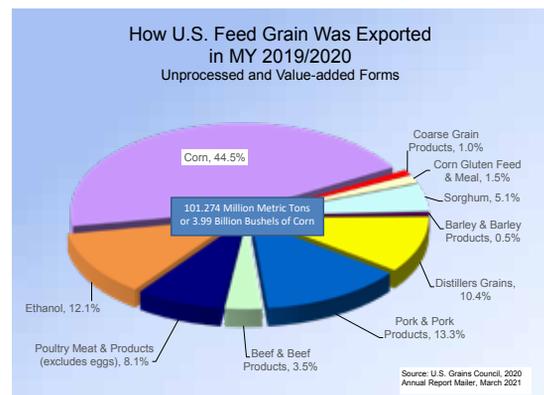
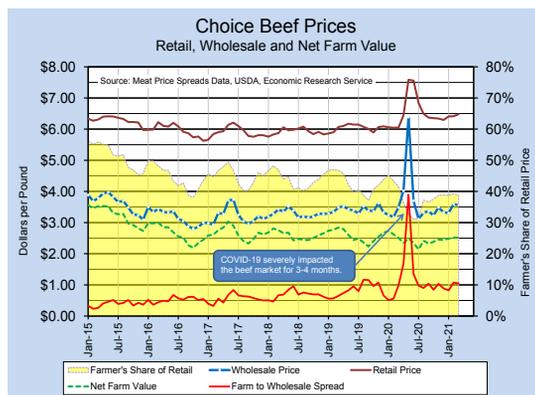
2020 RED MEAT PRODUCTION WAS RECORD LARGE

Total red meat production for the United States totaled a record high 55.8 billion pounds in 2020, one percent higher than for 2019. Red meat includes beef, veal, pork, and lamb and mutton. Red meat production in commercial plants totaled 55.7 billion pounds. On-farm slaughter totaled 94.3 million pounds. Beef production totaled 27.2 billion pounds, up slightly from 2019. Veal production totaled 69.3 million pounds, down 13 percent year/year. Pork production, at 28.3 billion pounds, was up two percent on the year. Lamb and mutton production totaled 143 million pounds, down seven percent from 2019.

There were 858 plants processing livestock under federal inspection on January 1, 2021 compared with 835 last year, according to the USDA Livestock Slaughter 2020 Summary. Of these, 683 plants slaughtered at least one head of cattle during 2020 with the 13 largest plants slaughtering 54 percent of the total cattle killed. Hogs were slaughtered at 621 plants, with the 14 largest plants accounting for 58 percent of the total. For calves, 3 of the 172 plants accounted for 55 percent of the total and 1 of the 522 plants that slaughtered sheep or lambs in 2020 comprised 20 percent of the total head.

RECORD PACE OF SOYBEAN EXPORTS AND CRUSH DROVE STOCKS DOWN AND PRICE UP

Nearby soybean futures have reached the highest level since the summer of 2013 due to strong demand domestically and abroad leading to tight stocks. At 1.56 billion bushels, March 1st soybean stocks were down 31 percent from a year earlier. USDA forecasts 2020/21 ending stocks of 120 million bushels. The U.S. had a record monthly soybean crush rate in the first few months of 2020/21, but the pace has fallen off since February. The first six months of this marketing year saw record monthly soybean exports, contributing to a new record annual export forecast of 2.28 billion bushels. Through February, the U.S. had exported 1.99 billion bushels, up 78 percent year/year; of this total, a record-high 1.27 billion bushels were shipped to China, an increase of 185 percent year/year. A late start to Brazil's soybean harvest delayed their export season into March. However, Brazil made up for lost time by shipping a record 13.5 million metric tons (mmt), up 25 percent year/year. USDA economists expect the U.S. will face similar limited competition from Brazil in the upcoming October to January period as it did earlier this marketing year. For those four months, USDA's forecast is 4.8 mmt, compared to 4.2 mmt last fall and an average of 13.1 mmt in the previous three years. Because of increased use of soybean oil in renewable diesel, USDA in May will begin including it in the new renewable fuels line of the balance sheet (WASDE).





