Specialty Crop Block Grants Available

The West Virginia Department of Agriculture (WVDA) is accepting applications for the 2014 Specialty Crop Block Grant Program (SCBGP).

Applicants are invited to submit a “Concept Proposal” for projects meeting the criteria of specialty crops as defined by USDA. Fruits, vegetables, horticultural crops, tree nuts, maple syrup, Christmas trees, and honey are just a few of the examples of the types of agricultural products eligible for funding under this program. All projects must provide exclusive industry programming for research, education, production increases or marketing of these products.

Funding in 2014 is expected to be approximately $180,000. The program is available to groups and organizations that are qualified to receive grant funding and cannot be used to fund individual farms or enterprises.

Proposal instructions are available on the WVDA website (www.wvagriculture.org). Scroll to the bottom of the page and look under "Specialty Crop Block Grant Program Funds Available" to find the information.

Applications are due to WVDA by the close of business Friday, March 14, 2014. Additional information including sign up and registration for an upcoming webinar can be obtained by contacting WVDA Marketing Specialist Melissa Beller at 304-558-2210, mbeller@wvda.us.

Take Online Survey to Help Farm Bureau Serve You Better

What do you think about Farm Bureau? How much do you value your membership, and what can we do to make your membership even more beneficial?

An online survey has been developed to help us better understand your views about Farm Bureau and how we might serve you better.

It only takes a couple of minutes to complete - and will help us determine ways to improve benefits as well as provide information to guide us about the services we provide.

It’s easy! Go to wvfarm.org - the link to the survey is on the right side of the main page. Make your voice heard and help shape the future of Farm Bureau! Thanks!

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Articles for NewsBytes must be submitted by the 15th of the month prior to publication. Time-sensitive announcements must be submitted no less than 8 weeks prior to the date of the event. Electronic submissions, including photos, are preferred. Send to joanh@wjfarm.org.
6  Ag Organizations Partner to Save Lives
10  The Power and Pitfalls of Big Data
13  Stallman: Grassroots Strength, Strategy
15  WVU Update
20  AFBF Annual Convention
23  Orr Competes in Discussion Meet
27  Lines to the Ladies

On the cover

Hilltop Barn at Sunrise
istockphoto.com/tj_mccarthy
It appears we may finally have a Farm Bill in place as we await a vote in the U.S. Senate. All parties agree this bill is far from perfect, but after almost three years, it will finally give farmers some much-needed stability and allow them to make long-range plans.

The most notable features of the bill include:

1) Cuts to the SNAP program. Though not the deep cuts many of us wanted, others say this is at least a start. Purportedly, some of the money saved will be used for job training to help the unemployed.

2) Repeal of most Direct Payments. This program was the source of much criticism toward the ag community. Now farmers will be encouraged to base their planting decisions on the marketplace, and not on anticipated payments from the government - a return to free market principles that many support.

3) Disaster aid to livestock farmers. This aid will be retroactive, and includes coverage for livestock losses from severe weather such as the recent event in the Dakotas. The bill establishes a new, permanent 10-year baseline for disaster assistance. There is also a Livestock Forage Program for losses resulting from drought or fire; and programs to aid producers of honey bees and farm raised fish.

4) Continuation of EQIP. This conservation program offered through NRCS provides funding and technical assistance to farmers and ranchers facing threats to soil, water, air, and related natural resources on their land. EQIP helps agricultural producers to voluntarily implement conservation measures to mitigate these threats.

5) Payments in lieu of taxes. This program provides funding to areas of the country where large tracts of land are government-owned, and therefore do not produce tax revenue for surrounding counties to fund schools, infrastructure, etc. However, this program is only extended for one year.

Also, a Veterinary Services Grant program provided in the Farm Bill will award competitive grants to develop and help sustain veterinary services. Veterinarians are key in helping to maintain a safe food supply. Our state, along with many others, has a critical shortage of large animal vets. Hopefully this will help answer that need.

One of the major objections to the Farm Bill is mandatory Country of Origin Labeling. Many in agriculture feel this requirement has damaged relations with international trading partners and will result in retaliatory tariffs being placed upon a number of U.S. exports, putting our producers at a distinct disadvantage. Several agriculture-related groups withdrew their support of the Farm Bill because this requirement was not removed. It remains to be seen whether or not this problem will be addressed in future legislation.

