Support Agriculture Education by Recycling

West Virginia Farm Bureau’s Mobile Agriculture Education Science Lab is partnering with Evolve Recycling to help reduce the number of office and technology items that are thrown away everyday.

In exchange for these recyclable items, Evolve Recycling will make monetary donations to our “Ag on the Move” program.

So, we need YOUR help! We are accepting the following items for recycling: ink and toner cartridges (any kind); cell phones; digital cameras; GPS devices and iPods/mp3 players. Instead of throwing these items into the trash, bring them to the West Virginia Farm Bureau office, turn them in for recycling, and help support “Ag on the Move”!

If you or your company would like to support our recycling efforts but can’t get your items to the Farm Bureau office, please call Becky at 304-472-2080 x. 311, and we will have a collection box and/or pre-paid shipping label sent to you. Fill the box with 20 items, and then have UPS pick it up. It’s that simple!

One extra note: Evolve Recycling has a remanufacturing facility right here in West Virginia. So, you’re not only helping agriculture education, but you’re also helping to provide jobs in the Mountain State!


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@wvfarm.org.
table of contents

4  Presidential Paradigms
8  New EZ Ag Mobile App
11 WVU Update
16 New Law: Transfer on Death Deed
19 A Glimpse into German Agriculture
22 Growing a College Savings Fund
27 Working Together Beneficial for Farmers, Politicians

On the cover
Barn In Hills
©Johnsroad7/dreamstime.com
Expensing Rule Limits Must Be Addressed

Charles Wilfong, President, West Virginia Farm Bureau

An extremely important issue must be addressed during the current lame duck session of Congress, which takes place between now and the end of the year. The Section 179 expensing rule allows farmers and other small businesses the ability to deduct the total cost of new or used equipment or other property in the year it is purchased, rather than having to depreciate the cost over a longer period of time. Over the past few years, the Section 179 expensing limit allowed up to $500,000 in allowable purchases to be deducted in the year the purchase was made. However, for 2014, that limit will only be $25,000 because Congress has failed to pass an extension of the higher limit.

The House of Representatives has done their part, and passed a permanent extension of the $500,000 limit. Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid, on the other hand, has not allowed a vote to be taken by the full Senate. Without action from the Senate, the $25,000 limit stands.

This year in particular, when we are seeing exceptionally good livestock prices, we need this valuable tax tool to help us manage our equipment, buildings and other purchases that dramatically affect our farm profitability. When we have good years like this, such tools help us maximize income and allow us to make the equipment and other purchases we need to make, and allow us to average out the bad years when we wrestle with bad weather and unpredictable markets and don’t have sufficient income to make those purchases.

Many farmers have already made significant equipment purchases during 2014, unaware that expensing limits have dramatically decreased. Senators Rockefeller and Manchin need to hear from us about the importance of getting increased Section 179 expensing provisions extended immediately. Farmers have got to have clarity, so that we can make alternate plans if necessary.

Agriculture’s Leading Role in the International Marketplace

Bob Stallman, President, American Farm Bureau Federation

Farmers and ranchers have a long history of promoting American strength and goodwill through international trade. Thanks to our ability to satisfy demand here and abroad, U.S. agriculture is one of the few sectors that can boast a positive trade balance, overall shipping out more than we bring back in. The balance could shift, however, if political barriers stand in the way of agricultural trade.

Getting Markets Open for Business

U.S. agriculture is ready for a boost in activity in the Asia/Pacific region. This area holds great promise, and it makes no sense to limit access to food here or anywhere else. The Trans Pacific Partnership promises to open up trade among the U.S., Australia, Brunei, Canada, Chile, Malaysia, Mexico, New Zealand, Peru, Singapore, Vietnam and Japan. But the real success of TPP negotiations rests on an agreement between the U.S. and Japan, which would require Japan to resolve its long-standing tariff and non-tariff barrier issues. Price restrictions and high tariffs have been the standard for too long, and Japan will have to play on the same terms as other participants for the TPP to work.

The European Union is also primed for growth. Last year, U.S. agricultural exports to the EU totaled $11.5 billion compared to $17.3 billion in EU agricultural exports to the U.S. American farmers and ranchers are ready to be competitive here, but the EU system has stubbornly held to guidelines that are based in politics.
**Something to Think About**  

**Don Michael, WVFB Director of Governmental Affairs**

**Trick or Treat** – This month’s article was written a day before Halloween, that festive time of year for youngsters of all ages who attend costume parties, carve pumpkins into jack-o’-lanterns, visit haunted house attractions, and go trick-or-treating. As I reflect on three topics – Tank Program, Waters of the United States, and the 2015 Legislative Session – consider the relevance of the words “trick” and “treat” per a few of the definitions offered by *The Free Dictionary* – trick (an act or procedure intended to achieve an end by deceptive or fraudulent means; a stupid, disgraceful or childish act or performance) and treat (a source of delight or pleasure).

