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Spring 2023 ISSUE

Considering backyard chickens for cheaper eggs? Don't forget biosecurity to protect against avian flu

Ehlers family gets chickens to teach responsibility while helping budget

By Mavis Fodness

As the cost for a dozen eggs exceeded the price of a gallon of gas in 2022, many people are considering raising their own backyard chickens and eggs this spring.

For Lisa and Mark Ehlers of rural Luverne, the investment in laying hens eight years ago is paying off — especially for their existing customers.

"We bought six laying hens just to have eggs and to give the kids something to do," Mark said.

Since then, the family flock has grown to 21 in a mixture of Rhode Island red and Golden Comet hens.

Lily is a senior at Luverne High School and continues to collect eggs each day just as she did when she was in elementary school.

She's been the hens' primary caretaker while her brother, Seth, a fourth-grader, fills in when she needs backup help.

"It has definitely taught me responsibility," Lily said. "I go out every day to feed and water them, and sometimes they need their feet cleaned as they pick up clumps when they walk around in the pens."

Mavis Fodness photo/0302 ag tab chickens

Lily Ehlers, a senior at Luverne High School, collects eggs each day She's been the hens' primary caretaker while her brother, Seth, a fourth-grader, fills in when she needs backup help.

The hens produce 10 or more eggs a day, which is more than the Ehlers family of four uses, so they sell their extras for $2.50 a dozen.

This is well under the supermarket price that has reached as much as twice that amount, but they said it still pays for the expenses of caring for the hens.

"It has definitely taught me responsibility. I go out every day to feed and water them, and sometimes they need their feet cleaned as they pick up clumps when they walk around in the pens."

— Lily Ehlers
Chicken caretaker at Ehlers family farm

"We are not charging an arm and a leg," Lisa said. "We don't want to take advantage of people."

They have, however, capped orders at two dozen each week to ensure there's

Chickens/see page 3B

Corn-fed deer

Heavy snow cover sends wildlife searching for food in nearby feedlots

By Lori Sorenson

Heavy snow this winter is putting an unexpected burden on livestock producers who are feeding hungry deer alongside their cattle.

According to Jeff Ahrendt, the deer show up each afternoon at his feed bunker near the Blue Mounds State Park.

"They're starving," Ahrendt said. "I feel bad for them, but it's money out of my pocket, especially when you're feeding $7 corn."

He said it's not unusual to see deer on the farm, but harsh winter conditions over the few months have made it difficult for the deer to access their usual food sources that are now buried under a hard layer of ice and snow.

"Around Christmas I noticed about a dozen, but in the past few weeks there have 75 or more," Ahrendt said.

"It's like clockwork. They wait for us to get done feeding in the afternoon, and then they start coming in a single file."

One day Ahrendt said he turned off his machinery after feeding and waited with his cell phone video camera recording.

Dozens of deer filed past him on their way to the feed bunker to fill their bellies.

He said it's difficult to know how

Jeff Ahrendt shared videos and images of deer invading his cattle feedlot near the Blue Mounds to eat cattle feed. He's been working with DNR wild game specialists on ideas to keep them at bay, but the reality of this winter is that the deer are simply hungry, because their food sources are buried under a heavy cover of snow and ice.

much feed he's losing, but he estimates each deer eats a pound or two per day, and they leave behind droppings that mix with the feed that his cattle end up eating.

"Losing feed is one thing, but my main concern is parasites or disease that the cattle could get from ingesting the deer feces," Ahrendt said.

Deer in cattle feedlots/see page 2B

Winter-hungry deer search for food in nearby cattle feedlots/continued from page 1B

"We haven't had a winter like this since 2013. The deer can dig through the snow, but it's more difficult this year. They're lazy eaters; they go looking for food, silage piles and alfalfa bales that are easy sources."

— Bill Schuna, DNR

"It's like clockwork," Jeff Ahrendt said about the invading deer. "They wait for us to get done feeding in the afternoon, and then they start coming in a single file." One day he said he turned off his machinery after feeding and waited with his cell phone video camera recording. Dozens of deer filed past him on their way to the feed bunker to fill their bellies ... and poop in the cattle feed.

"There are multiple internal parasites that can cross back and forth between deer and cattle.This can especially be a concern because the deer are defecating in the feed storage areas where they are also eating. So, when Jeff is loading feed, he cannot help but load the deer feces into his feeder wagon."

— Dr. Erin deKoning Rock Vet Clinic

According to Dr. Erin deKoning at Rock Veterinary Clinic, this is a real concern.

"There are multiple internal parasites that can cross back and forth between deer and cattle," she said.

"This can especially be a concern because the deer are defecating in the feed storage areas where they are also eating. So, when Jeff is loading feed, he cannot help but load the deer feces into his feeder wagon."

She also empathized with cattle farmers losing money to hungry deer.

"The price of hay right now is quite high, so it is rather expensive to be feeding the deer," she said.

Ahrendt reached out for advice from the Minnesota DNR, who suggested scaring the deer away with a propane-powered canon.

He said it worked on the deer, but it also spooked the cattle. "The cattle about went through the fence," Ahrendt said. "And the deer came back anyway."

DNR Wildlife Manager Bill Schuna said he's dealt with many cases of deer encroaching on livestock operations this winter.

"We haven't had a winter like this since 2013," he said. "The deer can dig through the snow, but it's more difficult this year. They're lazy eaters; they go looking for food, silage piles and alfalfa bales that are easy sources."

The DNR can provide emergency abatement measures to deter deer. For example, an Ellsworth livestock producer reported that deer broke through the plastic on his earlage.

"In that case we put a bag around the pile that the deer couldn't get through," Schuna said. "The farmer said the deer were a bit frustrated when they came back."

Generally speaking, he said the best solutions are to provide physical barriers. In the case of the Ahrendts, he suggested they use their moveable cattle panels to encircle the feed bunks.

Also, Schuna said deer don't eat cornstalk bales, and he encourages farmers to create walls out of their cornstalk bales to protect feed sources such as alfalfa and hay that deer often eat.

He also said the Ahrendt feedlot is particularly vulnerable near the park.

"Deer have their traditional wintering areas, and the Rock River is a traditional wintering area," Schuna said.

"Deer move into this area and the park from over 10 miles away, and they go looking for food.

He said he's discussed options for the annual special youth hunt in the Blue Mounds, possibly expanding it in order to cull more deer.

Meanwhile, until this winter's snow cover melts, farmers will need to be creative about keeping wildlife out of their feedbunks.

Ahrendt said he placed some haybales between the feedlot and the park as a decoy of sorts — hoping the deer would eat the less expensive hay instead of his livestock feed.

"That's just salad to them," Ahrendt said. "Why would you settle for an appetizer if you can come in here for the main course?"

"That's just salad to them. Why would you settle for an appetizer if you can come in here for the main course?"

— Jeff Ahrendt about trying to distract deer from feed with hay

Raising chickens for cheaper eggs — be sure to protect against avian flu/from page 1B

enough product for all 10 of their customers.

This spring the Ehlers family is considering adding another 15 hens to the former pig nursery turned chicken coop on their acreage. More chickens means they will add new customers.

Last year's outbreak of the avian flu eliminated many commercial poultry flocks, and the Ehlers family has made sure their small egg production flock is protected.

"All our hens are inside," he said. "We've built coops in a former hog nursery. They have plenty of room."

The two large coops inside the nursery house the laying hens, who are separated based on their breed.

He's made sure no wildlife enter the barn to prevent the spread of disease. "Especially no sparrows," he said.

Fans that were installed when the building housed pigs are still used, and they circulate the air for the laying hens.

Spring is popular time to buy chicks

The Minnesota Board of Animal Health notes that spring is a popular time of the year to find chicks at local feed and supply stores.

State veterinarians are encouraging all poultry owners to learn more about biosecurity measures to keep poultry safe from the most recent outbreaks of the avian influenza.

As of Dec. 1, 633 flocks were confirmed with avian flu in 2022 in 46 states and involving 52.7 million birds. The number surpasses the avian flu outbreak in 2015 when 21 states were affected.

The Board of Animal Health anticipates cases will continue to climb since the avian flu is still detected in the wild bird population. Experts suggest that avian flu is on its way to becoming a resident virus and is in the state to stay.

Biosecurity can prevent the avian flu from spreading.

Biosecurity is the process for protecting animals from infectious diseases and is used to protect a wide variety of species including poultry.

Anyone wanting to keep their laying hens (or ducks and geese) healthy should follow these biosecurity steps:

•Give the birds shelter. Provide a coop for the birds to roost overnight.

•Keep your distance as well as isolate birds from visitors and other birds.

•Clean shoes, tools and equipment used around the birds to prevent germs from spreading.

•Don't haul disease home. Change clothes before caring for birds or entering the coop.

•Don't borrow disease; avoid sharing tools and equipment with others.

State epidemiologists indicate the most common risk factor appears to be building integrity.

Older buildings with failing roofs, holes in screens and ground level breeches are more likely to be a site for infected birds.

Buildings that are fully enclosed and environmentally controlled have less risk of infection.

A secondary factor is proximity to wetlands where migratory waterfowl are seen flying overhead, landing in nearby fields and even walking near barns.