No one is fully satisfied with the results of the Farm Bill. Congress must understand the importance of allowing our farmers and ranchers to continue to produce safe, healthy, affordable food and still earn a living for their families. If we don’t, the only alternative is to be at the mercy of others when it comes to feeding our nation. That is a frightening alternative.
Something to Think About

Don Michael, WVFB Director of Governmental Affairs

At this writing it is hard to believe 23 days have elapsed since the 60-day Regular Legislative Session started and this session has been anything but regular! During an election-year one can expect the number of controversial bills to gain serious traction to be kept to a minimum. It was also apparent new spending bills would be challenged due to our present budget picture. The expectation of a slower-paced, election-year session quickly evaporated with the arrival of the disastrous chemical spill impacting a nine-county area and sending shock waves throughout our state and nation. The “regular” session became intense, with lawmakers working overtime to secure facts in preparing legislation to “beef up” regulations to help prevent such a disaster in the future. The Senate has completed action (33-0 vote) on a water resources protection bill – SB 373. The final version of their legislation focuses on water use/withdrawals and aboveground storage tanks. The bill provides appropriate exemptions for agriculture. For those associated with agriculture protecting water resources is a way of life. Our livelihood depends on it. Farm Bureau appreciates the efforts of our Senate in crafting common sense legislation to protect our water resources and is hopeful the House will concur. The bill is presently in the House Health and Human Resources Committee.

Another significant bill of interest – HB 4286/Captive Cervid Farming Act – passed the House Agriculture and Natural Resources Committee with amendment this week and is presently in Finance. Perhaps the stars are finally aligned to yield success on this important piece of legislation embraced by Farm Bureau . . . time will tell.

Before the session started Farm Bureau members and land/property owners statewide took it on the chin as the Supreme Court of Appeals of West Virginia issued a ruling (No. 12-0106, filed November 12, 2013 – Walter E. Hersh and Mary L. Hersh v. E-T Enterprises, Limited Partnership, et al.) tossing the “open and obvious” doctrine premises liability law that has been a part of West Virginia law for over a century. The vote was 3-2, with Chief Justice Benjamin and Justice Loughry dissenting. The essence of open and obvious is that a possessor of real property owes no duty of care to protect against dangers that are open and obvious. In Justice Loughry’s dissent he noted – “It is decisions like this that have given this state the unfortunate reputation of being a ‘judicial hellhole.’ The majority has saddled property owners with the impossible burden of making their premises ‘injury proof’ for persons who either refuse or are inexplicably incapable of taking personal responsibility for their own safety. More troubling, however, is the fact that ordinary homeowners will pay the highest price for the majority’s pandering to persons who ignore the risk associated with open and obvious hazards that ordinary, hard-working citizens encounter every day and invariably utilize their common sense and good judgment to avoid. This decision is a radical departure from our well-established law, and therefore, I dissent.” The “open and obvious” decision has major implications for the trespass responsibility legislation Farm Bureau and other stakeholders have promoted the past two years. We are presently looking at alternative strategies to deal with this curveball tossed our way by the Court – stay tuned!

The House Rural Caucus, under the leadership of Delegate Bill Hartman (D-Randolph), continues to offer a refreshing perspective as lawmakers leave politics at the door to unite their efforts in making a positive difference for rural West Virginia. Meetings to date have drawn standing-room only crowds: Agriculture in the Mountain State with Commissioner Walt Helmick; the Alt/Eight is Enough Farm v. EPA case and legislative developments with WVFB staff; and concerns about possible lease integration legislation with Ron Hayhurst of WV Royalty Owners.

Until next time – Take a little time to do, whatever makes a happy you! KEEP SMILING FRIENDS, God bless you and your loved ones, and God bless America.

Over the past 50 years, more than 900 cases of grain engulfment have been reported in the U.S. with a fatality rate of 62 percent. In 2010, at least 26 U.S. workers were killed in grain engulfments – the highest number on record. The most tragic fact of all: grain engulfments are highly preventable.

Nationwide Agribusiness Insurance Company is partnering with Farm Safety for Just Kids, Heartland Co-op, Iowa FFA Foundation, National Education Center for Agricultural Safety (NECAS) and others to increase awareness of the dangers of flowing grain and bring visibility to safety procedures that can save lives through an annual Grain Bin Safety Week beginning in 2014.

Timed to bring safety awareness to the dangers of grain bins prior to planting season in much of the country, the week-long event will highlight a different component each of the seven days:

- Sun., Feb. 23: Grain management
- Mon., Feb. 24: Bin hazard identification
- Tues., Feb. 25: Bin and equipment design, including safety equipment
- Wed., Feb. 26: Bin entry
- Thurs., Feb. 27: Working safely in a bin
- Fri., Feb. 28: Extraction/rescue
- Sat., Mar. 1: Confined spaces beyond the bin

Highlights of the Week

#AgChat on Twitter
Nationwide Agribusiness, along with our partners Farm Safety for Just Kids and NECAS, will host #AgChat on Twitter 7-9 p.m. CT, Tues., Feb 25. This moderated, online conversation will look at grain bin safety from different angles and generate insight from folks involved in the business of growing food, fuel, feed and fiber. Anyone with a Twitter account can participate. Go to www.twubs.com/agchat to tweet during the chat. The site automatically enters the #agchat hashtag in every tweet and allows users to participate in real time. Please include the hashtag #GBSW14 in your tweets in support of Grain Bin Safety Week.

