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Wednesday, Nov. 15, 2023



Energy prices projected to rise

By DANIEL GRANT
FarmWeek

Farmers looking to trim historically high production costs could face more challenges again next season.

The price of oil and natural gas, both instrumental components of farm inputs, is expected to rise into next year compared to current levels.

The Energy Information Administration's (EIA) short-term energy outlook predicts prices could average \$86.48 per barrel for Brent crude oil and \$3.22 per million BTU for natural gas in 2024. That's up nearly \$4 per barrel for oil and 64 cents for natural gas compared to the average estimates for 2023.

"Crude oil prices have increased since June, primarily due to extended voluntary cuts to Saudi Arabia's crude oil production and increasing global demand," EIA noted in its latest report. "We expect these factors will continue to reduce global oil inventories and put upward pressure on oil prices in the coming months."

EIA projects the U.S.

will boost crude oil production from an average of 12.76 million barrels per day this year to 13.09 barrels daily in 2024.

But the planned uptick in production may only help to moderate price increases.

"Energy prices will keep rising," said Dan Basse, president of AgResource Co. "World crude prices could reach \$90 to \$95 by the first quarter of 2024 (and possibly reach triple digits by next summer). Look at taking forward coverage (if you're a bulk buyer)."

Farmers should also consider hedging some of their fertilizer needs for the coming season. Anhydrous ammonia prices declined to a range of \$560 to \$760 per ton across the state as of Sept. 7, according to the Illinois Production Cost Report. That's down significantly from historic highs last year.

However, the statewide average price of \$636 per ton for anhydrous on Sept. 7 represented an increase of \$47.78 from the previous two weeks.

"I have a hard time

seeing fertilizer prices come down much more," Gary Schnitkey, soybean industry chair in ag strategy at the University of Illinois, told FarmWeek. "If we have a cold winter, it could cause natural gas prices to go higher."

Overall, Basse looks for inflation to remain a major issue in the U.S. for some time to come, which could trigger the Federal Reserve to continue increasing interest rates down the road.

The Federal Reserve raised its policy rates by 5.25 percentage points since March 2022, after another quarter point hike in July, in an effort to tame inflation, which hit 7% last year.

"The Fed may have one or two rate hikes to go, but it may not happen until 2024," Basse said. "By raising rates, the Fed is compressing demand."

Inflation slowed to 3.3% in July. But Basse questions whether the Fed can get inflation back to its target of 2%.

"I believe the central bank will struggle to get inflation back to 2%. That target is unrealistic in this market as too many things are short," he said. "I think we'll have to live with inflation between 2.75 and 3.5%."

The situation could cause the dollar index to weaken over time. If that happens, the commodity markets could find some strength amid new sales opportunities in the world market, Basse added.

(This story was distributed through a cooperative project between Illinois Farm Bureau and the Illinois Press Association. For more food and farming news, visit FarmWeekNow.com.)

El Nino adds wrinkle to winter outlook in Illinois

By DANIEL GRANT
FarmWeek

With temperatures in Illinois at or above average for November, at least for the time being, many people probably wonder what lies ahead for winter.

And, as always, there's no shortage of opinions on the subject.

Sources such as the Farmers' Almanac predict a "cold, stormy" winter season ahead. But the arrival of a strong El Nino, such as the one in place, typically tilts the pattern in Illinois toward a warm and mild winter, according to Chris Yates, chief meteorologist with WMBD and WYZZ in Peoria.

Yates discussed the weather outlook for the rest of fall and winter during a recent interview with FarmWeek.

"We're heading into a strong El Nino winter," he said. "An El Nino winter historically has been on the warmer and drier side and we tend to not have a lot of snow in the Midwest."

"There have been exceptions, specifically during weak El Nino events," he said. "But the stronger the El Nino, the warmer, drier and less snowy winters tend to be around here."