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From farm fields to the legislative chambers of the state and nation, it takes leadership at all levels to meet the challenges of Kentucky's agricultural communities. Kentucky Farm Bureau will continue to support that leadership – as an advocate, a service provider and an organization – by giving leaders the tools, encouragement and voice they need to succeed in an ever-changing world. Why Farm Bureau? Because effective leadership makes life better for all Kentuckians.



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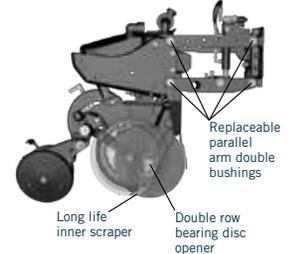
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UK's Equine Science and Management Undergraduate Program Providing Opportunities Through Internships

IN KENTUCKY, THE EQUINE INDUSTRY REMAINS A TOP ECONOMIC DRIVER WHILE TOUCHING MANY DIFFERENT SECTORS, PROVIDING A WEALTH OF INTERN POSSIBILITIES.



Mackenzie Rockefeller and Lauren Olsen using the TDR (time-domain reflectometry) Moisture Sensor on the main track at Keeneland, testing what the moisture levels are in the dirt at that area.



The use of internships by a variety of industries has long been a bridge between students who are soon to be in the workforce and want to gain experience in occupations they may be well suited for, and employers looking for perspective employees.

No one knows that better than Savannah Robin who serves as the University of Kentucky (UK) College of Agriculture, Food, and Environment's Equine Science and Management Undergraduate Program Internship Coordinator.

Her goal is to get as many students as possible into internships in as many different equine-based areas as are available.

"An internship in general is an invaluable experience because the student gets a hands-on opportunity to apply what they're doing and what they've learned in their classrooms," she said. "We hope that they take the core of what they've learned and then are able to apply it in a real-world setting."

As well as being the instructor for students involved in the internship program, Robin also teaches two classes, one of which is the Equine Careers class to help guide and direct the students and provide valuable career advising from their freshman year to their senior year.

"We try to teach them the importance of networking as early as their freshman year which is a huge piece of the careers class that I teach," she said. "Because a lot of times we're preparing kids for jobs that don't even exist yet, which is really cool. But for them, by the time they get to an internship, we want them to realize they're learning what they do and what they don't like. A lot of our students will walk away knowing that particular job is not for them, or they find it is definitely their path."

Students may also find they are building such a relationship with their intern employer that may enable them to get connected to other opportunities.

"Our employers find our internship program really valuable to them because they are then preparing for the future of the industry," Robin said. "We have a lot of people in the industry who know that we need to create the next generation of equine industry leaders and so our internship supervisors get a chance to do that through our program. They get to mentor our students, they get to foster those relationships, and they get to train them, potentially as a future employee."

Since it began in 2009, the internship program has helped numerous students connect with a multitude of different equine-related industries, so gauging the success of the program is important, Robin emphasized.

"With Kentucky's great reputation in the equine industry, around 72 percent of our students are from out of state because they know this is the best place to be if you that is their interest, which means that we need to do a really good job of fostering that relationship with them so they feel at home and they feel connected," she said. "This is the 'Horse Capital of the World,' but if they don't know how to access those resources, it doesn't do them any good. So, we try to really work with them from their freshman year on to build that community and then keep in touch with them."



Kassie Rutherford walking a Spy Coast horse on the Aqua Icelander Water Treadmill

UK Student Kassie Rutherford is spending her internship at Spy Coast Farm's equine rehabilitation facility. The New Mexico native grew up around horses, but it wasn't until she had completed a tour of duty in the U.S. Navy that she decided UK was the place for her to take her love for the animals to the next career level.

"After getting out of the Navy, I did some random jobs including working at an equine endurance barn, where I was also a dressage groom," she said. "It was then I applied to the UK equine program and moved here."