Webinar – Grain Bin Safety
On Wed, Feb 25, Nationwide Agribusiness will host a free, live webinar on grain bin safety that’s open to everyone. Farmers and commercial grain handlers will gain valuable insight into the risks and hazards of grain bins, safe-work procedures, OSHA standards and more. Space is limited so reserve your spot now at http://nwagcompanyevents.fugent.com/home/events.asp.

Win Safety Equipment and Training for your Local Fire Department

Contest period: The contest runs from January 1 to April 30, 2014.

Nationwide Agribusiness and NECAS have partnered to provide grain entrapment rescue training.
and a bin rescue tube (valued at $2,600) to one
nominated fire department or emergency rescue
squad.

To enter, provide your name, regular mail and
email addresses, the name and address of your local
fire department or emergency rescue team, and one
page describing how the local fire department or
rescue team and rural community would benefit from
grain entrapment training and rescue tube, and how
they plan to share the tube and training with nearby
departments. Official rules are available online at
GrainBinSafetyWeek.com

Completed nominations can be emailed to
agcontest@nicc.edu or mailed to: NECAS, Grain Bin
Safety Contest, 8342 NICC Dr., Peosta, IA 52068.

Visit GrainBinSafetyWeek.com for more
information.
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*PPDC. Plus $159 tax/service/government fees. Add $100 for June departure dates. Alternate departure dates available June-September. Seasonal charges may apply. Add-on airfare available.

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The power and pitfalls of big data

There’s been a lot of buzz about big data recently in both urban areas and out in the countryside. Big data has always surrounded us in varied shapes and forms, but many times we don’t realize it.
How many times do we turn to Google or ask our smartphones for answers or even directions to a desired location? How often do we connect with family and friends through social media platforms such as Facebook or Twitter? How much of your Christmas shopping did you do online last year?

Every time we connect digitally, data is generated, collected, and on an ever-increasing basis, analyzed to help achieve our desired outcomes. Even though most of us think that typing a question on an Internet search engine is free, the reality is that these simple questions provide valuable data to a company or a provider that uses the information to make products or services better and more efficient. Aggregating data can help analysts, scientists and economists tailor products, refine research objectives, answer key research questions and further innovation beyond the societal and technological norms of today.

The agriculture industry has been front and center on the topic of big data for years.

Technology has improved to the point that during the 2012 and 2013 crop years, several seed, fertilizer and equipment companies worked with farmers to monitor and collect farm data on variables such as number of plants in a given area, seed hybrids, soil topography, fertilizer usage and crop yield data on a site-specific basis. In some cases these sites were only a few square yards. These variables generate data and are just a pile of numbers comprised of 0 through 9, but when analyzed and interpreted correctly, the information can provide a great benefit to the farmer and the company providing the service.

However, the situation is more complex than interpreting a pile of numbers. Consider…what value does farm-level data have? What value do we place on privacy? When does my data stop and your analysis begin?

Assessing the payback value of each farm’s data generated from precision technologies will vary from farm to farm. But the company analyzing the data will almost always charge the farmer a fee for that analysis. The company usually counts on a positive return as the analysis of the data will strengthen its predictive analytic capabilities, strategic benchmarking and help solidify advantages in marketing.

The key word for the farmer, though, is “may.”

Farmers already using precision technologies may see a productivity gain by providing data and then gaining access to a company’s analytical supports. This support may help maximize output while reducing inputs such as seeds and fertilizer on specific pieces of crop ground. But the output generated from the services provided by the company does not necessarily guarantee the farmer will see an increase in overall farm output from year to year. From the company’s end, the guarantee is solidified by the farmer giving the company the data and paying a service cost. Should this degree of guarantee be considered when determining the fair value of big data, or is this just an associated risk carried by the farmer?

The use of data through precision technologies has the potential to revolutionize the agricultural industry by making farmers better at producing food.

Data derived from the use of technologies will offer a new competitive advantage and could provide economic benefits for farms that implement and interpret data correctly. For instance, the economic impact on agriculture from drones is expected to be $2 billion by 2015. However, even with that big of an expected payoff from big data, farmers need to be cognizant of the potential pitfalls, especially the possibility that their private farm-level data might not remain so private.

The question should not be only whether or not farmers are ready to give up the privacy of their individual farm data. Those days are long gone. The real question for farmers to consider is: Do the short- and long-term benefits of giving farm-level data to another entity outweigh the costs associated with the possibility that the farm-level data would be released or misused by others?

Matthew Erickson is an economist at the American Farm Bureau Federation.
Many people neglect to review their wills periodically. That can be an expensive form of neglect. Tax laws change, and the tax bite on your estate changes too.