The **Aboveground Storage Tank (AST) Program** continues to evolve, and with it many unanswered questions and potential unintended consequences. Three Farm Bureau members were involved in a recent stakeholders’ meeting hosted by DEP in Charleston. The meeting focused on how the rule would work and our participants returned home with more questions than answers. DEP has filed its final version of the AST Interpretive Rule, which can be accessed from the agency’s home page at www.dep.wv.gov. As reported last month, the Aboveground Storage Tank page provides a rough draft of the emergency rule. You can also find contact information for DEP employees who can help with the registration process and answer questions about the program. Per current guidelines, anyone having aboveground tanks that hold at least 1320 gallons of liquid, are 90 percent or more aboveground, and are at a fixed location for at least 60 days are subject to regulation. While this program is not intended as a “trick,” it is far from a “treat.” Many feel most farming operations, particularly those outside of a critical concern/water intake area, should have been exempted from the rule or at the very least had a 5000 gallon tank exemption. Rumors still abound about a possible Special Session to address the AST issue.

The comment period on the **“Waters of the United States”** issue was extended until November 14. With the deadline passed all eyes are on the future to see if sanity prevails. Since last issue we learned our Attorney General Patrick Morrisey led 10 other state attorneys general and six governors in filing official comments challenging how the U.S Army Corps of Engineers and Environmental Protection Agency plan to change the definition of “Waters of the United States.” The 14-page letter signed by attorneys general from Alabama, Alaska, Georgia, Kansas, Louisiana, Nebraska, North Dakota, Oklahoma, South Carolina, South Dakota and West Virginia, as well as the governors of Iowa, Kansas, Mississippi, Nebraska, North Carolina and South Carolina concludes, “The proposed rule unlawfully and unconstitutionally seeks to assert federal jurisdiction over local water and land use management, while making it impossible for farmers, developers and homeowners to know when they may carry on their activities without obtaining an extremely expensive federal permit.” In closing they also urge EPA and the Corps to meet with State officials throughout the country to gain a better understanding of the careful measures these officials are taking to protect the land and water in their respective states. Farm Bureau appreciates the efforts of our Attorney General and other state leaders who have come forward to assist with this “tricky” situation. It is truly a “treat” to have such leaders supporting our cause.

The **2015 West Virginia Legislative Session** is around the corner complete with the usual suspense and fireworks. Lawmakers will be faced with tough decisions given budget issues driving the session. Many discussions hint of possible tax increases. Legislation dealing with private property rights is again anticipated. Stay tuned for regular legislative updates (FB Website – www.wvfarm.org, *Legislative Action Report, WV Farm Bureau News*, etc.) as we unite our efforts to ensure positive results “Under the Dome.” Let us hope that reasonable legislation prevails so our final scorecard on the 2015 Legislature will reflect more “treats” than “tricks.”

I leave you with my favorite signage of the week: 

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Float Mobile Learning, a consulting firm that develops mobile strategies and apps for major agricultural organizations and Fortune 500 companies, used market research to determine that 94% of farmers own a smartphone or a mobile phone, as reported in USA Today in March 2013. In 2012, it found nearly half of American farmers were using a smartphone such as an Android™ or iPhone®, up from 10% in 2010. Many others had tablets like the popular iPad.

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EZ Ag Mobile is another way we’re working hard to make our farm and ranch customers’ lives easier and more productive. Many farmers already use smartphones to check the status of fields and bins as well as to control equipment and facilities. They constantly check weather and commodity markets. EZ Ag Mobile creates a self-service environment for Nationwide’s farm and ranch customers, enabling them to:

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Sculpted tractor emerges from the “barn” doors to greet every hour with a cheerful rooster’s crow

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NOT SOLD IN STORES

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Stallman, continued

rather than science.

Although the U.S. and the EU both follow the safety guidelines set out by the World Trade Organization, the EU tacks on a “precautionary principle,” which allows it to add non-scientific guidelines to risk management. Match this with its snail’s pace for approving biotech products, and it is not surprising that we’ve seen a significant drop in corn and soybean exports. For U.S. food products that do make it over to the EU, the use of geographic indications can put some at an unfair disadvantage, limiting their marketability.

Standing Firm in Negotiations

No trade agreement can be fully successful without the support of agriculture. In September, AFBF’s Trade Advisory Committee met with EU officials in Brussels, where we urged them to remove unnecessary trade barriers once and for all and to move forward with the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership. A free trade agreement between the U.S. and the EU can bring a serious boost to U.S. agriculture, but only if politics are set aside.

AFBF also met with several ambassadors and the WTO director-general in Geneva where we affirmed U.S. support for completing the Trade Facilitation Agreement, an accord that would eliminate many antiquated customs procedures that serve no useful purpose. The agreement is currently on hold thanks to India — which originally signed on with all other WTO countries back in December but is now delaying the ratification. U.S. agriculture is ready for ambitious trade negotiations. Hanging onto failed ideas that place certain agricultural sectors at a disadvantage or create special exemptions for developing countries is no way to move forward in today’s marketplace.

