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Spring

FARM & COUNTRY LIFE

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Special Section • 12 pages





SO MANY SHEEP - The Smith family farm has 87 adult sheep and 100 lambs, including seven sets of triplets. Herald photo by Kyle Evans.

Don't fall asleep counting all of these sheep

Farm welcomes seven sets of triplet lambs

By **KYLE EVANS**
Interim Editor

Not one, not two, but seven sets of triplet lambs were born this spring at an area farm.

Harold and Nona Smith, from a rural area in Monroe County between Sparta, Tomah and Norwalk, bought a farm and homestead in August 1959. They started breeding sheep in 1980. Grandson Caleb Smith took over the sheep since 2019 and his father David helped before that.

The family has 87 adult sheep and 100 lambs and are all done lambing for the season. Fifty-two ewes lambed this year. A ewe usually has two lambs but the Smith family has been lucky enough to have seven sets of triplets so far this year, which is rare. Additionally, the Smith family produces 35 sets of twins, and 10 single lambs. The single lambs mostly come from first time mothers.

"In 2019 we had two sets of triplets, in 2020 we had zero sets of triplets, in 2021 we had one set of triplets, and this year we had seven sets of triplets," Caleb said. There isn't always enough milk on one ewe to go around with triplets, so the lambs must often be bottle-fed. The ewes stay outside until they lamb, then once they lamb they go to what's called a "jug" which is a 4-by-6-foot pen. They



This is the 'jug': a 4 X 6 pen where after an ewe lambs they come into one of these pens for the lamb and ewe to get used to each other. Herald photo by Kyle Evans.

'SHEEP' cont. on pg. 7

U.S. supply of fertilizer can't keep up with demand

By **KYLE EVANS**
Interim Editor

American fertilizer suppliers have an advantage over foreign suppliers due to tariffs on imported fertilizer, a local agronomist said.

Kevin Hoyer, an agronomist and fertilizer plant manager at Country Farm Supply and Melrose Farm Service, has been in the fertilizer business for more than 32 years. He runs the agronomy operations at both facilities. He



Hoyer

also spent 16 years on the American Soybean Association, on a state and national level working with foreign countries to use U.S.-made products to better their well-being. He was also involved in working with foreign and domestic ag and rural policy.

There are three types of fertilizers: animal-produced manure, human waste and synthetic fertilizer, Hoyer said.

"There is not enough animal agriculture in the U.S. to supply all nutrients plants need, and also the U.S. does not produce enough synthetic fertilizer currently to supply the plants as well," he said.

When asked "What's happening in the ag industry?" Hoyer said, "This country is under a period of hyper-inflation. The Biden administration has made significant policy moves that put major tariffs on the imported fertilizer; however the U.S. cannot make enough for themselves." These policy changes gave American fertilizer suppliers an advantage over foreign suppliers. The American fertilizer suppliers felt other countries had an unfair advantage to selling

fertilizer, Hoyer said.

As the population continues to grow, so does demand, which creates shortages. Also, third world countries that are looking to better themselves also drive demand, Hoyer said.

"We are going on 12 months of the cost

'FERTILIZER' cont. on pg. 8

Lawmakers urge action from trade commission

Recently, More than 80 federal lawmakers called on the U.S. International Trade Commission to help reduce costs for farmers by cutting some tariffs on fertilizer components.

In a letter from members of US Congress and Senate sent in March, more than 80 lawmakers urged the U.S. International Trade Commission to reconsider the duties placed on phosphate fertilizer products imported from Morocco and suspend the current process to impose new duties on urea ammonium nitrate fertilizer from Trinidad and Tobago.

According to the letter, Imports currently supply about one-third of all domestic phosphate fertilizer, and Morocco has been a long-time supplier to U.S. farmers. Currently, only about 35% of the world's traded supply of phosphate fertilizer is not subject to duties for import into the U.S. This has

'TRADE' cont. on pg. 8

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Wet spring conditions result in limited days for fieldwork

By NICOLETTE NAUMAN
Sentry-Enterprise Editor

Cold and wet weather as characterized April thus far, with less than two days suitable for fieldwork recorded in the first ten days of the month, according to the U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) National Agricultural Statistics Service. Last year at this time, farmers had seen 3.4 days suitable for fieldwork in early April.