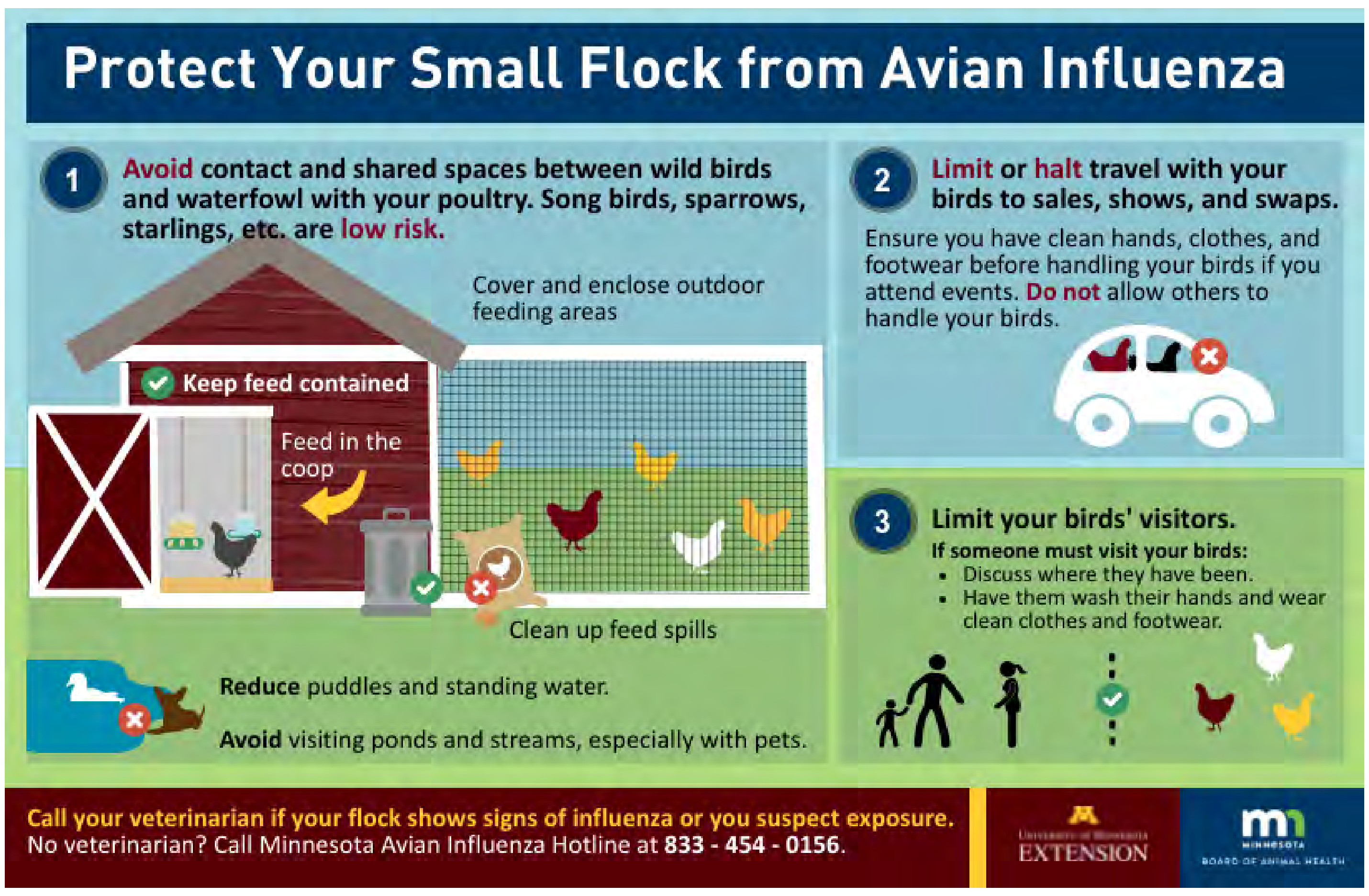
A third factor is wild birds roosting on barn tops or near feed sources where droppings can be left and exposure to domestic poultry can occur.

The USDA's Animal and Plant Health Inspection Services developed the "Defend the Flock" program to prevent avian influenza from establishing itself within the U.S. poultry population.

"Defend the Flock" outlines free tools and resources to help everyone who works with or handles poultry to follow biosecurity measures and to alert local veterinarians about unexpected illness or sudden death within flocks.

The program can be accessed through the USDA website: aphis.usda.gov

In-town residents should check with their city clerks to see if poultry is permitted in their city limits.



Highly pathogenic avian influenza (HPAI) has been confirmed in the United States. Introduced by migrating wild birds, HPAI risk increases during spring and fall migration, and can affect *all* domestic poultry: small and urban flocks and commercial industries.

Scan for info on avian influenza

Poultry with HPAI *do not* survive the illness. Vaccines for HPAI are not readily available.

Signs of Avian Influenza

- Extreme depression
- Very quiet
- Difficulty breathing
- Decrease in feed or water intake
- Swelling or purple discoloration of head, eyelids, comb, wattle, and hocks
- Decrease in egg production
- Sudden unexplained death

Biosecurity is your best option to prevent HPAI from entering your small or urban poultry flock.

•Give birds shelter. Provide a coop for the birds to roost overnight.

•Keep your distance as well as isolate birds from visitors and other birds.

•Clean shoes, tools and equipment used around the birds to prevent germs from spreading.

•Don't haul disease home. Change clothes before caring for birds or entering the coop.

•Don't borrow disease; avoid sharing tools and equipment with others.

Mavis Fodness photo/0302 ag tab chickens

Lily Ehlers takes care of the hens, which produce 10 or more eggs a day. This which is more than the Ehlers family of four uses, so they sell their extras for $2.50 a dozen. This is well under supermarket price, but they said it pays for expenses of caring for the hens.

Lori Sorenson photo/0302 ag edition spring 2023 cattle at sunset

Blac-X cattle west of the Bakken feedlot gather at sunset north of Beaver Creek during a recent February evening. Grain, hay, and livestock can all be protected by various forms of insurance. Multi-peril crop insurance can protect both the production and revenue risks. Hay and pasture ground can be covered by Pasture, Rangeland and Forage insurance that is designed to indemnify the producer against a shortage of rainfall in the grid area. LRP and LGM are available to put a floor under cattle and swine prices.

Protect your income and shield your assets

Having the right insurance coverage can be a powerful tool to help you keep doing what you love

By Barbara J Anderson
Cattnach Insurance

Insurance is an essential part of any business operation, and it's especially true in agriculture.

However, there are better ways than others to make your insurance work for you — not the other way around.

Identify your sources of income and determine ways to protect them.

Grain, hay, and livestock can all be protected by various forms of insurance. Multi-peril crop insurance can protect both the production and revenue risks.

Hay and pasture ground can be covered by PRF (Pasture, Rangeland and Forage) insurance that is designed to indemnify the producer against a shortage of rainfall in the grid area.

LRP and LGM are available to put a floor under cattle and swine prices. With all these resources available to producers at a subsidized rate, one of the most critical decisions is choosing an experienced agent to guide you through the process.

The agents at Cattnach Insurance Agency have a combined 85-plus years of experience managing risks for farmers.

Identify your important assets and verify that you have adequate insurance coverage.

Livestock feeding barns, equipment and shops can be insured, and it is essential to understand the perils that are covered to ensure you can continue earning a living. Verifying that buildings and equipment are insured to value will ensure that you are compensated adequately to rebuild.

Do you need coverage for replacement costs (waiving depreciation), collapse from the weight of ice and snow for vulnerable buildings, "ingestion of foreign object" coverage for harvest equipment, etc?

Proper liability coverage is the key to protecting assets from lawsuits and potential negligence, liability umbrellas, care custody and control for livestock and employer's liability.

Mitigate your risks without overspending.

We can help you evaluate your risks, determine the perils to protect against, and do this without wasting your hard-earned dollars.

We recognize that the margins are often very narrow in livestock and grain production and that you must use your insurance dollars wisely.

Just because you are spending a lot doesn't necessarily mean you are well-protected. In many cases, it's just reallocating your insurance premium to work better for you.

Take advantage of the subsidies offered, and review the history of the area's yield losses, revenue losses, and rainfall totals.

One of the essential tools we offer our clients is the annual review as a minimum.

Whether it's property and liability, auto, or crop insurance, it's vital that you update coverages, remove obsolete or unused equipment and vehicles and keep values up to date.

Insurance helps you do what you love

Insurance coverage can be a powerful tool to protect your income and assets so you can keep doing what you love.

A trusted adviser is key in determining what is important to you and your operation and custom-fitting an insurance plan.

Cattnach Insurance Agency has been helping customers find the best protection without wasting their hard-earned income on unnecessary coverages.

We operate on the motto of our founder, Wallace Cattnach, when he said, "Take care of the customer first."

This means that we always put the customer's needs ahead of our own agenda because it's not about making the most money, but doing what is right.

Rock County Soil and Water Conservation District still working to preserve local natural resources more than 75 years later

By Mavis Fodness

Conservation of soil and water in Rock County continues to evolve as the local district celebrates seven decades of conservation delivery.