In the American Taxpayer Relief Act of 2012, Congress established a permanent base of $5 million as the tax-free amount for lifetime or estate giving. The amount will be indexed for inflation each year.

In 2014, property and assets in your estate worth $5,340,000 and less can be protected from federal estate taxes, but above that amount, 40% of the property will be needed to pay the taxes within 9 months of death. Special rules apply to married couples who receive, in effect, a total $10,680,000 in tax-free assets if both die in 2014.

Because of these recent significant changes, do yourself a big favor and review your will thoroughly now. Do all of the terms still provide the legacy you thought it would? Considering the possibility of changing tax laws in coming years, is the plan still appropriate?

If not, a codicil (or amendment) to the will may be appropriate. However, if the changes you decide upon are more than minor ones, a new will is the better option.

It is very important to spend some time re-evaluating your property’s value in today’s dollars and the potential for future growth during your lifetime. Your real estate has probably gone up in value more than you realize over the years. Other assets may have as well. In that case, a tax-saving bequest may be an appropriate choice.

Consider making additional or larger gift provisions to favorite charitable organizations in your revised estate plan. Such gifts, whether to a church, university, hospital or other helping organization, can provide a beneficial legacy for others while cutting estate taxes, if that is a concern.

Changes in tax laws, in intended beneficiaries, or in property or assets should prompt a periodic review of the legacy that your will provides.

That’s good planning.
Stallman: Grassroots Strength, Strategy Drive Success

With an appreciation for agriculture’s heritage, farmers and ranchers are focused on the opportunities and challenges of the present, keeping their eyes on the road ahead, according to American Farm Bureau Federation President Bob Stallman.

“If we keep our commitment to learn from the past, look toward the future and never let go of the wheel, I know that Farm Bureau will have a bright future,” Stallman told about 7,000 Farm Bureau members who gathered in San Antonio for AFBF’s 95th Annual Convention.

Stallman, a rice and cattle producer from Texas, also spoke about the example Farm Bureau members set during what was a bitterly divided Congress in 2013.

“This very gathering is about people from different regions and backgrounds coming together to develop policy that benefits all of American agriculture,” he noted.

While lawmakers are close to the finish line on the farm bill and the Water Resources Development Act, farmers and ranchers can’t wait any longer for effective, long-term solutions to the agricultural labor crisis, which has forced growers to leave millions of dollars’ worth of crops unharvested and threatens the country’s food security.

“Farmers and ranchers have been waiting for Congress to take action and work for solutions, waiting for them to put the nation’s needs above politics,” Stallman said.

Despite this time of congressional gridlock, few organizations have seen their key priorities passed by even one house of Congress, much less two, Stallman noted.

see Stallman, page 25
The American Farm Bureau Federation’s Annual Convention always comes just when I need it the most. After the holidays are over and we are truly in the grips of winter, Annual Convention rolls around and I have an excuse to escape the mud/snow/ice/rain for a few days and see another part of the country.

This year, the 70 degree weather in San Antonio was much appreciated after the -10 degree weather we experienced in Pocahontas County only a couple days before!! The highlight for West Virginia’s Young Farmers and Ranchers was the Discussion Meet. Kacey Orr, a member of the Ohio-Brooke Farm Bureau, won the state contest in November and did a fantastic job representing us on the national level. 41 states had folks in the Discussion Meet this year; but only 16 made it past the first two rounds of discussion. Kacey’s cumulative rankings placed her in this group, known as the “Sweet Sixteen.” Kacey raises vegetables, fruits, and chickens on her farm in Triadelphia; selling her products at farmers’ markets in three states. Joe Hatton put in many hours coaching Kacey for the competition and we thank him for his commitment and support of the Young Farmer program.

While most of the West Virginia delegation took in workshops, sessions, and maybe even some sightseeing, I was busy working behind the scenes with my fellow AFBF Young Farmer and Rancher Committee members ensuring that our three competitive events ran smoothly. On Monday, I had the honor of chairing the Final Four Discussion Meet. I wasn’t competing in the contest, but speaking in the huge Lila Cockrell Theatre was still a little nerve-wracking!

One of the highlights of my six days in San Antonio was visiting a school in New Braunfels to promote agricultural literacy. Each year before the Annual Convention officially begins, the national committee reads to students at a local school and presents an agriculture lesson. We paired off to visit twelve different classrooms and were able to reach over 200 children with our message. Many of these kids had never met or even seen a farmer before, so it was a pretty neat experience to tell them that we were the people who produced their hamburgers and milk.