Waiting for trade negotiations to conclude can feel a bit like watching paint dry, but persistence pays off: A recent agreement between the U.S. and Brazil has resolved Brazil’s complaint to the WTO and ended years of uncertainty for America’s cotton growers. Thanks to the support of the U.S. government, the current structure of commodity programs remains intact. We must continue to hang tough in trade negotiations to keep the marketplace open to the American farmer.

Register Now for AFBF Annual Convention in Sunny California!

Online registration is open for the American Farm Bureau Federation’s 96th Annual Convention and IDEAg Trade Show, Jan. 10-14, 2015, in San Diego.

Speakers at this year’s event include U.S. Navy SEALs Commander Rorke Denver and comedian and former Tonight Show host Jay Leno. The full member registration fee is $100 and includes the IDEAg Trade Show and Young Farmer & Rancher competitive events (Saturday, Jan. 10 through Monday, Jan. 12), general sessions, workshops and the AFB Foundation for Agriculture Silent Auction. For full details, see www.annualconvention.fb.org.

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Try a new crop in 2015 – Hazelnuts

A relatively unknown nut crop for most West Virginians, hazelnuts have the potential to thrive in many areas of the state.

Why grow hazelnuts

The ability to grow on sloped ground and tolerate cold winters, make hazelnuts an ideal crop for West Virginia.

As a food crop, hazelnuts (often called filberts) have high energy and protein value. They can be roasted and eaten individually or used as ingredients in items, such as candy or syrups.

Choosing a variety

Currently, there are European and American varieties of hazelnuts; however, the European varieties are not resistant to Eastern Filbert Blight, a devastating fungal disease of hazelnuts. Even though there are native, wild species of hazelnuts in West Virginia with excellent disease tolerance, these species produce small nuts with thick shells.

When interplanting varieties of hazelnuts, be sure to choose varieties that flower at approximately the same time. Planting stock grafted varieties should be from inspected, commercial nurseries that are resistant to Eastern Filbert Blight.

Several state universities and the Arbor Day Foundation are collaborating on a research project to develop hybrid hazelnuts for the eastern United States. New varieties of hazelnuts will be planted in West Virginia beginning in 2015. Interested gardeners can become charter patrons of the Arbor Day Foundation’s Hazelnut Project. Participating gardeners will get hazelnut trees for their own use and observation. To join this project, go to the Arbor Day Foundation website at www.arborday.org.

Planting tips

Hazelnuts are shrubs or small trees that can reach up to 10 feet tall and 15 feet wide. The plants are infertile, so they need to be cross-pollinated with other trees. To allow for adequate pollination, plants should be spaced 20 feet apart. For best establishment, planting should be done in early spring.

About harvesting

Most hazelnut varieties reach full production in approximately 6 years and can remain in production for as long as 25 years. Hazelnuts are harvested in late fall when the nut separates from the husk and falls to the ground. The nuts should be shelled and dried prior to storage.

For more information on this new nut crop, contact Lewis Jett at 304-293-2634 or Lewis.Jett@mail.wvu.edu.

By Lewis W. Jett, WVU Extension Specialist – Commercial Horticulture
How to sell your timber wisely

After a number of depressed years, the timber market has rebounded with strong demand for logs by sawmills and other users. Many landowners are being approached by loggers, log buyers, sawmills, foresters, and others about purchasing their timber.

Do your homework
Harvesting timber is often a once in a lifetime activity, and it is important to do it correctly the first time.

While selling timber will almost always generate some financial benefit, many landowners end up with less than the true value and undesirable or unexpected post-logging conditions.

The timber sale transaction should be a fair and open process that provides shared benefits for all parties. To protect their interests now and in the future, landowners are strongly encouraged to work with an industry expert, such as a professional forester, to guide them through the process.

Determine goals
First, the landowner should determine a goal for the timber harvest. Often times, the goal is to maximize income from the timber, develop wildlife habitat for hunting, remove dying trees to have a healthier forest, or even a combination of all these.

Marketing your trees
The forester will then prepare and market a prospectus to potential buyers. The prospectus will include the location of the property, general payment terms, and other necessary details. In most cases, a buyer will then submit a sealed bid with an offer. This is the preferred process, because competition encourages buyers to offer the highest value to the landowner. Even though direct price and percent basis (shared proceeds between buyer and landowner) negotiations are less desirable, they may be appropriate for smaller volumes and specialized situations.

The contract
Once a buyer is selected, both parties should enter into a contract that includes the description of the timber, agreed upon price, payment terms, time period, who will pay the severance tax, and other responsibilities of each party. An experienced industry professional will typically have a good template for this contract; however, an attorney review will ensure legal rights are protected.