The Minnesota Board of Water and Soil Resources quietly recognized the Rock County Soil and Water Conservation District in 2020 for 75 years of partnering to preserve natural resources for future generations.

In 1945, as federal and state legislators pushed farmers to use practical tillage methods to prevent further dust storms from reoccurring, five local producers stepped forward to serve on the first Rock County SWCD board.

In 1945, as federal and state legislators pushed farmers to use practical tillage methods to prevent further dust storms from reoccurring, five local producers stepped forward to serve on the first Rock County SWCD board. They outlined "five dangers which must be overcome if Rock County is to retain its agricultural productivity."

Mavis Fodness photo/Ag Tab Spring 2023 Rock SWCD 75th

Rock County Soil and Water Conservation District supervisors pose with the plaque from the Minnesota Board of Water and Soil Resources in recognition of 75 years of bringing soil and water management and conservation to the county. Pictured (front, from left) are Dave Esselink, Josh Ossefoort, (back) Jim Veldkamp and Gene Cragoe. Not pictured is Roger Hoff.

The five dangers to be overcome in 1945 order for Rock County to retain its agricultural productivity included:

•soil fertility, which had been depleted by intensive war production the previous few years.

•gullies.

•loss of topsoil by erosion.

•weeds.

•poor drainage in certain areas.

News accounts have Jacob Sells, Harold Crawford, Roger Pengra, L.J. Hofelman and E.J. Wilroth meeting with representatives from the regional Soil Conservation Service and U of M Extension Service in early July 1945.

They outlined "... five dangers which must be overcome if Rock County is to retain its agricultural productivity." The five dangers were:

•soil fertility, which has been depleted by intensive war production the past few years.

•gullies.

•loss of topsoil by erosion.

•weeds.

•poor drainage in certain areas.

The board tasked themselves with introducing new soil conservation practices that

•established grass waterways to prevent gullies,

•contoured cultivation to prevent erosion of topsoil,

•seeded more legumes and grasses to build soil fertility and

•establish several terracing demonstrations.

The group first met on July 25, 1945, as the state's newest Soil Conservation District.

In the 1960s the word "water" was official added to SCDs in the state, becoming Soil and Water Conservation Districts (SWCD).

The groups met monthly for more than seven decades.

Rock County is still comprised of five supervisors, one from each district in the county.

They serve four years and are selected through a general election.

Current supervisors are Roger Hoff, Gene Cragoe, Jim Veldkamp, Josh Ossefoort and Dave Esselink.

SWCDs established due to Dust Bowl

Persistent drought conditions on the Great Plains caused widespread crop failures, exposing soil to the blowing wind in the early 1930s. The Dust Bowl continued for six years.

In 1932 President Franklin D. Roosevelt made conservation of soil and water resources a national priority during his New Deal administration.

The Soil Conservation Service was created in 1935, later renamed the Natural Resources Conservation Service in 1994.

The first Minnesota SWCD was established in 1939, the Root River SWCD in Houston County.

At first, SWCD boundaries were based on the watershed, later changing to a county basis. The last SWCD to be officially formed was Winona County in 1986.

SWCD work is 'evolutionary process'

While the Rock County SWCD supervisors oversee the implementation of state statutes and rules, the day-to-day work is completed through the Rock County Land Management Office.

Eric Hartman has been director since 2002.

"The 75 years of the Rock SWCD is probably not so much about specific project(s)," he said.

"It has been, like most everything else, an evolutionary process and adoption to a changing landscape with every changing need."

As the county progressed away from the Dust Bowl, the SWCD has worked with individual farmers with implementing less tillage practice, controlling water drainage, promoting ways to farm safely around drinking water areas, and improving soil health.

For decades each project was completed with limited funding, with farmers cost-sharing in the improvement.

A stable funding stream was created in 2008 through the Clean Water, Land and Legacy Amendment.

A portion of the state's sales tax is dedicated to clean water, outdoor preservation, arts and cultural heritage, and parks and trails.

SWCD/see page 8B

Farmers should consider 'enhanced coverage options'

By Shirley Top Kozlowski Insurance

The Enhanced Coverage Option (ECO) was a new supplemental insurance program that became available in 2021. ECO is an option that can only be added to an underlying individual plan of insurance and provides area-based coverage like the Supplemental Coverage Option (SCO).

ECO can be purchased at either a 95-percent or 90-percent coverage level. Coverage extends from the selected level down to 86 percent, the point where SCO begins to offer coverage. (See Figure 1)

ECO uses a county-based trigger. ECO could result in indemnities being paid when individual losses are not realized.

Similarly, individual losses could be triggered without leading to an ECO indemnity payment.

Farmers Mutual Hail has available to farmers ECO + "yield protection", "revenue protection" or new in 2023 "forward plus protection" which provides harvest price upside protection.

Farmers can purchase ECO+ that will provide coverage for individual losses from 86 percent to 95 percent. ECO+ can be purchased with 75-percent, 80-percent or 85-percent multi-peril coverage.

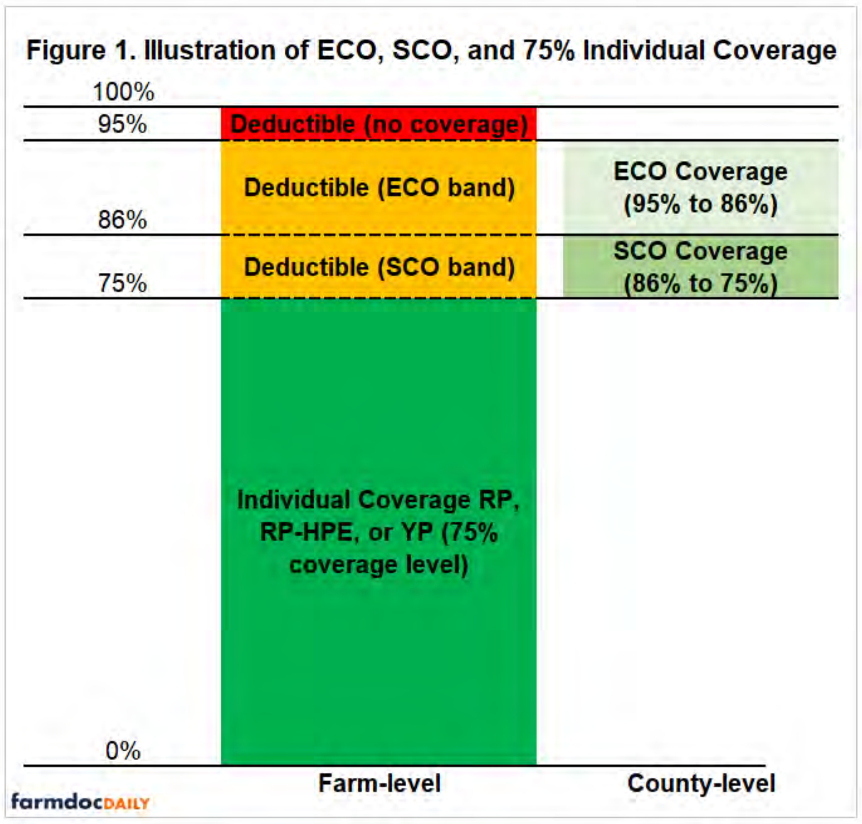
ECO+ is always optional unit coverage no matter if you have enterprise units on your underlying coverage.

All my farm clients who chose ECO in 2021 elected 86-95 percent ECO Revenue coverage. I love giving my farmers all their options. For those of who know me you know my love for spreadsheets.

It took me a weekend to "revise my default spreadsheets for the 2023 crop year.

Also new in 2023 is purchasing hail, green snap, wind, and extra harvest expense ala carte. In prior years you needed to purchase hail to purchase the green snap, wind and extra harvest expense. In 2023 they can purchase the combination, or they can purchase hail with wind OR green snap OR extra harvest expense.

In 2023 farmers' expenses have skyrocketed. I have found with the appointments I have that they are looking for options like Enhanced Coverage Option Plus that provides individual coverage above enterprise units. If history repeats itself where corn is less than $4 and soybeans less than $10, growers need revenue protection.



ECO can be purchased at either a 95-percent or 90-percent coverage level. Coverage extends from the selected level down to 86 percent, the point where SCO begins to offer coverage.

Summary

ECO allows producers to further supplement the coverage offered by their underlying individual plan of insurance.

Like SCO, ECO coverage mimics the underlying individual plan, and payments are made based on county-level triggers.

While SCO provides coverage across a band of 86 percent down to the underlying plan of insurance, ECO provides coverage from either 90 percent or 95 percent down to 86 percent of expected county revenue or yield.

To be eligible for ECO and SCO coverage, producers must purchase an individual plan of insurance (RP, RP-HPE, YP).

While SCO use is limited to acreage enrolled in the PLC program, ECO can be used on acres enrolled in both PLC and ARC.

ECO premiums will be subsidized at a rate of 51 percent if used with individual yield coverage or 44 percent if used with individual revenue coverage.

SCO is subsidized at a rate of 65 percent.