Reading to school children is, perhaps, one of the easiest ways to share our story. It takes only a few minutes and most teachers are eager to let guest readers come into their classrooms. The excitement and interest shown by the students I read to gave me a real sense of accomplishment. I encourage you to think about reading to a class (or two or three!) in your own community. If you need help selecting an “accurate ag” book, the American Farm Bureau Foundation has a wonderful searchable database and list of recommended books available online at www.agfoundation.org/bookdb.
The basics about bird feeding stations in your backyard

Backyard bird feeding stations supply birds with easily accessible food during harsh weather conditions or times of migration. They also serve as an ideal bird watching and information gathering location for native birds.

Unfortunately, if not properly maintained, feeding stations can become hazardous to the bird population. When left unmanaged, bird feeders can cause disease spread, attract exotic species, such as European Starlings or House Sparrows, or increase bird population numbers beyond what the natural habitat can support.

To minimize these effects, follow these simple guidelines:

Placement
Place bird feeders in locations that offer optimal viewing and easy access. Feeder placement close to natural cover can provide birds with a resting area between feedings and an escape from predators; however, make sure that squirrels will not be able to jump onto the feeders. Consider the feeder’s proximity to windows, which cause millions of bird deaths each year. If you place the feeder near a window, place it within 3-feet to avoid a hard impact.

Cleaning
Clean feeders regularly to prevent contamination and disease spread. Remove decomposing or moldy feed. Wash feeders every two weeks with hot soapy water. Remove spillover seed from the ground to prevent buildup of moldy or spoiled feed and to reduce the attraction of unwanted pests.

Bird seed
When purchasing bird seed, consider the native birds and the birds you wish to attract. Do a bit of food preference research to choose a seed that is preferred by your target birds. Many seed mixtures have filler seeds that are often raked out and spilled on the ground. This spillover promotes the growth of fungus and bacteria that can attract many unwanted pests, such as mice, squirrels, bear, and deer.

Sunflower is the most commonly used seed, because it attracts the largest variety of birds and is readily available. There are two types of sunflower seeds commonly sold for birds – black oil and striped. Black oil seeds have a thinner shell and are easily opened by most birds. Striped sunflower seeds have a thicker shell and may be more difficult for some exotic birds to open. Sunflower seeds can be purchased already shelled; however, this is more expensive and the unprotected seeds spoil more quickly. Other good seed options include safflower, peanuts, cracked corn, milo, sorghum, and white proso millet.

More information
There are many online resources available, such as www.allaboutbirds.org, to help you choose the appropriate seed.
W. Va. Premium+ Heifer Program improves herd quality

Beef producers know the key to a successful and profitable cow/calf operation is having efficient, functional, quality cows. Producing quality cows starts with selecting and successfully developing quality replacement heifers. However, the development and breeding of replacement heifers can be a fairly expensive and management-intensive process.

Proper management of heifer calves from weaning through breeding, and even up to first calving, has a significant and lasting impact on the long-term productivity and profitability of the herd. The difficulty is that smaller herds producers often find it costly to manage and develop heifers that maximize their potential. In fact, most small herd producers would fair better financially by selling their own calves and purchasing reputable replacement heifers. Even then, finding a source of replacement females that offers improved genetics and adaptability is challenging.

Realizing that many beef producers in West Virginia are faced with this dilemma, the WVU Extension Service launched the West Virginia Premium+ Heifer Program (WVPPHP), designed to provide a source of top-quality replacement heifers, while enhancing the profit potential for small producers. The WVPPHP provides independent verification of health management, breeding, and sire selection practices, and simplifies marketing opportunities for West Virginia producers. The WVPPHP also allows progressive cattlemen with extra replacement-quality heifers to add value to them by retaining, breeding, and marketing them as bred heifers.

The W. Va. Premium+ Heifer Program works! In 2013, 40 heifers from six producers qualified for Premium+ status and brought $1,630 per head. The WVPPHP is open to both spring and fall calving heifers.

To enroll in WVPPHP producers must:
- Be a member of the West Virginia Cattlemen’s Association
- Be Beef Quality Assurance (BQA) certified
- Have a registered premise ID
- Enroll a minimum of five heifers (West Virginia marketing groups and associations may participate as a group by collectively enrolling at least five heifers.)

To achieve West Virginia Premium+ status, heifers must:
- Meet or exceed minimum qualifications for weight, body condition, muscle, frame, health, and vaccination requirements
- Be verified pregnant
- Be free of structural or physical defects

If interested in WVPPHP:
Contact your local WVU Extension Service office for program requirements and enrollment forms.

Note: Enrollment for 2015 spring calving heifers will be accepted until May 1, 2014.
Take action now to stop heart disease

If you could protect your family from being robbed, would you? And would you stop a killer from taking a life? Of course! West Virginians are at risk of being robbed of their health and losing their lives. How? Heart disease kills approximately 5,000 state residents each year. That is why everyone needs to take action now to stop this killer.

How can you protect yourself and family members?