During harvest
Once harvesting starts, the forester can oversee the operation to ensure skills to develop a plan to help the landowner meet his/her goals. Typically, the forester will inventory the forest and help you determine what trees should be cut, the estimated value of the trees, and some initial planning steps for the removal of the trees.

At a logging landing site, log decks surround the loader and log truck. (Photo – Ben Spong)
Support local businesses this holiday season and year-round

The holiday season is a wonderful time to explore West Virginia. As you shop for gifts and ingredients to make delicious meals, WVU Extension experts recommend looking to local small businesses to fulfill your holiday needs.

The benefits
When you choose to purchase from a small business instead of a large national chain, you invest directly into the local economy, creating vigorous growth for small towns and local businesses.

Buying local goods and services directly impacts the local community and allows for economic advancement of individual businesses and eventually, the entire town.

Small Business Saturday is a day to support local businesses.

Small Business Saturday
The Saturday after Thanksgiving is “Small Business Saturday,” a day to show your support for local businesses. This year it falls on Nov. 29. Small Business Saturday is about patronizing brick and mortar businesses that are small and local. It’s a reminder to get out and explore your town – and the state – to see what West Virginians have to offer.

Although Small Business Saturday is the single-most recognized day of the year where small business shopping is highly encouraged, it shouldn’t be the only time of year that you frequent your local business owners’ shops.

West Virginia small businesses are open for business throughout the year. It’s important that we support them through every season and not just during the holidays.

Finding small businesses
Perhaps the best place to find local shops and businesses in on “Main Street” of small towns. Communities across the state have that one street that stands out above all the rest. Find the Main Street in your area that offers boutique shopping, family-owned restaurants, and other West Virginian-owned businesses.

Gifts are just part of shopping local. You can find many of the ingredients for “grandma’s famous apple pie” or locally-made cheeses and wines for the holidays – or any day – from local businesses and marketplaces.

Places like the Capitol Market in Charleston offer a large amount of handcrafted goods and West Virginia-made foods from across the state, available year-round.

Show your support
“When visitors seek out local shops and spend money on their goods or services, resident businesses gain resources from other areas of the state – or neighboring states – that grow their business, leading to increased economic development from tourism in the region,” says Doug Arbogast, WVU Extension specialist for community and rural tourism.

Although visiting the communities and towns where small businesses are located is part of the appeal to shopping local, you can still support small businesses and create a strong local business economy in West Virginia by purchasing products from West Virginian merchants online.

For information on community development or tourism, contact the WVU Extension Service Office of Community Resources and Economic Development at 304-293-6967.

By Kelly Nix, WVU Extension Specialist – Leadership

How to sell your timber wisely
– continued from page ii –

the contract is being upheld and the desired end results are achieved. Even though professional foresters provide their services for a fee, landowners typically benefit from much higher timber values and overall satisfaction.

For additional information or guidance on the timbering process, contact Ben Spong at 304-293-9425 or Ben.Spong@mail.wvu.edu.

By Ben Spong, WVU Extension Specialist – Forest Operations
Cattle prices are at an all-time high and are expected to remain high for two to three more years. The additional income generated by these prices will likely result in greater taxes. However, if this income is reinvested in your operation, you can save taxes and increase long-term business productivity. Purchasing equipment often reduces taxes; however, making agronomic improvements can be a greater value.

**Improve soil health**

Agronomic investments can help manage taxes, while also improving soil health, forage production, and farm productivity. Since pasture soil is often neglected, use the surplus income to improve soil, thus improving pastureland yields. Begin by collecting soil samples and having them analyzed by a qualified laboratory. Soil testing is available at no cost to West Virginia residents through the WVU Soil Testing Laboratory. Remember, to take soil samples from each boundary in the field or the results will be meaningless. Use the soil test results to purchase lime, fertilizer, and/or seed in 2014 for application this fall or next spring.

**Interpreting soil test**

Interpreting soil test results and deciding which products to purchase in order to meet recommendations can sometimes be difficult. The WVU Extension Service has a number of fact sheets and calculation tools available to assist with the management of soil fertility. Visit [http://anr.ext.wvu.edu/forage/soil-fertility-and-its-management](http://anr.ext.wvu.edu/forage/soil-fertility-and-its-management) to learn more.

**Consider fertilizers**

When deciding which fertilizer to purchase, consider poultry litter as an alternative to conventional fertilizers. Poultry litter is readily available during the fall and winter months and can be stockpiled under tarps for spring application. Also, consider preparing for conventional fertilizers before the end of the year and taking delivery next spring. Lime applications are best applied during fall months to allow the lime to react as it is moves into the soil from winter precipitation. Changes in soil pH as a result of liming impact soil nutrient availability so establish a regular soil sampling routine to maintain economic efficiency. These pasture fertility amendments typically provide benefits for a three- to five-year period.