Compared with SCO, ECO offers even higher coverage options to cover a wider band of the deductible value, and use is not limited by farm program choice.

In 2023 farmers' expenses have skyrocketed. I have found with the appointments I have that they are looking for options like ECO+ that provides individual coverage above enterprise units.

I have also found that farmers are definitely concerned about downside prices. If history repeats itself where corn is less than $4 and soybeans less than $10, growers need revenue protection.

When the harvest price is less than the spring price, their bushel guarantees increase.

Why? They need to collect sooner because it will take more bushels to pay for their expenses, and their expenses will not decrease.

Federal law limits the authority for Federal Crop Insurance to insure individual farm yields at 85 percent.

ECO can offer coverage up to 95 percent, at a county level to enhance your total coverage.

In 2023 Farmers Mutual Hail ECO+™ provides individual yield protection up to 95 percent.

Give me a call at 507-283-3704 to determine what best meets your individual risk management needs.

My best education was being raised on a river farm with a family of nine. Light soil required ample regular rains to get a crop.

Wishing all farmers a safe, healthy, and prosperous 2023.

2012	CORN RP	$ 5.68	$ 7.50	Oct for Dec	SBEAN RP	$ 12.55	$ 15.39	Oct for Nov
2013	CORN RP	$ 5.65	$ 4.39	Oct for Dec	SBEAN RP	$ 12.87	$12.87	Oct for Nov
2014	CORN RP	$ 4.62	$ 3.49	Oct for Dec	SBEAN RP	$ 11.36	$ 9.65	Oct for Nov
2015	CORN RP	$ 4.15	$ 3.83	Oct for Dec	SBEAN RP	$ 9.73	$ 8.91	Oct for Nov
2016	CORN RP	$ 3.86	$ 3.49	Oct for Dec	SBEAN RP	$ 8.85	$ 9.75	Oct for Nov
2017	CORN RP	$ 3.96	$ 3.49	Oct for Dec	SBEAN RP	$ 10.19	$ 9.75	Oct for Nov
2018	CORN RP	$ 3.96	$ 3.68	Oct for Dec	SBEAN RP	$ 10.16	$ 8.60	Oct for Nov
2019	CORN RP	$ 4.00	$ 3.90	Oct for Dec	SBEAN RP	$ 9.54	$ 9.25	Oct for Nov
2020	CORN RP	$ 3.88	$ 3.99	Oct for Dec	SBEAN RP	$ 9.17	$ 10.55	Oct for Nov
2021	CORN RP	$ 4.58	$ 5.37	Oct for Dec	SBEAN RP	$ 11.87	$ 12.30	Oct for Nov
2022	CORN RP	$ 5.90	$ 6.86	Oct for Dec	SBEAN RP	$ 14.33	$ 13.81	Oct for Nov

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Southwest MN farmland values increase 27.9 percent

Dave Bau, U of M Extension Educator

The annual survey of farmland sales in 14 southwestern Minnesota counties shows values increased nearly 28 percent in 2022 to an average $8,673 per acre.

The survey collects bare farmland sales to non-related parties for the first six months of each year.

Land values had been steadily increasing until 2014 after reaching record high prices in 2013 ($8,466 per acre average) and then declining through 2017 to an average $6,340 per acre.

The counties in this study include Chippewa, Cottonwood, Jackson, Lac qui Parle, Lincoln, Lyon, Martin, Murray, Nobles, Pipestone, Redwood, Rock, Watonwan and Yellow Medicine counties.

This year the increase across the 14 counties averaged 27.9 percent from $6,780 to $8,673. (The highest year-to-year increase of 35.6 percent in 2013).

There was a lot of variability in the numbers from 2021 to 2022.

The largest increase was in Cottonwood County with an increase of 86.77 percent while Pipestone County experienced the largest decrease of 8.1 percent for the sales that met the bare farmland to non-related party transaction requirements.

Nobles County had the highest average sale price of $11,025 per acre and Chippewa County had the lowest at $6,333 per acre.

Each year sales vary. Within a county, land location could affect these average values, as could quality of the land sold. The number of sales in each county varies greatly from year to year. The 27.9-percent increase is above historical increases of 1 to 2 percent.

There are several factors that affect land values. Farm incomes, grain prices, interest rates, return on other investments and 1031 exchanges are often mentioned as reasons for the increase.

Farm average incomes improved in 2019, 2020 and 2021, and are projected higher in 2022.

In a 1031 exchange, property owners who sell land in an area of increased value purchase like property or farmland at a more reasonable price elsewhere to avoid paying taxes on large gains from the sale of the higher valued land.

This increases rural farmland demand and land values.

The overall reason for increases or decreases in farmland sale prices is a combination of all of these factors.

Which direction farmland values will go depends on several factors.

•Supply and demand will determine this.

•The simple return on investment, which is determined by rental rates will determine how competitive farmland is compared to other investments and this will determine a value for farmland.

•Corn and soybean prices were high in 2022 and remain high starting in 2023. This should have an impact on profits, farm rental rates and eventually farmland values.

•The government program payments decreased in 2021 and 2022.

The two-page document on the trends in farmland sale prices is available at local Extension offices at any of the 14 southwest Minnesota counties. The U of M Extension Regional Office is in Worthington, 507-372-3900.

County	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
Chippewa	$6,578	$6,460	$6,336	$6,231	$6,812	$6,333
Cottonwood	$7,266	$7,322	$8,064	$5,811	$4,839	$9,033
Jackson	$7,399	$6,671	$6,361	$7,334	$6,750	$9,300
Lac qui Parle	$5,111	$5,105	$5,049	$4,684	$4,719	$6,733
Lincoln	$4,415	$5,312	$5,806	$3,853	$6,350	$7,092
Lyon	$6,057	$5,358	$5,607	$5,509	$6,902	$8,787
Martin	$6,370	$6,120	$6,915	$8,894	$7,479	$9,127
Murray	$6,135	$6,406	$5,446	$6,055	$6,622	$8,038
Nobles	$7,132	$8,548	$8,152	$6,664	$7,680	$11,025
Pipestone	$5,478	$6,211	$6,914	$7,119	$9,008	$8,282
Redwood	$6,852	$7,114	$6,600	$6,858	$7,082	$10,534
Rock	$7,545	$8,656	$8,851	$8,698	$7,854	$9,935
Watonwan	$6,588	$7,373	$6,006	$5,948	$6,671	$9,918
Yellow Med.	$5,830	$5,584	$5,959	$5,533	$6,158	$7,284
Average	$6,340	$6,589	$6,576	$6,371	$6,780	$8,673

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•Government program payments decreased in 2021 and 2022.

SWCD — celebrating 75 years of soil and water conservation in Rock County/from page 5B

"Drowning in Dirt: Joseph Hutton and the Dust Bowl" exhibit is on display through fall of 2024. It explores life during the 1930s through the eyes of a soil scientist trying to save family farms by preserving the land. The photo above was taken by Joseph Hutton in 1936 in South Dakota.

'Drowning in Dirt: Joseph Hutton and the Dust Bowl' exhibit tells history of soil conservation

The South Dakota Agricultural Heritage Museum in Brookings presents its latest exhibit, "Drowning in Dirt: Joseph Hutton and the Dust Bowl."

This exhibit, on display through fall of 2024, explores life during the 1930s through the eyes of a soil scientist trying to save family farms by preserving the land.

Professor Hutton, one of the first soil scientists in South Dakota, researched and taught at SDSU from 1911 to 1939.

He brought a new concept that not all soil was the same and that different soils required different farming practices to be sustainable.

For Hutton, soil became a sacred living entity in which sprang all life.

During the drought of the 1920s and 1930s, Hutton saw the devastation that loss of healthy farmland had on families and their surrounding communities.

He dreamed of a time when man was akin with nature and not the destroyer of it.

"The ideas he implemented a hundred years ago are the same fundamentals of soil health still promoted today by the Natural Resources Conservation Service and the South Dakota Soil Health Coalition," said Gwen McCausland, director of the South Dakota Agricultural Heritage Museum.

"It is not a new concept but a very important one that needs to be repeated."

This exhibit is funded in part by a grant from the South Dakota Humanities Council, an affiliate of the National Endowment for the Humanities, and by the Friends of the Museum membership fund.

The amendment continues through 2034.

The flood and rainfall event of 2014 increased the interest and investment in local conservation practices.

"At the time I started here, the NRCS staff was successful and able to keep up with the demand for services," Hartman said.

"A number of good practices were already in place.

"No one could prepare for Mother Nature with more than 22 inches of rain over eight days, which is becoming more common."

The weather event renewed interest in conservation practices that limited the impacts of rain events.

"Past practices and efforts seemingly were no longer adequate for the changes that we were experiencing in our rainfall events," Hartman said.

"The trend has been toward greater amounts of rainfall and more of that rain coming in thunderstorm events and less in gentle showers."

Declared a disaster, Rock County received $1.7 million to fix the 2014 flood damages. More funding in 2016 helped ramp up local technical staff when the demand for ground and structural practices locally greatly increased.

1W1P expands focus on a regional area

When Rock County joined forces with six neighboring counties in 2017 to develop a comprehensive management program for the Missouri River Basin, the move harkened back to when conservation districts were organized regionally.