1. Get the facts.
   • Learn about health issues from A to Z at www.health.gov.
   • Learn from fact-based, reliable sources, such as www.womenshealth.gov and www.heart.org. For videos and cool tools, visit www.medlineplus.gov.

2. Have a “doc talk.”
   • Has it been awhile since your last check-up? Schedule an appointment today.
   • Prepare for the visit. Write down your questions about family history, screenings, risk factors, and ways to stay healthy. Bring all medications and nutrition supplements.

3. Know and track your numbers.
   • Is it your doctor’s job to keep track of your numbers? Not really – it is YOUR job. Know your blood pressure, blood sugar, Body Mass Index, waist measurement, and cholesterol. Half of all heart attacks are linked to controllable risk factors.

4. Watch for signs and symptoms.
   • You know your body the best. Notice anything unusual? Do not wait. Check with your doctor, or in an emergency, call 9-1-1.
   • Women may experience heart attack and stroke symptoms that are different from men’s symptoms. Can you name the signs to look for? Check the websites listed above.

5. Share.
   • Facts you learn, family health history, and interesting resources – your family and friends need to know about these, too!
   • Ask those around you to support you in practicing heart-healthy habits. Want help finding a doctor? Need a buddy to walk with? Interested in learning CPR? Just ask.

The Love Your Heart Movement is a new effort to help women live healthier, longer lives. Both men and women are victims of heart disease and need to know how to prevent it. However, women may be at greater risk than men, because women may experience different symptoms, ignore them, and do not get essential screenings, treatments, and medications. Compared to men, women’s heart attacks are more often fatal. Half of heart attacks happen with no obvious prior symptoms. That is why the Love Your Heart Movement is needed. Individuals and groups can join the movement by contacting their local WVU Extension Service Office or going to the website: http://fh.ext.wvu.edu/health/heart-health. Ready to take action to prevent heart disease? Caring for ourselves is one of the most important ways we can be there to care for others.

By Elaine Bowen, Health Promotion Specialist, WVU Extension Service

Basics about bird feed stations

– continued from page i –

feeder and seeds to attract the birds of your choice. These resources can also guide you in managing your landscape to attract birds and in deterring squirrels and other pests that would steal seeds from feeders.

For other questions contact your local WVU Extension Service office or your regional Division of Natural Resources office.

By Sheldon Owen, Wildlife Specialist, WVU Extension Service
Prepping the garden for early-season planting

As the spring gardening season approaches, gardeners are preparing for early-season planting and harvesting.

Benefits of early-season planting
Many popular vegetables are cool-season plants, meaning that the best yield and quality is produced in cooler weather. Early planting allows for early harvest, which provides fresh vegetables over a longer period of time. Also, if you are selling vegetables at a farmers market, prices are typically higher for early-season produce. Finally, the presence of vegetable pests becomes more prevalent in warmer weather and with vegetables planted later in the gardening season.

Try transplants
Starting the season with a healthy transplant is an effective way to establish cool-season leafy vegetables, such as head lettuce, bok choy, Swiss chard, cabbage, kale, broccoli, spinach, and cauliflower. Even though all of these vegetables can be seeded in the garden, transplants accelerate growth and harvest for most crops.

Indoor transplant growing options
While many of these transplants can be grown indoors near a well-lit window, a cold frame (miniature solar greenhouse used to acclimate plants to cooler temperatures) can be used to successfully start vegetable plants. A hotbed can also be constructed, filled with composting material, and topped with a layer of topsoil or peat moss. Vegetables can be seeded in the bed and later transplanted into the garden. To maximize light and plant growth, both hotbeds and cold frames should be oriented in an east-west direction.

Once in the garden
Raised beds warm the soil significantly, allowing the plants to grow rapidly in the spring. Raised beds should be approximately 10- to 12-inches tall and 3- to 4-feet wide. Leaf lettuce, carrots, beets, radishes, and turnips can be seeded in rows 4- to 6-inches apart or simply broadcast-seeded over the bed and watered in with a watering can or sprinkler hose. Head lettuce, bok choy, Swiss chard, broccoli, and cauliflower can be grown on dark colored mulches, such as black plastic or paper mulch, which warms the soil. Avoid placing straw or hay on the dark mulch, because it can shade the mulch and cool the soil, which will delay transplant establishment. To trap heat during the day, place gallon jugs filled with water around the plants. Drape row covers (spunbonded fabrics) over the crops for frost and freeze protection. A cloche, or hot cap, can be placed over the tender transplant to warm the air and soil around the plant.

For more tips
Consult the WVU Extension Service Garden Calendar to find more information about planting dates for vegetables in your region.