**Plant legumes**

Frost seeding pastures with legume species, including red, white, and ladino clovers, is another option for long-term soil fertility management. Seed can be purchased in the current year and applied during the month of February to provide nitrogen to grasses and improve the nutritional quality of the pasture plant community.

Tax management strategies can be complex. Consult a qualified tax advisor to determine how potential investments may impact tax obligations.

*By Kevin Shaffer, WVU Extension Specialist – Livestock and Tom Basden, WVU Extension Specialist – Nutrient Management*
The last thing you want is a lender who keeps grilling you for information about your industry and your operation.

You need a lender who won’t grind your business to a halt trying to make heads or tails out of what you do. Call us—we’re the experts.
New Law: Transfer on Death Deed

Emily R. Lambright

A new West Virginia law now enables real property to pass simply and directly to a beneficiary, without going through probate.

The new law, called the West Virginia Transfer on Death Act, is in line with the Uniform Real Property Transfer on Death Act (URPTODA), which has been adopted by more than a dozen states across the country. The new law’s impact touches nearly all West Virginia residents seeking to leave their real property (often their major asset) – such as a house, farm, or oil and gas mineral rights – to their children or other beneficiaries. It is expected to become an important tool in estate planning, nursing home planning, Medicaid planning and Elder Law.

The Transfer on Death Act builds upon existing state statutes, where an individual routinely passes personal property to a named beneficiary outside of probate. Common examples include a beneficiary designation in a life insurance policy or pension plan, registration of securities in a transfer on death (TOD) form, and a payable on death bank account.

The new law also details the operation and effect of the TOD deed and provides a
standardized method for the straightforward non-probate transfer of real property.

During the owner’s lifetime, the owner may name a beneficiary of a TOD deed, although the beneficiary has no immediate interest in the property and the owner retains full power to transfer or encumber the property or to revoke the deed. On the owner’s death, the property passes to the beneficiary, much like the survivorship feature of joint tenancy and the personal property mentioned above.

The TOD deed presents several advantages over joint tenancy. Because the TOD deed does not convey an immediate interest to the beneficiary, the property is not subject to partition or to the beneficiary’s creditors. The deed remains revocable, enabling the owner to make a different disposition of the property. It does not trigger an acceleration clause in a mortgage or a property tax reassessment during the transferor’s life. In addition, it does not create adverse Medicaid consequences for either the owner or the beneficiary.

The TOD deed also may be preferable to an inter vivos trust (living trust) in many circumstances. If the decedent’s only significant asset is the family home, for example, the TOD deed provides a simple, inexpensive, understandable means for the decedent to pass the property directly to heirs without probate.

Summary:

Prior to the law’s adoption, West Virginia law did not contain a straightforward mechanism to pass real property, outside of probate, directly to a beneficiary at death.

Now, with the law enacted, West Virginia residents are afforded an uncomplicated, reliable and affordable means of passing real property – which may be a decedent’s major asset – directly to a beneficiary.

This new transfer on death deed may be very helpful to farmers who want to pass their farms on to the next generation.

Emily R. Lambright is a senior associate in the Charleston office of Bowles Rice LLP. Licensed as a certified public accountant (CPA), she has experience in wills, trusts, estates and business succession planning. For more information, please contact Ms. Lambright at (304) 347-1100.
Sapa Extrusions Inc., Yankton, SD (World’s Leading Aluminum Extruder) has several production positions available for qualified individuals. Those with Manufacturing Experience will be given first opportunity and must be capable of working a 4 days on 4 days off (12) hours a day shift schedule with overtime, must be able to lift up to 50# on a regular basis. Must be reliable and willing to work your way to the top. These positions are full time and include both night and day shift openings.

Sapa offers a very competitive compensation package (starting wage for entry level positions is $12/hour with $1.00 shift differential, paid weekly) performance based merit increases every 3 months/benefits package (where else can you get Medical, Vision and Dental Insurance and pay only $14.41 a week for single coverage and $42.81 a week for family coverage). Sapa also offers quarterly profit sharing (how would you like to get an extra paycheck every four months just because you helped the company make a profit), company paid life insurance, short and long term disability and ten paid holidays, a 401K plan with Company participation and a Company sponsored retirement plan which you become fully vested after three years of service. If you are a hardworking, dedicated person who wants to work only sixteen days a month then come join us.

Interested candidates please apply in person and/or by mail:
Attn: Jane Larson, HR Mgr. 2500 Alumax Rd, Yankton, SD 57078 or email: Jane.Larson@sapagroup.com.
In June I learned that I was a 2014 recipient of a McCloy Fellowship in Agriculture. The McCloy Fellowship program began in the 1970s as a way to foster better understanding and relationships between the United States and Germany. Each year, four Germans have swapped sides of the Atlantic with four Americans for twenty-one 21 days of intense farm visits and policy studies.