As a member of the One Watershed One Plan (1W1P), Rock County shares in $1 million in state funding allocated every two years for projects focused on improving the quality of groundwater, surface waters, and fish and wildlife habitat.

The plan also educates and has an outreach focused on land stewardship. The current 10-year plan is in effect through 2028.

Through 1W1P and flood relief dollars, nearly 160 project sites have been completed since 2017 in Rock County. That includes over 90 grass waterways and 220 structures, such as water and sediment control basins and terraces.

The current conservation plan continues to address the "five dangers" Rock County SWCD supervisors identified in 1945, while evolving into a concentrated focus on soil health and use of cover crops.

"This approach is certainly different from what we have generally been accustomed to, but success is being seen by establishing a living cover on cropland when that cropland is at its most vulnerable state after harvest, through the winter and into spring," Hartman said.

"I cannot help but think back to my early childhood when so much farmland was aggressively tilled and, in dry springs especially, we saw soil loss in the wind, and in wet springs and in snowmelt, we saw soil loss with the water running off the landscape."

Don't stockpile antibiotics for livestock

Dr. deKoning dispels rumors about farmers' ability to purchase antibiotics in the future

By Erin deKoning, DVM
Rock County Vet Clinic

We've had a number of concerned clients reach out to the clinic about the upcoming Guidance 263 that will be fully enforced on June 12, 2023.

I had written an article in the fall Ag Tab about Guidance 263, but now felt the need to further clarify some of the questions that have arisen.

Several clients have called the clinic with the intention to panic-buy or stockpile antibiotics, very similar to toilet paper and Covid-19.

Guidance 263 is far from a pandemic situation.

Furthermore, toilet paper doesn't have an expiration date, but antibiotics do, so there is no need to waste money stockpiling antibiotics unnecessarily.

Guidance 263 makes over-the-counter medications available for purchase only from a veterinary clinic. In short, producers will not be able to purchase any antibiotics from any type of farm store. However, for those producers with a working relationship with a veterinarian, nothing will change.

Why did the government decide to create Guidance 263? To help slow down the incidence of bacterial infections that are resistant to treatment with commonly used antibiotics.

According to the government, drugs like penicillin, tetracycline and sulfa are all considered medically important for both human medicine as well as veterinary medicine and horticulture.

To help insure that these antibiotics are used judiciously, the government has decided to no longer allow these drugs to be sold over the counter (OTC). Now, all antibiotics will have a label that states that the antibiotic will only be sold and used "by or on the order of a licensed veterinarian."

If you have a working relationship with a veterinarian, Guidance 263 will not affect you in any way whatsoever.

You will still be able to walk into a veterinary clinic and purchase whatever antibiotics you may need.

*But you will only be able to purchase medicines as long as you have an established **VCPR – Veterinary Client Patient Relationship**.*

What is a VCPR with a veterinarian, you ask?

In the past year did you ever have a veterinarian on your farm for any reason? Or have you brought a production animal into a veterinary clinic for treatment? If you have had a veterinarian provide you with veterinary services in the past year, then you have an established VCPR.

What does not constitute a VCPR?

Simply having a veterinarian driving past your farm does not constitute a VCPR. Seeing a veterinarian in the grocery store and asking him or her a veterinary question does not establish a VCPR. Calling a veterinarian on the phone and asking questions does not create a VCPR.

To fully establish a VCPR, a veterinarian needs to physically treat your production animals or have actual "boots on the ground" on your farm.

So what are the benefits to establishing a VCPR?

In return for allowing me to work on your production animals to set up a VCPR, I, as a veterinarian, agree to be your primary contact for all of your veterinary needs.

I also assume responsibility for making clinical decisions for your operation. I am your hotline for all of your veterinary questions.

Our local Bomgaars has wonderfully knowledgeable and helpful employees, but none of them are licensed veterinarians that can assist you with the proper advice for treating your animals with the medications for purchase there.

Also, I highly doubt that those employees will be on call should you need a calf pulled in the middle of the night.

When Guidance 263 is fully enforced, what changes will producers experience?

Well, for those few individuals that are accustomed to purchasing things like penicillin, tylosin, lincomycin, oxytetracyclines, and sulfa boluses at their local farm store, Bomgaars, Runnings, TSC, etc., they will find the shelves bare.

Guidance 263 takes all the over-the-counter medications (OTC) and makes it so they are only available for purchase from a veterinary clinic.

In short, producers will not be able to purchase any antibiotics from any type of farm store.

However, for those producers with a working relationship with a veterinarian, nothing will change.

If you would like to set up a VCPR or need to purchase antibiotics after June 12, 2023, feel free to contact any of us at Rock Veterinary Clinic.

Agriculture priorities are being debated in Minnesota House

By Rep. Joe Schomacker, Luverne, District 21A

An aggressive start to the 2023 legislative session has left us many politically driven, headline grabbing sessions. Unfortunately, the issues important to the economy that drives our state, agriculture, don't often grab headlines.

On a variety of topics important to the business of agriculture in Minnesota, bills are being considered.

Regarding clean energy and sustainability, the Minnesota House majority approved and Governor Walz signed a bill into law requiring electric utilities in the state to generate or acquire 100 percent carbon-free energy by 2040.

I'm an advocate for renewable energy because it improves the checkbooks of so many in southwestern Minnesota. But when my utility providers tell me that storage capacity isn't there yet, it's clear the state shouldn't be setting this mandate at this time.

I applaud the goal of 100 percent carbon-free energy. Without infrastructure behind it though, we risk higher rates for energy, grid failure which will lead to blackouts, and unsafe conditions when these blackouts occur.

Regarding the health care accessibility priority, I am personally sponsoring three bills to make improvements. The first bill closes the gap on mental health operating costs, keeping rural settings open. This is necessary to make up for the lack of coverage by consumers and low commercial insurance utilization.

The second proposal allows Minnesota nurses the opportunity to practice in all states that are part of the Nurse Licensure Compact. Doing so makes it easier for hospitals to provide health care and makes it easier for nurses to practice in their field.

"I applaud the goal of 100 percent carbon-free energy. Without infrastructure behind it though, we risk higher rates for energy, grid failure which will lead to blackouts, and unsafe conditions when these blackouts occur."

My third proposal establishes the Minnesota Health Policy Commission, a non-partisan group complete with economic experts that have the expertise to dig deep into the details of determining how to provide the best health care policies for Minnesota.

Rural vitality is critical to all of us who live in the southwestern corner of our state. To address this, I have introduced workforce legislation that would create more opportunities for businesses to offer apprenticeships.

Once approved, this allows Minnesota to compete with South Dakota and its Build Dakota scholarship program which puts more students into technical careers.

Our region's need for reliable and clean drinking water continues on my agenda. I recently signed onto a bipartisan proposal that leverages federal dollars to help replace lead water pipes throughout the state.

Many of our communities continue relying on Depression-era infrastructure and securing funding allows our cities to modernize the delivery of clean drinking water to their residents. I'm also sponsoring legislation that authorizes bonding proceeds for construction of the Rock County water tower.

Access to child care continues as a top issue to our region and throughout the state. The Minnesota House recently approved two bills increasing the rates for the child care assistance program (CCAP). State audits uncovered the program has been plagued with large scale fraud. Personally, I support the additional funding, but we cannot throw good money after bad with no guardrails on future fraud.

I met with the ag education programs in Pipestone earlier this month to hear their support for beginning and emerging farmers, along with research and investment.

I am doing what I can to ensure that the MAELC (Minnesota Agricultural Education Leadership Council) has the funding it needs to continue being a success to recruit new instructors and help potential farmers get into the business. I also support extending the young farmer tax credit as a package of tax reform bills move through session later this year.

As the session is only a few weeks old, I am expecting legislation that will address other areas of interest will come up as it so often does.

It remains my honor to serve the interests of Rock County farm families at the Capitol. Not every legislator gets the privilege of representing such dedicated and hard-working people.

State Fair and Farm Bureau accepting Century Farm applications

Deadline is March 6, 2023

Minnesota families who have owned their farms for 100 years or more are invited to apply for the 2023 Century Farm Program.

Produced by the Minnesota State Fair in conjunction with the Minnesota Farm Bureau Federation, the Century Farm Program was created to promote agriculture and honor historic family farms in the state.

More than 11,000 Minnesota farms have been honored since the program began in 1976.

A family farm is recognized as a Century Farm when three requirements are met.

The farm must be:

1) at least 100 years old according to authentic land records;

2) in continuous family ownership for at least 100 years (continuous residence on the farm is not required); and

3) at least 50 acres and currently be involved in agricultural production.

A commemorative certificate signed by Governor Tim Walz, the State Fair Board of Managers President Joe Scapanski and Minnesota Farm Bureau Federation President Dan Glessing will be awarded to qualifying families.

They will also receive an outdoor sign signifying Century Farm status.

Applications are available online at mn-statefair.org/about-the-fair/awards-and-recognition/; at fbmn.org.

Applicants can also call the State Fair at 651-288-4417; or contact statewide county extension and county Farm Bureau offices.