Rutherford already had received her associate's degree while serving in the military, so she knew she had a couple of years left in her studies and Kentucky was the place to make that happen. The internship program has provided her a look at a different aspect of the equine industry.

"I knew a little about the farm and liked the idea of rehabilitation and liked the idea of seeing these animals succeed," she said.

Rutherford said the experience she has received has been very valuable and very hands-on.

"So, day one, I was walking horses; I was holding horses and I was able to help Dr. Julie Vargas with procedures," she said.

Vargas serves as the sports medicine and rehab veterinarian at Spy Coast Farm. She said for students who want to get into the equine industry, the internship program is very valuable to them, as well as employers.

"I think for a lot of people it's just going to be the door

that opens the next door to get to where they want to be," she said. "How else are you going to know what you want to do for the rest of your life? A student might intern in a spot they didn't think they had an interest in, explore it and find they really did, or the opposite could be true and that's just as important to determine."

"An internship in general is an invaluable experience because the student gets a hands-on opportunity to apply what they're doing and what they've learned in their classrooms."

Savannah Robin

Mackenzie Rockefeller is also interning through the UK program with the Racing Surfaces Testing Lab which does onsite testing on the different surfaces at tracks across the country including Keeneland.

Rockefeller began her journey with horses at the age of 11 as a rider and has experienced many jobs related

to the industry including summer camp counselor for horse camps and a farm hand grooming horses and cleaning stalls.

"In the summer of 2017, I worked in the visitor center or the Kentucky Horse Park, and that was amazing," she said. "I got to meet people from all over the world and explain Kentucky's horse industry and how it has such a big impact on our economy. So, my entire life, every job I've ever loved, every job I've ever had was with the equine industry, and it kind of just made sense to me that that's where I needed to be."

The internship program has helped fortify that feeling for Rockefeller and being involved in helping to make the track surfaces safer for the horses, may be providing the niche she has been looking for.

"While we are at Keeneland doing this testing and research, this information will be helpful to tracks and arenas all over the world, not just for thoroughbreds or just in this state," she said.

Rockefeller emphasized that the internship program provides a look at many different aspects of the equine industry, many of which may be unknown to prospective students.

"Because I didn't grow up as a child in the industry, or grow up on the racetrack, or grow up with a mom or dad as a trainer, I didn't really know what all the industry had to offer," she said. "Ms. Robin was able to bring that to our conversation and say, 'Look, this industry is so broad and

so vast. There are so many different opportunities in this industry, and we can find the right one for you.'"

Lauren Olsen is a senior who will be graduating in May from UK with an Equine Science and Management major, with minors in Agriculture Economics, and Business. She is also in the midst of an internship directly with Keeneland but participated in the UK internship program last year.

"I did my 'official' internship last year with a trainer and realized that that's not what I wanted to do with my life, and I was in this limbo and stressing out really badly," she said. So, I talked to Ms. Robin, and I told her I needed guidance in showing me what else is out there."

Robin pointed her in the direction of Jim Pendergest, who is in charge of all of the surfaces at Keeneland, which has turned out to be something that interest Olsen and turned into the internship she is currently involved in.

"I job shadowed him for a day and I thought I'd really like it, so we stayed in contact and now I'm working an internship with him to see if this is what I want," she said. "This has been extremely valuable to me in helping point me in the direction of what my future could hold and I hopefully plan to stay within this sector of the industry."

Robin said the experience these students are getting is amazing and helps in developing their efforts to find that right occupation in an industry that is truly a Kentucky tradition.



UK's Equine Internship Program gives students hands on experiences in real-world work environments.

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Its brilliance has been a beacon in the dark for millenniums
and comfort to all eyes that have gazed upon its radiance.
Surrounded by a band of stars, the clear night sky offers comfort and hope
in knowing it is an everlasting sight, unchanged to the human eye
but ever-changing under the watchful gaze of its Creator.
And though clouds may sometimes obstruct its view
Never doubt its unending presence
It is not there by chance but by design and
its beholders can be calmed in this world of uncertainty
by knowing the brilliant night sky will last forever
even when the morning sun light kisses it goodbye.
Be assured the night will come again and the guiding light
will always belong to that constant moon.