Over the first ten days of April, reports of snow totaling in amounts as much as a foot were reported throughout the northern areas of the state, and periodic flurries and rain showers impacted field conditions across Wisconsin.

'SPRING' cont. on pg. 6



SPRINGTIME CONDITIONS - The unpredictable nature of spring has made fieldwork unsuitable. Last year, farmers had 3.4 days suitable for fieldwork, compared to this year's count of less than two. Herald photo by Logan Everson.

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SIGN OF SPRING - Green life springs up through the scraps of last fall's harvest. Herald photo by Logan Everson.

Natural service vs artificial insemination

Natural service (NS) and artificial insemination (AI) are the two most popular breeding programs used by cattle breeders and producers worldwide. Here's an overview of these methods.

Natural service is used by most cattle breeders and producers. It's the natural breeding method where the cow and bull are allowed to mate without technological intervention. In other words, the bull and cow mate as they naturally show heat.

Although the bulls must be fed and taken care of all year, this method is relatively hands-off and doesn't require special equipment.

Artificial insemination is reproduction achieved by human intervention. It involves collecting sperm cells from a bull and manually depositing them directly into a cow's reproductive tract.

This breeding method is labor-intensive and requires farmers to invest in expensive facilities, equipment and estrous synchronization drugs. However, it often results in improved reproductive performance and herd genetics. In addition, AI reduces the risk of disease transmission.

Some farmers use a combination of both methods to improve the health of their herds.

'SPRING'

continued from page 4

While some temperature increases have enabled a few areas of southern Wisconsin to begin to green up, the lingering cold temperatures throughout most of Wisconsin have limited the development of overwintered crops.

By April 10, topsoil moisture was rated at 2% very short, 7% short, 62% adequate,

and 29% surplus. Subsoil moisture condition was rated at 2% very short, 18% short, 64% adequate, and 16% surplus for the same time frame.

The condition of winter wheat has continued to fall, dropping from 77% good to excellent reported at the end of November to 58% as of April 10. By the same date, roughly 1% of the anticipated oat crop has been planted in Wisconsin.

Statewide, roughly 1% of spring tilling has been completed, and pasture conditions

are rated at 37% good to excellent—a drop of 1% from the previous week.

Weather forecasts for the second half of April here in the Hillsboro area indicate a few showers on Wednesday and Friday, with a thunderstorm forecast for Saturday. Temperatures are expected to climb between Wednesday and Saturday, with temperatures in the low 70s expected by the weekend. However, temperatures are expected to drop back into the forties throughout the final week of April.



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From left Caleb, Caleb's daughter Eliza, Caleb's wife Rebecca, Caleb's daughter Bethany, Nona, Harold, Debbie, and David Smith stand in front of a temporary shelter for some sheep. Herald photo by Kyle Evans.



'SHEEP'

continued from page 2

stay in the jug for two to three days with their lamb(s), allowing them to get used to each other.

Their farm is set on 230 acres, that includes many steep hills and valleys. When asked why they started with sheep, Harold said, "I thought these hills ought to be good for something." On the farm, Caleb makes hay to feed the sheep, takes care of fences, breeds the sheep, cares for the lambs, and also has a few cattle. They send the sheep out and rotationally graze the pastures.

The family had a flock of more than 400 sheep at one point.

"We mostly want hair sheep," Caleb said. Hair sheep are different than normal sheep because they don't have to be maintained. With wool sheep you have to shear them and the wool market isn't very

lucrative unless you have a specialized market. "Most of our sheep now are Katahdin breed. We used to have Fin, Rambouillet, Targhee and Dorset cross breeds. The Fin was always a good breed for multiple lambs."