The submission deadline is Monday, March 6.

Recipients will be announced in the spring. Previously recognized families should not reapply.

Information on the Century Farm Program will be available at the Minnesota Farm Bureau exhibit during the 2023 Minnesota State Fair.

A Century Farm database is also available at fbmn.org.

To qualify, a farm must be:

1) at least 100 years old according to authentic land records;

2) in continuous family ownership for at least 100 years (continuous residence on the farm is not required); and

3) at least 50 acres and currently be involved in agricultural production.

There are many issues to consider as spring farming season approaches; take time to weigh your options

By Rob Andringa
Professional
Ag Marketiing

Drought, demand, inflation, yield increases, interest rates, potential improved weather patterns ...
What does this mean looking forward?
Consider using options to take some risk off while allowing some upside potential. Consider the opportunities offered today, ... and remember every season is unique.

As the days fly by, we find ourselves hoping we are through the worst of my least favorite season, winter.

As I am writing this, we are over one third of the way past the shortest day of the year. The mornings seem brighter and the evenings longer.

As we look forward to the changing of the seasons as the snow melts, buds begin to form, birds make the trip back north (often to experience some snow first), and a new unique growing season begins.

As we look back into last year, the one word many of us would use to describe it would likely be drought. The past two years have been unusually dry for many of us in the west and south.

This has created its challenges. Lower yields and dried up pastures have created the lowest beef cow herd since 1962. Levels on the Mississippi were also depleted making barge logistics a challenge.

Drought over the year greatly reduced corn yields making a tight corn stocks to use ratio. However, weather was not the only challenge facing U.S. grain.

High inflation globally has caused an increase in the U.S. dollar, making U.S. grain prices less competitive in the global market.

Inflation has affected the U.S. consumer with high grocery prices and energy cost slowing demand, especially on gasoline consumption.

Lower cattle on feed, lower hogs on feed, lower exports, and lower ethanol production has greatly reduced demand.

What does this mean looking forward? While it is impossible to know with certainty, there are a number of things to consider, starting with a positive.

Forecasters pay a great deal of attention in the U.S. to water temperatures in the Pacific as these temperatures affect the amount of moisture pumped into our jet stream.

Water temps are rising from where they were back in December of 2021.

Warmer water is making its way west, indicating a much greater probability of a change in weather patterns from La Nina to El Nino.

These probabilities increase starting in June through late season of 2023.

Historically, 10 out of the past 13 years this switch has generated above trend line yields.

Better yields, improved pastures, while it would greatly aid the cattle feeder building back a herd, takes a great deal of time.

January's U.S. inflation data showed inflation at 6.4 percent, down from its high back in June of 2022 at 9.1 percent.

While this is a move in the right direction, the Fed has indicated a target to bring inflation back down to 2 percent. Fed interest rates have risen at a pace not seen since the 1970s.

The current rate sits at 4.75 percent with the anticipation of more than prior expectations to come until inflation target is met.

Higher interest rates put a lid on expansion, particularly in the livestock business. Inflation also hits the consumer. We have started to see a decrease in M2 money supply, the money supply of cash, checking, and other types readily converted into cash.

Personal saving rate has reduced down to 3.4 percent. The producer price index rose 0.7 percent in January over the 0.4 percent expectation, largely due to higher food and energy prices.

It is difficult at this time to expect the consumer to become more active, increasing demand.

Global pork production was lower in 2022 and is expected to remain flat in 2023 as high input cost and demand uncertainty remain due to inflation.

Where does this leave us? A higher probability of improved moisture, a smaller cattle and hog inventory, less money supply, and inflation concerns around the globe.

With that said, it is difficult to assume an increase in demand.

This makes managing risk a priority today!

Over the past several years, marketing a crop ahead of harvest hasn't performed well, while waiting for harvest has had better results than in years past.

This has caused many of us to be all too complacent.

With the potential for an improved weather pattern and an unlikely increase of overall demand, grains could be looking at a decent setback.

Crop insurance this year will not be protecting a profit, making marketing grain ahead of harvest a more pressing priority.

Take some time to look over your crop insurance options. Look into options such as yield protection in comparison to revenue protection. Look at price targets for new crop sales.

Consider using options to take some risk off while allowing some upside potential. Consider the opportunities offered today, and remember every season is unique.

Updated Minnesota Groundwater Protection Rule Map available

The Minnesota Department of Agriculture (MDA) has issued an updated map that will help farmers across the state comply with the Groundwater Protection Rule.

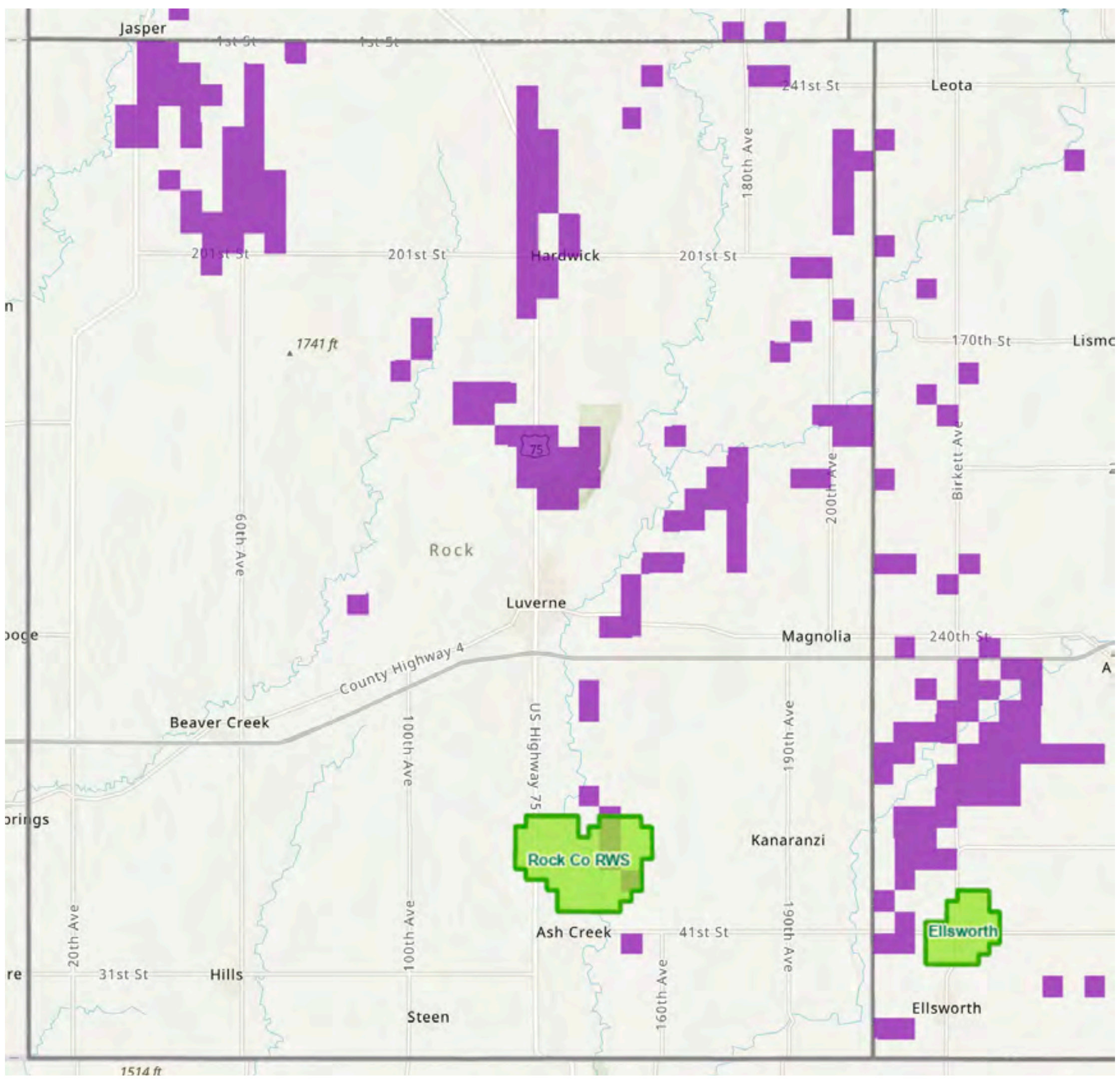
The rule restricts fall application of nitrogen fertilizer in areas vulnerable to contamination, and it outlines steps to reduce the severity of contamination in areas where nitrate is already elevated in public water supply wells.

The MDA has made changes to the Fall Nitrogen Fertilizer Application Restrictions map which is accessible on the MDA website.

There have been changes to the Drinking Water Supply Management Areas (DWSMA). One DWMSA was removed and two DWSMAs had boundary changes.

Additional information on the fall application restrictions and exceptions to the restrictions can be found on the MDA's website.

The restriction of fall application of nitrogen fertilizer on these acres will begin Sept. 1, 2023.



The restriction of fall application of nitrogen fertilizer on acres identified in the updated maps will begin Sept. 1, 2023. The application of nitrogen fertilizer on cropland in the fall or on frozen soils will be restricted in vulnerable groundwater areas.