Beth Vessels practices her barrel racing at the facility on her family farm.

A Horse Race of a Different Kind

KFB'S BETH VESSELS HAS GROWN UP AROUND HORSES AND MAKES BARREL RACING PART OF HER "SECOND LIFE."

While most people are still asleep or just rising for another day of work at 5:00 a.m., Beth Vessels is likely on horseback honing her skills as a barrel racer. The Meade County native/resident, and Kentucky Farm Bureau Insurance Internal Audit Manager finds this time before work, the most convenient to get in practice for the coming competition season in a sport that she has been involved in nearly all of her life.

"A lot of people are surprised at what is my 'second life,'" she said. "I grew up on my family's farm, which included horses, and I have ridden since I can remember. I had that special first pony when I was very young, and my parents always joked that they had to pry me off of her."

Vessels was also involved in 4-H and FFA as a student and has fond memories of the organizations, especially the 4-H State Horse Show.

"Some of my greatest memories growing up were going to the 4-H State Horse Show which generally took

place around the 4th of July, and it was like our family vacation," she said. "My parents would take off work, and we would go to the fairgrounds in the big city of Louisville. I participated in barrel racing and pole bending."

Vessels recalls the famous Stopher Walk where world champion show horses have made their way to the warmup ring before competing at the fairgrounds for decades. It was a dream of hers' to be able to do that same thing.

"I remember seeing one of the Saddlebreds in that Stopher Walk, and that was my dream, to ride my pony, Sissy, through there," she said. "So, I was nine-years-old when my dream came true."

But that was just the beginning of the dreams Vessels would have when it came to her horses. During her high school years — a time when she moved up from the pony to a full-sized quarter horse — barrel racing became more serious to her.

"Actually, the horse I graduated to was my dad's, which was born on my parent's farm when my twin brother and I



were two," she said. "He was such a big horse to me, and I couldn't believe I was getting him to ride."

Ride she did however, taking her skills to the next level. In doing so, Vessels said the family normally traveled to several shows/competitions each year, most of which were never more than an hour away, including the state fair and the North American International Livestock Expo. The shows always included riders of similar backgrounds, and more often than not with people they knew well in their circle of horse enthusiasts.

"My best friend grew up riding horses, as well, and we were president and vice-president of our horse club," she said. "We just really had a group of friends who all rode horses together and we were all at the same horse shows every weekend. It was just a great time."

After high school, Vessels attended Western Kentucky University but made her way home on weekends so she could still compete.

As the tradition of horseback riding was passed to Vessels as a child, she is doing the same with her two daughters, Vivian and Victoria.

Her and husband Adam have a practice facility on their 22-acre farm near Brandenburg allowing those early morning practices and easy access for the children.

"I'm the type of mom who never wants to make my daughters do something that they don't want to do," she said. "But, at the same time, I want them to have the

opportunity if they do want to."

"Wanting to" is an understatement as each one has developed the same love of being on horseback as their mom and grandfather.

"I like to teach them responsibility such as taking care of the stalls as well as to make sure that they respect the horse," Vessels said.

Vivian has already participated in her first competition and Victoria is still learning but will likely be in the competition ring before long. Vessels said she is excited for them but it is a little nerve-racking.

"I remember my mom was the worrier in addition to taking care of my clothes and braiding my hair before each show," she said. "I would always tell her that she didn't have to worry, and if my dad did, he never showed it. But now I know how they felt. As excited as I am to see the girls become involved, I do worry a little. It's hard to completely let go of that, but I do everything in my power to prevent anything from happening."

As she grew up in this sport, Vessels said the thought of being a professional barrel racer may have entered her mind when she was younger but having a good first career was always important to her, although her "second life" is very gratifying.