By Lewis W. Jett, Commercial Horticulture Specialist, WVU Extension Service
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ON TOP OF MOST CURRENT OFFERS

PRESENTING A PRIVATE OFFER FOR FARM BUREAU MEMBERS

West Virginia Farm Bureau News 19
This year’s AFBF Convention was held in balmy San Antonio - a welcome break for WVFB members who left behind sub-zero temperatures.

Following two days of exciting competitions, informative workshops and dynamic speakers, voting delegates gathered to approve AFBF policy to guide the organization over the coming year.

This page, clockwise from top: General Stanley McChrystal speaks on adaptability; Lois and Tony Alt chat with Denny Canterbury; the West Virginia delegation gathers for the Flapjack Fundraiser; AFB Foundation for Agriculture’s Book of the Year The Beeman.

Opposite page: Board members David Ash and Mike Merinar at the Trade Show; Executive Committee Member Joe Clay carries the WV flag at the opening ceremony; WLC Chair Pam Hessler and Vice-Chair Mary Clay at the Women’s Leadership Committee meeting; Formerly beardless Alan Robertson addressed the crowd; and a peek at the Trade Show.
2014 San Antonio
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Kacey Orr made her fellow West Virginians extremely proud as she competed in the national Young Farmers & Ranchers Discussion Meet at the 2014 American Farm Bureau Annual Convention.

Orr, who produces 36 varieties of fruits and vegetables and raises chickens on her 30-acre farm, is from Triadelphia in Ohio County.

The Discussion Meet, which took place in January in San Antonio, Texas, features a series of discussions between young farmers and ranchers about various agricultural matters. The participants strive to build consensus while searching for solutions. Topics are provided for each round of the discussion. Participants are judged not only on subject knowledge and delivery, but how well they draw their fellow participants into the discussion.

Orr won an all-expenses paid trip to compete in the AFBF Discussion Meet, after winning the state event last November at West Virginia Farm Bureau’s Annual Meeting.

Topics discussed by the young farmers included the need for immigration reform, the proliferation of government regulations and the need for building relationships with legislators.

Though disappointed in the outcome, Kacey enjoyed the experience and was grateful for the opportunity to compete.

Want information about Young Farmers & Ranchers or know someone who may be interested in joining? Contact Eric Thomason at the WVFB state office at 800-398-4630 or erict@wvfarm.org.
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On the regulatory front, securing farmers’ and ranchers’ privacy is a growing concern, as are attempts to challenge farmers’ ability to use modern technology to increase crop yields and food quality.

“Instead of focusing on how to feed more and more people with existing land and water, and instead of allowing us to use food staples to address nutritional deficiencies in less-developed countries, some are intent on standing in the way,” Stallman said of state legislation and ballot initiatives that would require labels for foods made with biotech ingredients or even ban the use of biotechnology outright.

With the Environmental Protection Agency late last year putting the wheels in motion to propose extending federal regulatory authority to nearly every body of water in the country – and ultimately regulating so-called “waters” that aren’t even wet most of the time – farmers and ranchers are bracing for a fight.

Farm Bureau has also been working through the courts to stop EPA’s attempts to broaden its regulatory reach.

Disappointed with a loss in its case against the EPA’s Chesapeake Bay pollution limit rules, AFBF, along with Pennsylvania Farm Bureau, has appealed the ruling.

“Once again, we are saddled-up for the long ride in our fight for rational regulations that allow farmers to continue feeding America,” Stallman said.

Stallman highlighted West Virginia poultry grower Lois Alt’s court battle against EPA’s unlawful water regulations as a testament to the powerful results that can be achieved when people work for the good of the whole.

“Whether it’s a regulatory, legal or legislative issue, just think how much Farm Bureau could achieve if everyone was like Lois Alt – taking a long-term view and taking a stand for America’s farmers and ranchers,” he said.

One challenge that Farm Bureau has turned into an opportunity is the aging demographic in agriculture. Farm Bureau’s rural development initiatives – like the organization’s partnership with the Department of Agriculture on Start to Farm and its support for the recently launched Farmer Veteran Coalition – put beginning farmers and ranchers on the path to success.

Stallman encouraged Farm Bureau members to take part in the Farmer Veteran Coalition’s effort to help create opportunities on farms for those returning from the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq.
Healthy Farms Need Healthy Farmers

Having benefited from a healthy lifestyle that included good diet, exercise and regular doctor checkups, George is looking forward to his most successful year yet.

Health reform is here and with www.healthcare.gov you now have a way to apply for coverage.

No matter where you live, you may buy insurance from private health plans that cover a comprehensive set of benefits, including doctor visits, hospital stays, preventive care, and prescriptions. For example, George and his family discovered that plans in the Marketplace must treat you fairly; they can’t deny you coverage because of a pre-existing condition, such as the cancer George’s wife had a few years ago.

With a single application, you also will find out if you qualify for Medicaid or the Children’s Health Insurance Program or savings you can use right away to lower your health insurance premiums.