We arrived in Berlin on September 28th, where we spent four days for our “orientation” with the Deutscher Bauernerbond (DBV), the German equivalent of the American Farm Bureau Federation. While in Berlin, we were told of differences we would soon see in the farms around the country, stemming from the history of the Cold War and what used to be East and West Germany.

As we traveled throughout East Germany, I picked up on a definite theme on the way Germans see time. Time is neatly divided into two categories – “before the wall came down” and “after the wall came down.” Small family farms did not exist in East Germany before the wall came down because farms were combined into cooperatives by the former German Democratic Republic (GDR) during the Soviet rule. Even today, the farms in that part of the country are quite a bit larger than those in West Germany, with an average size of 538 acres. Farms in West Germany, however, were family farms and as land was handed down to generation to generation they became smaller.
and smaller as each child received a share. The average farm size in the west today is about 100 acres. After the wall came down, many folks from West Germany moved to the east to buy cheap land and establish their own farms.

As a fifth generation farmer whose family owns and farms land in Randolph County that has been passed down since the Civil War, it was very humbling to me to hear the stories of people picking a farm up from the ruins and trying to start something new. I will forever remember a comment made in a meeting we had with two staff of a local farm association in East Germany. The younger of the two men grew up under the GDR and clearly remembers the new opportunities available to him as a twenty year old when the wall came down. He said that democracy today was such a confusing mess because everyone just does what he or she wants to. The older man looked at him and said, “Yes, but you are free.” The very recent struggles of the German people make me realize why Americans are sometimes viewed as selfish and proud. How often do I truly appreciate the fact that I am free? I may not agree with some of the laws our government passes and I may vehemently oppose the direction our country is led in at times, but I am free. And I have never known any other way. In response to our astonishment over a comment about the differences between German and American agriculture, one farmer said to us “This is the middle of Europe. Not America.” I could not tell if he was jealous of the opportunity we have in the United States or if he was berating us for being so self-centered. Nonetheless, I thanked God once more for the place I am blessed to call home.

Germany’s farm policy is dictated by the European Union and is known as CAP, or Common Agriculture Policy. The CAP first began in 1957 in response to a shortage of food after the end of the war. From the 1960s to the 1990s, the CAP directly intervened with the markets – guaranteeing farmers high prices with the goal of producing more food to stimulate growth. This has since changed to a compensation type of program based on the number of acres of land in production (or number of animal units).

We were amazed at how much of a farmer’s income is derived from government payments. The average income for a farmer is 28,000 Euros per year. Of that, 21,000 Euros come from the European Union in the form of CAP payments. My family takes pride in our role as farmers. As farmers, we are our own boss. We work for ourselves and to feed the world. I am not so sure that same pride would exist if the majority of our income was coming from the government.

Farmers in Germany operate under some pretty heavy regulations and laws; for example, the ban of GMO seeds. The ban largely stems from consumer outcry. Germans are very risk adverse and only pay about 11% of their income for food and alcohol. The need for producing more food on less land more efficiently is lost to the consumer. They only see GMO seed and biotechnology as ways to make the farmer richer. In our conversations, it seems that many farmers would like to use GMO seed, but they are not allowed because so much of their farm policy is driven by the consumer.

Because of the skewed consumer-driven system, some of the laws are downright outrageous. For example, if a farmer drives his (or her!) tractor down the road and leaves muddy tracks on the pavement, he
must go back and clean it up. Corn is being planted in smaller and smaller quantities because the people of Germany do not like the way it looks and feel that it mars the landscape. In all of Germany, only 20% of cropland is planted in corn. And then there’s the open land law – where anyone can walk across your land at will, regardless of whether it’s your best field of alfalfa or a woody lot. If a member of the public wants to take a hike across your land, they can.

One of my biggest challenges while in Germany was knowing what to eat. The Germans like their pork, but not pork chops or roast like I am used to – they like sausages. Lots of sausages. And sometimes they eat pork that isn’t exactly cooked. We were invited to lunch with a very nice farmer who runs his own meat processing facility where he treated us to a nice spread of cooked sausages similar to American hotdogs, smoked liverwurst, smoked sausage, and mettwurst. Mettwurst, as we found out, is completely raw - as in uncooked and unsmoked. We were assured that only extremely healthy, sanitary hogs are butchered for mettwurst and that very stringent sanitary conditions must be met to produce this meat, but all of us left feeling pretty unsettled.

As a beef farmer, I am used to eating a lot of hamburger and steak, but those items were not on many restaurant menus. On the two occasions I did order some beef, I wasn’t overly impressed. I found out why during a particularly mind-boggling visit to a beef cattle farm. We stepped out of our van and into a large barn of feeder cattle, which I assumed would be steers. However, upon inspection I realized that every animal in the building was a bull. There were dozens and dozens of bulls in two or three large pens. Then the farmer proceeded to tell us that these bulls would be slaughtered in just a few months.