Farmers are encouraged to check the new map prior to the fall of 2023 to determine if their fields are subject to these restrictions.

The application of nitrogen fertilizer on cropland in the fall or on frozen soils will be restricted in vulnerable groundwater areas.

This includes quarter-sections of land where 50 percent or more of the quarter-section is in an area with vulnerable groundwater and in DWSMAs that have nitrate-nitrogen concentrations at or in excess of 5.4 mg/L nitrate-nitrogen.

An area with vulnerable groundwater is an area where nitrate can move easily through soil and into groundwater, contaminating drinking water sources.

Some portions of the DWSMAs have low and very low vulnerability; those areas are not subject to the fall restriction. Vulnerable areas for Part 1 of the rule are defined as:

•coarse textured soils based on USDA NRCS soils maps.

•shallow bedrock based on USDA NRCS soils maps.

•karst geology based on MN DNR map.

Consider manure application guidelines this growing season

By Brandon Bosch, Rock County Land Management Office

The upcoming growing season will kick off with many producers applying manure to their crop ground.

Livestock manure offers several nutrient and soil health benefits, and proper use of manure as a fertilizer minimizes nutrient pollution to water resources.

Collective following of best management practices limits the risk for expanding restrictions and can stretch the value of manure as a fertilizer source.

Manure application setbacks place emphasis on special protection areas, especially during winter months.

It is important to map setbacks in each field prior to application – intermittent streams are often overlooked as a protected surface water source.

Other sensitive features to consider are open tile intakes, DNR waters, protected wetlands, drainage ditches, and lakes/ponds.

Non-winter setbacks for manure application in special protection areas (within 300 feet of lakes, streams, intermittent streams, public waters wetlands, and drainage ditches w/o berms) depend on application methods, vegetated buffer widths and phosphorus management practices.

They are outlined as follows:

Non-winter setbacks can be reduced from 300 feet to 25 feet if the manure is immediately incorporated and the rate and frequency of manure application will not result in long-term soil phosphorus build-up (e.g. over any six-year period) on soils with phosphorus test levels exceeding 21 ppm Bray P1 or 16 ppm Olsen.

Crop removal rates of phosphorus can be used as a guide for limiting phosphorus rates until subsequent soil testing results are available to determine if phosphorus build-up is occurring.

Non-winter setbacks can also be reduced along waters where permanent vegetative buffers are established.

Where vegetated buffers are at least 100 feet wide along lakes and streams and 50 feet wide along wetlands, intermittent streams, and unbermed drainage ditches, the setbacks can be reduced to 100 and 50 feet, respectively.

The surface water setback for manure applied by a traveling gun or other irrigation equipment is 300 feet.

Setbacks for land application of manure

Table 3. Minimum manure application setbacks (in feet) near sensitive features

	Winter frozen or snow-covered soils	Non-Winter with immediate incorporation (<24 hours)		Non-Winter not incorporated within 24 hours	
		With phos. mgmt.	No phos. mgmt.	vegetated buffer	Inadequate vegetated buffer
Lake, stream	300	25	300	100	300
Intermittent stream,*DNR protected wetland,** drainage ditch w/o berms*	300	25	300	50	300
Open tile intake	300	0	0	300	300
Well, mine or quarry	50	50	50	50	50
Sinkhole with no diversion berm	Downslope 50' Upslope 300'	50	50	Downslope 50' Upslope 300'	Downslope 50' Upslope 300'

Open tile intakes;

All manure and process wastewater must be injected or immediately incorporated when applied within 300 feet of an open tile intake.

Mines, wells and quarries

Do not apply to land within 50 feet of a mine, well or quarry.

Road ditches

The feedlot rules specifically prohibit manure application into road ditches.

Additional information about manure application, storage, and stockpiling requirements can be found on the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency website.

Contact the Rock County Land Management Office if you have any questions about manure application requirements.

Stop in, or give us a call at 507-283-8862.

Stepping Up:
Rock County walks the walk with soy-based shoes

Area soybean farmers donate soy-based shoes to frontline health care workers

Rock County Corn and Soybean Growers Board members Lucas Peters (far left) and Ryan Hoff (far right) donate soy-based shoes to various staff at Mary Jane Brown Good Samaritan Center on Jan. 12 as part of the Soybean Growers' "Stepping Up" program.

From farm to frontline, the Minnesota Soybean Research & Promotion Council (MSR&PC) is taking another giant leap forward to highlight environmentally friendly investments from the soybean checkoff.

Rock County soybean farmers in partnership with MSR&PC, which directs the state's soybean checkoff resources, are launching the Stepping Up campaign.

It amplifies farmer profitability and promotes the value-added uses of the "miracle bean" while making community connections.

Coming on the heels of the successful Driving Soy promotion, Minnesota counties have laced up to promote renewable, value-added soy products and give back to frontline health care workers in their counties.

Since Stepping Up began in Summer 2022, more than 50 counties across the state have participated in the campaign, donating more than 3,000 pairs of shoes.

"We are so glad to make this donation of soy-based Skechers shoes to the Good Samaritan Society of Luverne staff," Rock County Corn and Soybean Growers board member Lucas Peters said.

"With this donation, we were able to give them a well-deserved thank you for what they do for our community."

As part of the Stepping Up promotional effort, Rock County donated 50 pairs of Skechers soy-based GO shoes to the Good Samaritan location in Luverne.

"The staff were very appreciative of the donation," Good Samaritan Luverne Mary Jane Brown Administrator Kiona Rogers said.

"It was a great mood booster and safetywise we have a lot of staff who have worn out their shoes and these are good quality. They were excited and it is very appreciated. We're grateful to have the Rock County Corn and Soybean Growers be so involved in the local organization."

The Stepping Up campaign ran throughout the summer.

The statewide effort strives to inform both farming and non-farming public on soy's environmental advantages and the myriad uses of soybean oil.

County leaders also want to show their appreciation to health care workers in their community.

"We know how much health care workers sacrifice for others in communities throughout Minnesota, especially in the past couple of years. I've seen it firsthand," said Council Chair Joe Serbus, whose wife, Doreen, has worked in health care for more than 40 years.

"This campaign is an investment in both value-added soybean products and in the selfless health care professionals who keep us safe and healthy."

A step above the rest

In 2020 Skechers released its GO line of footwear, which uses soybean oil to improve grip, stability and durability.

Skechers is using the same checkoff-supported technology featured in Goodyear Tire Company's line of sustainable soy-based tires, which incorporated soy into its rubber technology.

Kurt Stockbridge, Skechers vice president of Product Development and Innovation, said the company and the soybean checkoff are stepping up to create a superior shoe and reduce their environmental footprints.

"Discovering ways to make product more sustainable is top of mind for Skechers," Stockbridge said.

"Though we were aware of the sustainable qualities of soybean oil, we were surprised to learn what the oil could do to improve our outsole rubber performance."

For each dollar, Rock County soybean farmers pay toward checkoff resources, growers receive an estimated $12.33 in return value.

Today, more than 1,000 commercially available products – ranging from shoes to machinery lubricants to asphalt – use commodity and high oleic soybean oil.

"Once that soybean hits the mill, it's local, it's national – it's everywhere," said Belinda Burrier, a United Soybean Director who helped oversee the partnership with Skechers.

"The money farmers make back on the checkoff is fantastic."

About the Rock County Corn and Soybean Growers Board

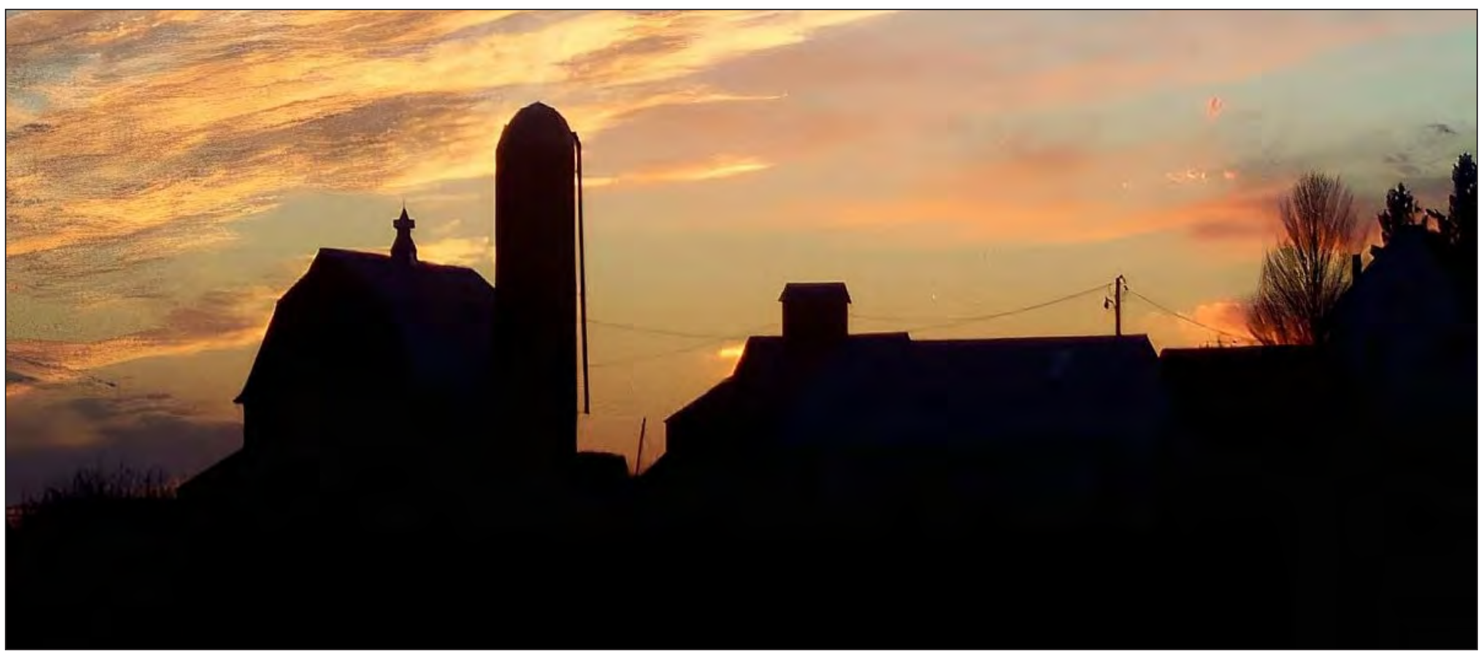
Rock County is affiliated with the Minnesota Soybean Research & Promotion Council, a 15-person, farmer-led board that oversees the investment of checkoff dollars on behalf of the nearly 28,000 soybean farmers in Minnesota.