"I know I can do this for as long as I want and as long as my family enjoys it," she said. "But the horses will always be a part of my life, for the rest of my life."

Farm Bureau Footnote:*

The following information was provided by the International Barrel Racing Association:

In a sport where the winner can be determined by thousandths of a second, the relationship between the rider and horse is crucial. The horse's athleticism and mental condition and the rider's horsemanship skills are tested as they maneuver through a clover leaf pattern at top speed. The course consists of barrels placed in a triangle in the middle of an arena. The rider races into the arena with the timer starting when the team crosses the start line, and ends after completing the clover leaf pattern and racing to cross the finish line. The team that puts up the best time with tight turns, explosiveness, communication and no overturned barrels wins.

County Corner

SNAPSHOTS OF COUNTY FARM BUREAU ACTIVITIES



Knox County

Cloyce Hinkle, Knox County Farm Bureau President, is presented a \$500 check for the Ky. Farm Bureau Eastern Ky. Flood Relief program. Making the presentation is the Barbourville Jr. Women's Study Club member, Angie Payne.



Harlan County

On March 31, Harlan County Farm Bureau donated \$300 to Christ Hands located in Harlan, Kentucky. Christ Hands' purpose is to promote the knowledge of Jesus Christ through service to the residents of the surrounding community. They serve hot meals weekly to the homeless. They have a homeless shelter. They are a conduit providing food to dozens of area food pantries. They partner with many organizations in Harlan and Surrounding Counties to effectively promote Jesus Christ. Pictured from left: Bryan Toll, Director of Christ Hands; and Dustin Miniard, Harlan County Farm Bureau Board Member.



Carter County

The Carter County Women's Committee purchased the AFBF books to donate to area elementary schools. The committee donated two books due to being unable to present them last year because of the COVID-19 virus.



Shelby County

Members of the Shelby County Farm Bureau Board hosted their membership drive during the Chamber Showcase held in downtown Shelbyville.



Harlan County

Harlan County Farm Bureau (HCFB) donated \$300 to the Harlan County Honor Guard. Pictured from left: Bill Middleton, Harlan County Farm Bureau HCFB Board Member; David Witt, Harlan County Honor Guard (HCHG); William Vanover, HCHG; Don Miniard President of HCFB; and Pete Cornett, Kentucky Farm Bureau Agent.



Harlan County

On March 11, 2021, Harlan County Farm Bureau donated \$500 to the Harlan County Future Farmers of America FFA. Pictured from left: Dustin Miniard, Young Farmer Chair of the Harlan County Farm Bureau; and Jace Howard, Chair of the Harlan County FFA.



Boone County

Boone County Farm Bureau donated \$1,000 to New Haven Elementary School's Family Resource Center, top photo, and \$1,500 to Go Pantry to support their efforts in providing resources to our community.



Carter County

The Carter County Farm Bureau Women's Committee gave giveaway bags to each person present for Farmer's Appreciation Day at Kee's Farm Service.



Grant County

The Grant County Farm Bureau Women's Committee received recognition from Senator Damon Thayer for receiving the 2020 Gold Star Award of Excellence by Kentucky Farm Bureau. Pictured L-R; Jackie Courts, Erin Butler, Rachel Magee, Natasha Rhoton-Women's Chair, Linda Cull, and Norma Kinsey.



Grant County

Natasha Rhoton, Grant County Farm Bureau Women's Chairperson, left is pictured with Erin Butler, FFA Advisor at Grant County High School & Director showing the books "Food and Farm Facts". The books were purchased by the Grant County FB Federation Board for the Freshman Ag Classes at Grant County and Williamstown High Schools.



District 10

The District 10 Policy Development meeting conducted a Disaster Relief donation from all counties in the district. We were able to fill the bed of a pick-up truck with much needed items. Thanks to all the counties that donated. David McGlone, President of Carter County Farm Bureau and State Director, right, and Tyler Ferguson, State Director from Johnson County helped load the truck.