Caleb said they breed the sheep to sell the lambs. The prime time for selling lambs is around Christmas and Easter. Caleb lets the ram in the pen starting in mid-October for about one month to breed the ewes. So the lambing season is only about a month long, they started lambing on March 16 this year and the last ewe lambed April 4. Those lambs will be ready for the Christmas sale. "We would like to breed twice a year so that we could have lambs for the Christmas and Easter sales," Caleb said. The Smith Family uses a sale barn in Fennimore to sell their lambs.

"The sheep are very easy animals to work with, I like cows, but you can go up and grab a cow if you have to," Caleb said.

Caleb's daughter Bethany feeds one bottle lamb on the farm who she named "Silver."

Sheep laying out in the pasture.
Herald photo by Kyle Evans.

'FERTILIZER'

continued from page 3

of production skyrocketing. The prices are three to four times what it was last year, and last year was high," Hoyer said. Russia and Ukraine supply a lot of fertilizer throughout the world, that war puts a strain on the ag market.

Synthetic fertilizers are mostly made up of nitrogen, pot ash and phosphorus. The U.S. can produce 70% of the nitrogen the U.S needs.

"The air we breathe is 78% nitrogen, we need to get that usable to get it in the ground for the plants to grow," Hoyer said. The pot ash is primarily imported from Canada, Russia and the middle east. Pot ash is mined out of underground shafts.

Those three ingredients are the main

ingredients for commercial fertilizer that can be made into a granule form that is more consistent than animal manure or human waste. There is also a host of secondary ingredients equally important to making plants grow but used on a much smaller scale.

Hoyer he is not aware of fertilizer shortages. "The overall supply for local farmers should be adequate barring any transportation issues."

However, Hoyer said there is an extreme shortage of herbicides and weed control products. We depend on other countries for almost all herbicides. "When we depend on other countries for our existence and safety, we put ourselves at risk," Hoyer said.

Hoyer, who farms 700 acres near West Salem said, "It's going to be an expensive couple of years on the farm, to start working our way out of high-priced inputs."

'TRADE'

continued from page 3

unnecessarily restricted supply and added costs. Historically, phosphate fertilizer accounts for 15% of total cash costs for producers. Since the U.S. Department of Commerce's decision to impose duties on phosphate fertilizer imports from Morocco, phosphate fertilizer prices have increased 93%.

Since the U.S. Department of Commerce initiated the process of imposing duties on UAN imports from Trinidad and Tobago, import volume of UAN fertilizers have decreased 97%. Because there is a degree of substitution among nitrogen fertilizer, the impact of the tariffs on

UAN is felt across all nitrogen products. Recent predictive modeling studies based on various factors like market fundamentals and inflation indicate that ammonia prices should be around \$1,000 per ton. The actual price, however, has exceeded \$1,500 per ton. At the end of February, all fertilizer prices were near record high levels.

Eliminating these duties on fertilizer imports provides the most immediate opportunity for a near term, partial remedy to the high costs of fertilizer facing U.S. farmers before the end of the 2022 planting season. Currently, in a time of tight global supply and demand for corn, soybeans, wheat, and other commodities, planting decisions are increasingly being made not on market fundamentals but rather on the cost of production driven by the price and supply of fertilizer.

3 tips for improving pastureland

Properly managed pastureland produces high-quality forage and lengthens the grazing season, ultimately reducing feed costs. Here are three tips for improving the quality of your pastureland.

1. Rotate

To prevent overgrazing, create a rotational grazing scheme. For example, subdivide large pastures into smaller ones and rotate your animals through these fields. Ideally, you should let the grass reach six to eight inches high before putting your animals out to graze. Remove them from the field when the grass gets down to three or four inches.

2. Mow and harrow

It's a good idea to mow your pasture after your animals have grazed. Mowing helps even out the grass height and encourages the plants to produce more leaves and fewer stems, resulting in a more palatable and hardy grass. It also helps control aggressive weeds like thistle.