The Council is governed by the rules of a federally mandated checkoff program requiring all soybean producers to pay a fee on the soybeans they sell.

This money is used to promote, educate and develop market opportunities for soybeans.

Follow the Stepping Up social media campaign at #SoySteppingUp and by visiting mnsoybean.org/stepping-up.

American Farm Bureau predicts ag income will fall



U.S. net farm income is forecast to fall almost 16 percent from last year, while costs are expected to increase more than 4 percent, on top of a record increase in production expenses last year.

While America's families continue to deal with record-high grocery prices, farm families can expect to see a drop in income in 2023.

American Farm Bureau Federation economists analyzed USDA's Farm Sector Income Forecast in their latest Market Intel report.

U.S. net farm income is forecast to fall almost 16 percent from last year, while costs are expected to increase more than 4 percent, on top of a record increase in production expenses last year.

Increased operating costs, lower prices for livestock and crops, and the end of pandemic-related assistance are among the factors that will contribute to a loss in farm income, down to $136.9 billion.

While fuel and fertilizer costs are expected to decline somewhat from record highs, marketing, storage and transportation costs are forecast to increase 11 percent.

Labor costs are projected to increase 7 percent.

"The farm income forecast is a stark reminder that America's farmers and ranchers are not reaping big benefits from higher prices at the grocery store," said AFBF President Zippy Duvall.

"Although some commodity prices are rising, farmers are being hit by circumstances beyond their control, from the cost of supplies and labor to drought and avian influenza. That's why the farm bill is so important and must be passed this year. Farm bill programs enable farmers to manage the risk and weather the storm of challenges to continue stocking the pantries of America's families."

Adding to the challenges, interest rates are rising, and farm sector debt is projected to increase $31.9 billion to a record $535 billion.

According to the Market Intel, "Nearly 70 percent of farm debt is in the form of real estate debt, for the land to grow crops and raise livestock.

Real estate debt is projected to increase $26.79 billion to a record-high $375.8 billion, largely due to an increase in land values across the country.

Non-real estate debt, or debt for purchases of things like equipment, machinery, feed and livestock is projected to increase by $4.4 billion to a record $159.1 billion."

USDA releases farm sector income forecast for 2023

Farm sector income is forecast to fall in 2023 following two years of strong growth.

Net farm income, a broad measure of profits, is forecast to decrease by $25.9 billion (15.9 percent) from 2022 to $136.9 billion in calendar year 2023.

This expected decrease follows an annual increase of $46.5 billion (49.2 percent) in 2021 and a forecast increase of $21.9 billion (15.5 percent) in 2022.

Net cash farm income is forecast to decrease by $39.4 billion (20.7 percent) from 2022 to $150.6 billion in 2023, after an annual increase of $32.7 billion (28.0 percent) in 2021 and a forecast increase of $40.4 billion (27.0 percent) in 2022.

In inflation-adjusted dollars, net farm income is forecast to decrease by $30.5 billion (18.2 percent) in 2023 and net cash farm income is forecast to decrease by $44.7 billion (22.9 percent) compared with the previous year.

If realized, both income measures would remain above their 2020 level and 2002-2021 average (in inflation-adjusted dollars).

Summary findings

•Overall, farm cash receipts are forecast to decrease by $23.6 billion (4.3 percent) from 2022 to $519.9 billion in 2023 in nominal dollars.

Total crop receipts are forecast to decrease by $8.9 billion (3.1 percent) from 2022 levels to $276.9 billion.

Receipts for soybeans and corn are forecast to decrease while receipts for wheat and hay are forecast to increase.

Total animal/animal product receipts are expected to decrease by $14.7 billion (5.7 percent) to $243.0 billion, following declines in receipts for milk, eggs, broilers, and hogs.

•Direct government farm payments will decrease.

They are forecast at $10.2 billion in 2023, a $5.4 billion (34.4 percent) decrease from 2022 levels.

Direct government farm payments include federal farm program payments paid directly to farmers and ranchers but exclude U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) loans and insurance indemnity payments made by the Federal Crop Insurance Corporation.

Much of this decline is because of lower supplemental and ad hoc disaster assistance to farmers and ranchers compared with 2022.

•Total production expenses, including those associated with operator dwellings, **are forecast to increase** by $18.2 billion (4.1 percent) in 2023 to $459.5 billion.

Interest expenses and livestock/poultry purchases are expected to increase in 2023 while spending on feed and fuels/oils is expected to decline relative to 2022.

•Farm sector equity is expected to increase by 5.0 percent in 2023 to $3.5 trillion in nominal terms.

Farm sector assets are forecast to increase 5.2 percent in 2023 to $4.0 trillion following expected increases in the value of farm real estate assets.

Farm sector debt is forecast to increase 6.2 percent in 2023 to $535.1 billion.

Debt-to-asset levels for the sector are forecast to worsen from 13.09 percent in 2022 to 13.22 percent in 2023.

After increasing in 2021 and 2022, working capital is forecast to fall 11.2 percent in 2023 relative to 2022.

Suggested citation for linking to this discussion: U.S. Department of Agriculture, Economic Research Service. Farm Sector Income & Finances: Farm Sector Income Forecast, Feb. 7, 2023.

What's that growing in your field?!

Consider cover crops for problems with weeds, washouts and more

By Lee Tapper, Rock County Land Management Office

Are you noticing these following issues in your fields: weeds, washouts, gullies, or even standing water in wet years?

If you have livestock, are you looking for another cost-friendly way to feed them?

If you answered yes to either of those, come visit with us at the Rock County SWCD/Land Management Office and discuss different cover crop and soil health options.

We are here to assist you with choosing the right cover crop options that will work for your farming operation.

You can also bring your agronomist to help you make good herbicide choices.

The Land Management Office offers different cost-share for trying cover crops and soil health practices on your farm.

Another benefit Rock County has is our very own Rock County Soil Health Team.

The Rock County Soil Health Team is made up of farmers in Rock County who have implemented cover crops into their farming practices.

They are willing to answer your questions and to share their experiences.

Give our office a call at 507-283-8862 or come in the Land Management building to sit down and chat with us.

Cover crops solve weed problems in row crops and offer additional feed for livestock.

Minnesota Farmers Union calls for MinnesotaCare public health care option

Recently Minnesota Farmers Union (MFU) testified before the Minnesota House Commerce Committee in support of House File 96, Representative Jamie Long's bill to expand MinnesotaCare with a public option.

"Unaffordable health insurance forces many family farmers to seek off-farm jobs in order to access affordable health insurance for their families," said MFU President Gary Wertish.

"Our members have consistently placed affordable health insurance and accessible health care atop their list of policy priorities. This is the year to make it happen."

MinnesotaCare provides health insurance coverage to people who do not have access to affordable health insurance.

Most members pay a monthly premium and the premium is based on the member's income.

The public option allows all Minnesotans to buy into this health insurance. Farmers' incomes are typically variable, rising when product prices are high and falling when product prices fall. This means farmers may qualify in some years and not others.

Danny Lundell, who farms near Cannon Falls with his wife, Mary, said the rising cost of purchasing health insurance on their own forced them to seek other options.

"At one point, we had a $20,000 deductible and were allowed $100 to use for wellness visits," Lundell said.

"That didn't cover the doctor's visit, let alone any lab fees."

Now Mary is employed off the farm to provide health insurance coverage for the couple.

"A MinnesotaCare buy-in option would provide health care insurance that we and other farmers could actually afford to purchase and use while providing high-quality care," Lundell said.

"It would allow the next generation of family farmers the ability to live and work in rural communities. Let's get this done."