Because of animal welfare issues, the Germans do not castrate animals. In fact, by the year 2018, no swine will be castrated at all. When questioned about why they would want to eat bull meat, we were emphatically told that steer meat is too fatty. There is no market for steer meat in Germany. Instead, bulls are raised to 17-24 months and slaughtered around 2500 pounds. Naturally, that would explain why the roast I had at dinner was pretty flavorless and a bit tough and hard to chew.

I saw my favorite part of Germany on one of our last days in the country. We visited the mountainous southern region known as the Black Forest. After traveling a steep, winding one-lane road through the woods, we arrived on a beautiful mountaintop timber farm. The area reminded me of the Spruce Knob and Sinks of Gandy area. When I emailed home that I had found West Virginia in Germany, my mom replied that the Black Forest was the region of Germany that my original Wilfong ancestors had come from many hundreds of years ago. No wonder I loved the area so much!

After twenty four days, thirteen hotels, thirteen trains, six planes, and four countries, I finally arrived back in my mountains of West Virginia on October 21st. I came home with an increased awareness of the connectedness of agriculture across the globe and even more appreciation for this wonderful country we live in. Despite the many challenges American agriculture is currently faced with, from the Environmental Protection Agency and water rights to labeling laws and animal welfare issues, we are truly fortunate to call this land home. We take so much for granted and could learn a great deal from the experiences of other farmers around the world. Even with all our differences, farmers in the United States and farmers in Germany share a common core – we are all dedicated to the field of agriculture and are blessed to call farming not a job, but a way of life.

Page 19: The author stands on 14,000 tons of corn silage; page 20, top: a traditional lunch of German wurst; below: cattle in the Black Forest. Above: the author and another McCloy Fellow sport some home pride at a German soccer game.
When a young John Perdue enrolled in college in the late 1960s, there were no savings plans designed specifically for higher education. Perdue, who is now West Virginia’s longest-serving State Treasurer, extracted much of his tuition directly from the rich earth, which could always be counted on to bless his family.

“My dad would wake me up at five in the morning starting when I was maybe 12, 13 years old,” Perdue recalled. “We’d start working in the gardens. I can appreciate it now. It made me tougher, mentally and physically.”

When elected State Treasurer in 1996, Perdue reflected on his formative years and how he and his family struggled to finance his college education. Perhaps if folks could put aside...
money a little at a time – with tax advantages and the potential for growth – then the late crunch wouldn’t be so severe.

Eventually, the SMART529 program was born. It is West Virginia’s officially sanctioned college savings plan, with assets totaling over $2 billion. Of 120,000 accounts nationwide, about 23,000 are owned by West Virginians at a value of $397 million.

Perdue’s efforts in the college savings industry have made the program a nationally recognized investment plan. He says it’s one of his greatest accomplishments during his more than 17 year tenure as Treasurer. He concedes his modest background helped shaped his determination for the program’s creation.

Perdue’s beginnings were not unusual circumstances for a kid growing up in southern West Virginia. To supplement income from the family general store, the Perdue family grew all manner of fruits and vegetables and sold them at roadside stands.

Saturdays proved especially lucrative. John could help an older brother on the truck, just the two of them, learning the ways of commerce while bonding on country roads.

“We’d drive down into Mitchell Heights, Logan,” Perdue said. “Located where we were, we could head that way or go into Madison and Danville. Those were booming towns back in those days. You’ve got to remember, this was the 1960s and we’d shoot for $100 a day and usually hit it. We’d split it between us.”

The Treasurer’s strawberries were always a huge hit. He won a Future Farmers of America contest, which meant longtime Agriculture Commissioner Gus Douglass would auction the berries. He did, for the familiar sum of $100. A photo of a thin, crew-cut Perdue standing on the auction stage next to Douglass is still proudly displayed in the Treasurer’s office at the State Capitol.

“It reminds me of simpler, less complicated times and when I sort of came into my own,” Perdue said. “I was discovering certain talents and some sense of leadership abilities. And there has always been something special about growing produce and working the land. I feel close to God and my roots.”

When Douglass auctioned off Perdue’s strawberries, the youngster made a vow that he would work for the commissioner one day. He would go on to spend 16 years in that office, until incoming Governor Gaston Caperton recognized Perdue’s skills as a behind-the-scenes assistant who knew how to get things done.

After his years with Gov. Caperton, Perdue defeated businessman Stan Klos of Wheeling in the fall of 1996 and took office as Treasurer in January 1997. Since his first election, he has been a champion for higher education and financial education programs.

“Nothing opens the doors of opportunity like education,” Perdue is frequently heard saying.

In today’s world, even if a student qualifies for generous financial aid, shortfalls often occur. A college savings nest egg makes handling those shortfalls much easier and reduces or eliminates debt.