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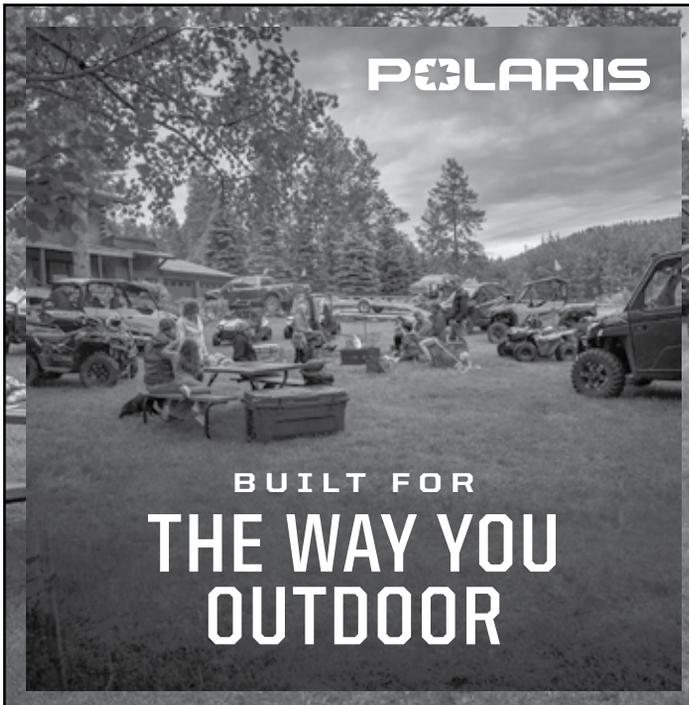
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Down the Backroads

UNFAMILIAR PLACES PROVIDE FAMILIAR FEELINGS

By Tim Thornberry

I have been blessed with the opportunity to travel quite a bit around our beautiful state and often I have visited places that seemed more special than others, even though I had never been there before.

I had no personal connection to these locations other than I just happen to be passing through, but a feeling of comfort would come over me just by being there.

And more times than not, these weren't big tourist attractions or spots along the beaten path. Many were out-of-the-way places along rural roads that caught my attention or little country stores that offered a place to rest and recharge with a candy bar and a cold soda.

I remember the first time I passed a small cemetery right off a road in Central Kentucky. I had seen many like it before, but this one seemed special and peaceful, so I stopped.

As I walked through, I saw name after name on old tombstones wondering who they were and what stories belonged to each. From the looks of the place, it had not been visited in many years. So, I was glad to be there.

Why I felt comforted in this place I don't know, but it was a true feeling of peace and I knew when I left, those who were laid to rest there were also at peace.

I would make that a regular stop through the years, each time I passed that way.

I also remember a small diner in West Kentucky that had the best homemade food. It was not a place you could visit quickly. And the first time I ate there, I immediately felt at home. I would stop by whenever I was in the neck of the woods and always left with a full belly and feeling of gratitude, not to mention a feeling of being home when I was far away.

Then there was this old motel that set up on a hill along a scenic highway headed to the southern part of the state. Every time I passed that way, I was completely overcome with a feeling of familiarity

although, I never saw the place when it was open for business. I figured it has closed many years prior to me discovering it.

But I got this comforting feeling whenever I passed by, and often I would take the time to stop and sit with the old building for a while just imagining what it was like during its time of prosperity.

No matter how long it would be before I would pass that way again, I always looked anxiously for it whenever going in that direction.

Unfortunately, on my last trip, I discovered the old landmark had disappeared; torn down or perhaps it had just fallen down due to old age. Whatever the reason, it was gone, and I felt very sad for some reason; like I had lost an old friend.

How could someplace I have no personal attachment to, be so dear to me? It was a familiar face along this lonely stretch of highway, I suppose.

Whatever the reasons I have found myself so drawn to these out-of-the-way places, I may never know, but I hope to find many more, as I continue to travel down the backroads.

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