You may want to consider harrowing your pasture after your animals have finished grazing. This helps break up manure piles and evenly distribute nutrients throughout the soil. Dispersing manure piles also helps control parasites and insects.

3. Fertilize

Like all plants, grass requires nutrients to grow. Therefore, it's essential to take regular soil samples and follow fertilizer recommendations.

Think of pasture management as grass farming: the grass is the crop, and the animals harvest it.

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Ways to reduce water consumption on the farm

Water conservation has always been a concern for farmers in drought-prone regions. However, the worsening impacts of climate change have exacerbated the problem worldwide. Here are three ways to reduce water consumption on your farm.

1. Soil management

Incorporating proper soil management techniques can drastically conserve water on your farm. For example, practicing zero tilling, using mulch and planting cover crops can all help the soil retain more moisture.

2. Water recycling

Many parts of North America see a lot of rain in the springtime, which can cause significant water drainage from fields. A drainage water

recycling system will capture this excess water in a pond or reservoir. The system will store it temporarily until it's needed to water crops later in the growing season.

3. Drip irrigation

If you already irrigate your crops, you may want to consider investing in drip irrigation. These systems reduce runoff and evaporation, saving up to 80 per cent more water than traditional spray systems. This type of watering allows moisture to penetrate deeply into the soil, leading to better growth.

Ultimately, incorporating water conservation into your agricultural practices is one of the most critical tools available to ensure a safe and reliable food supply.

How grain silos work

Grain silos are large, cylindrical tanks used to store livestock feed and grain high in moisture content like corn and barley.

There are two main types of silos: bunker and tower. On both models, grain can be added to the silo using a grain elevator or auger through a hole in the top. The fan must be turned on as soon as there's three feet of grain in the silo. This will ensure the grain doesn't overheat.

The temperature and humidity of the grain must be checked as soon as it's placed in the silo. It should also be frequently recorded throughout the storage period using a moisture meter or temperature probe. Once the silo

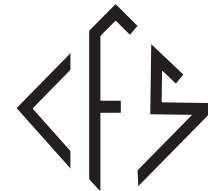
is full, the surface of the grain should be leveled with a spreader or shovel. This helps improve ventilation and stabilizes the temperature and humidity of the grain more quickly.

There's little to no oxygen inside silos. This allows the grain and plant materials to ferment, a process that's called ensiling. It preserves the value of the grain until it comes into contact with oxygen.

On tower silos, grain can be unloaded directly from the bottom. However, with bunker silos, you must use a loader. If you have enough space, you can open one side of the silo so livestock can help themselves to feed.



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New virtual course aimed at agricultural service providers

By **NICOLETTE NAUMAN**
Sentry-Enterprise Editor

Early into April, the Wisconsin Department of Agriculture, Trade, and Consumer Protection (DATCP) announced the launch of a free virtual course designed to help agricultural service providers better serve their farm clients.

The virtual course offers five modules, each with a focus on different topic ranging from a look at the unique challenges of farming to recognizing stress in farmers to addressing financial unpredictability. Each module contains a 15 to 20-minute video and is followed by a series of interactive questions that help those taking the course test their knowledge and skills.


This training is highly encouraged for those who regularly provide services to farmers, such as ag lenders, milk haulers, nutritionists, veterinarians, and farm equipment technicians. The course is free to take, and can be completed at one's own pace. There is no particular order to the

modules, and they can be completed in any order.

This course is offered as part of the Farm Center's Farmer Wellness Program, a program developed to help address access to mental health resources for farmers throughout Wisconsin. The program is funded through the 2021-2023 biennial budget.

Over the past two years, the Farm Center has directed effort towards connecting farmers with mental health resources, a subject of concern voiced by a number of farming families throughout the state. Additional efforts include the 24/7 Farmer Wellness Helpline—(888) 901-2558—counseling vouchers, online support groups, and tele-counseling services.

If you are interested in taking this course to broaden your ability to serve farm-based clients, the course can be found by visiting the Continuing Education Program's website through the University of Wisconsin – Madison.



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