“It reminds me of how we used to yield a crop,” Treasurer Perdue said. “You’d till the ground, ready the soil and plant the seeds. But that wasn’t the end of it. It was an ongoing process, right up until harvest.

“That’s the way it is with saving for college. It isn’t always easy. It takes a while. But it sure is nice when the reward is waiting for you.”

For more information on the SMART529 College Savings Program or to enroll, go to www.SMART529.COM or call 1-877-767-8529.
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I’m a farmer and a mother. Leaving my farm and family isn’t exactly something I treasure. It is, however, an investment I make to share the story of my American farm family.

I am not alone in this mission. As one of the Faces of Farming and Ranching for the U.S. Farmers and Ranchers Alliance, I introduce people to what farmers do and why. This is not as simple as you might think. Truth is: it’s rare to find people who have a solid understanding of what farming looks like today. With most Americans at least three or four generations removed from the farm, few have connections with the people who bring food to their tables.

Thanks to USFRA’s Faces of Farming, I now connect with people far outside of agriculture and on a broader scale than I once did through my blog and social media platforms.

I recently met with reporters along the Northeast corridor to discuss issues that are important in both rural and urban America. The use of antibiotics on farms and ranches was a recurring theme. But as I told them, antibiotics are just one of the many tools we have to responsibly care for our animals. Veterinarians and animal nutritionists play a key role in determining our animal care plan. Every decision we make regarding animal health is made under their guidance. Farmers and ranchers are always looking for ways to improve the care we give our animals.

Bloggers talk to each other a lot, but meeting face-to-face often brings the most benefits. I’ve gotten to know many urban bloggers and have discovered we have more in common than we would have expected. We all struggle to find interesting topics to write about, and we all have hectic schedules that prevent us from blogging as often as we’d like. Most importantly, we all want to feed our families healthy and nutritious food.

Many urban bloggers tell me I’m the first farmer they’ve met. I enjoy telling them about family life and business challenges on the farm, but I’ve learned just as much about the rest of America from them. Conversations like these help shape my story for people who have never visited a farm, so I can better explain what daily farm life looks like, including methods we use to grow food.

I remember joining a food discussion panel with Bo Stone – another one of the Faces of Farming—along with a chef for an international hotel chain and an independent hotel and restaurant owner. Bo and I shared our stories about the crops we grow and animals we raise on our farms. We explained why we do certain things to produce food and how our farms have changed over the last 50 years. This was also a great learning opportunity for us as farmers to hear about what goes into the decision-making process when chefs and restaurant owners buy food for their menus.

Through USFRA and other programs, farmers are sharing their stories like never before. Our platform for engagement has been elevated. I am finding that our fellow citizens, our friends and neighbors are receptive to learn how much we care for the land, animals and environment. They need to know that all these things we care for are in good hands. Agriculture must stand united in telling its story, but the story must be told in the genuine voices of individual farmers. USFRA’s Faces of Farming gives us that chance. I look forward to hearing more stories from those who follow in lending their unique voices and the credibility that only comes from a life on the land.
Every farmer in this great state knows the importance of water. Whether the farmer raises livestock or crops, he needs clean water for anything to grow.

But what farmers don’t need are more regulations from an overzealous Environmental Protection Agency that require farm ponds, ditches and gullies to adhere to the same strict water standards as navigable rivers, wetlands and major lakes.

In October, I helped to write a comment letter along with 10 other state attorneys general and six governors challenging proposed regulations that would redefine what the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and Environmental Protection Agency consider to be “Waters of the United States.”

In the letter, state leaders express their “serious concerns” over a proposal by the two federal agencies to broaden the definition of what should be considered a water of the United States to include any waters within a floodplain, including ditches, farm ponds and often-dry stream beds.

The letter says the proposed rule unlawfully and unconstitutionally asserts federal jurisdiction over local water and land use management, while making it impossible for farmers, developers and homeowners to know whether they can continue certain activities without obtaining an expensive permit.

This is a critical issue for farmers in West Virginia and every other state. We cannot allow the EPA to overstep its authority and effectively expand its jurisdiction to the “lands of the United States.”

Farmers and landowners should not have to worry that the federal government will show up at their door, claiming that they failed to go through a costly federal permit process before using property that has little to no water, let alone a navigable waterway. Quite simply, the proposed definition makes no sense and is overbroad.

We have called on the EPA and Army Corps of Engineers to reverse course on the proposed definition and replace it with a narrow, common-sense alternative that provides farmers with a clearer understanding of when they must seek permits under the Clean Water Act. It is time for the EPA to “Ditch the Rule.”

In addition to ditching this rule, I am also urging the EPA and Army Corps of Engineers to visit states to better understand the implications of their proposed rules. Sadly, whether the issue involves “waters of the United States” or the proposed EPA carbon dioxide rule, it’s long past time for the EPA to pay more respect to the residents of the Mountain State.
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