**All plans in the Marketplace offer the same set of essential health benefits.**

These are many of the benefits that people need when getting care. They cover things like doctor’s visits, prescriptions, hospitalizations, pregnancy, and more. Plans can offer other benefits, like vision, dental or medical management programs for a specific disease or condition. However, specific benefits may be different in each state. Even within the same state, there can be small differences between plans. As you compare plans, you’ll see what benefits each covers. This will be helpful if you have specific health care needs.

**Private plans are put into three categories.**

If you live in West Virginia and compare plans in the Marketplace, you’ll find they’re put into three categories based on how you and the plan can expect to share the costs for health care: Bronze, Silver and Gold.

The category you choose affects how much your premium costs each month and what portion of the bill you pay for things like hospital visits and prescriptions. It also affects your total out-of-pocket costs - the total amount you’ll spend for the year if you need lots of care. The categories don’t reflect the quality or amount of care the plans provide.

Having health coverage is important to assure you and your family have financial security. Take time to learn more at www.healthcare.gov.

**Open enrollment closes March 31, 2014.**

In general, when choosing your health plan, keep this in mind: The lower the premium, the higher the out-of-pocket costs.

George and his family chose a plan that covered daily prescriptions, lower-cost doctor visits for the kids and post-cancer and preventive care for him and his wife.

**Enroll and pay your premium by the 15th of the month for coverage to begin the 1st of the following month. Visit healthcare.gov to enroll by March 31, 2014.**
I hope everyone had a wonderful Christmas holiday and has been surviving the off and on cold temperatures that January can bring! As I was writing this month’s edition, the contaminated drinking water was still front page news and my thoughts were with those affected. The news has reported organizations that have been helping out by sending bottled water to the people affected but I wonder how many thought about the farmers and how they were going to get enough water for their livestock. My thoughts and prayers are with all of you.

I just returned from spending three full days (and two travel days) in San Antonio, Texas attending the AFBF Annual Convention. We were just starting to get out of the subzero temperatures in Berkeley Springs when I left for Texas and I will say the 70+ degree sunny, clear skies was a welcomed change. San Antonio is the seventh largest city in the U.S. but for such a large city, the people are genuinely friendly. People spoke to you on the streets and asked if you needed help finding things, which is not always the reception you get in the larger cities in the Northeast.

I attended several informative workshops and spent part of one afternoon networking with state women chairs from across the country. Ladies, we don’t give ourselves enough credit for all the programs we work on in West Virginia. At my network table there were seven other states represented and we each gave an overview of what programs we work on throughout the year. When it came time for me to mention the WV programs, they were literally amazed at all the different programs and contests we coordinate. I would say a majority at my table only work on a couple of projects a year. Now, I’m not telling you all this so you can sit back and take it easy. I believe what we accomplish in WV might have motivated several of them to pick up the pace. They realized we are a relatively small state in numbers in comparison to Florida, Georgia, and Oklahoma; just three of the states that I networked with. It made me so proud of each one of you for all you do to promote agriculture in our state.

So with that said, I hope each of you are working in your counties on upcoming projects. Food Check-Out Week is fast approaching. Let’s see if we can top last year’s $25,000 total in food and money donations to the three Ronald McDonald Houses. We will begin shopping at 10:00 a.m. in Huntington on February 20th and in Morgantown on the 22nd. The Charleston shopping date is April 11th.

Now that kids are back in school, plan a trip to a school for an Ag in the Classroom program. Also, the Agriculture in West Virginia poster contest should be ongoing and/or finishing up in March.

This year’s theme from the AFB Women’s Leadership Committee is “Growing Strong”. The committee has adopted “Our Food Link” as a planning toolkit with sample activities, media outreach, program graphics and plenty of room to tailor projects to our needs. They have discontinued the Food Check-Out Week so programs can be year around instead of concentrating on one specific week each year. Program examples from Our Food Link include agricultural literacy outreach in school-related activities with “accurate ag” books or communicating farmers’ and ranchers’ commitment to communities by increasing contributions to food banks or Ronald McDonald House Charities, Inc. County chairs should receive a copy of Our Food Link by the time you read this letter.

Now is also a good time to plan your safety day camps or if your county has never had one, we can team you up with neighboring counties that do.

Programs/projects don’t always have to be just your county; work with other counties in your region to plan new or existing programs. Remember, we need to tell our stories. The majority of the population in this country is several generations away from the farm and it is important to show and tell what we do to feed the U.S. and the world.

see Lines, page 30
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Lines, continued

I hope to see many of you in Charleston during Ag & Forestry Day at the Legislature and the Taste of West Virginia Reception. Remember, I’m just a phone call or email away if you need help or advice on how to get a Women’s Leadership Committee or project started in your county.

Blessings from my home to yours!

Pam

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