That doesn't mean Illinois will avoid run-ins with the Polar Vortex or big snow events this winter. But a typical El Nino winter also contradicts the Farmers' Almanac outlook.

"Even if the forecast says it will be a warmer and less snowy winter, it doesn't mean it won't get cold," Yates said. "It will mostly certainly still get cold and it's still going to snow. There's no stopping that."

"But, at the end of the day, we'll probably be warmer than average and less snowy than average if history repeats itself."

The typical El Nino pattern also contradicts recent observations from those who track the woolly black caterpillar. Folklore suggests the longer the black bands are on the woolly worm, the longer and more severe it will be for the upcoming winter.

"I've heard various things about the woolly worms this year," Yates told the RFD Radio Network. "From what I've heard, there's been a lot of black ones, which supposedly means a bad winter."

So, what's the history or track record

"Even if the forecast says it will be a warmer and less snowy winter, it doesn't mean it won't get cold," Yates said. "It will mostly certainly still get cold and it's still going to snow. There's no stopping that."

—Chris Yates, meteorologist

of seasonal forecasts produced by the Farmers' Almanac?

Yates analyzed the Farmers' Almanac winter outlooks the past 10 years by comparing the actual precipitation, snowfall and temperature statistics from December through February each year. He reported the findings on his weather blog.

And, while it was spot on in consecutive years last decade, the Almanac's long-range predictions are about as accurate as a coin flip.

"They had some good years and hit the nail on the head in 2013-14 and 2014-15," Yates said of the Almanac winter outlooks. "But the forecasts weren't as good beyond that."

Yates gave six of the past 10 Farmers' Almanac winter outlooks below-average to failing grades and scored four as average or better for accuracy.

Near-term, much of Illinois could be about done with summer-like temperatures, which would be good for fall anhydrous applications. But Yates can't rule out a return of unseasonable warmth.

Looking ahead, one of Yates' top concerns remains a lack of moisture. Topsoil moisture in Illinois ranked 57% short to very short, 42% adequate and just 1% surplus as of early October.

"The dry weather has been good for harvest. We're not dealing with a lot of delays due to rain," he said. "But I imagine there are some concerns as we're dealing with severe drought in some parts of the state."

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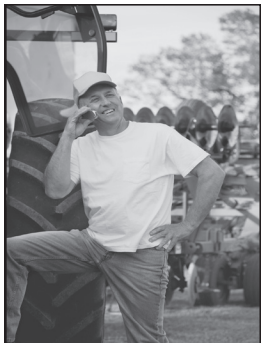
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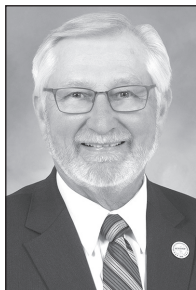
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Lawmakers must find a bipartisan way forward

By RICHARD GUEBERT JR.
Illinois Farm Bureau President

For many years, I have heard that agriculture policy is one of the few areas in Springfield and in Washington, D.C., that is truly bipartisan. Members of both political parties recognize the need for good farm and food policy. It is my hope this continues, but I am increasingly disappointed by the lack of civility and level of disrespect occurring in today's politics.



Guebert

I'm concerned that party leadership, on both sides of the aisle, is forcing lawmakers to vote exclusively along party lines. Large donors and special interest groups also seek to punish any representatives who stray from the party positions and vote for a bipartisan compromise—even if it's in the best interests of their constituents.

I don't believe this benefits farmers or our country.

Lawmakers must find a bipartisan way forward. Stop the political infighting and work together to better serve all Americans.

Bipartisanship has served Illinois farmers well. As a grassroots, membership driven organization, Illinois Farm Bureau (IFB) has forged strong relationships with our local government officials and state legislators, who in turn help us achieve our farm policy priorities.

IFB's Adopt-A-Legislator program has fostered mutual respect and understanding between farmers and Chicago-area lawmakers. More than 50 Illinois county governing bodies approved pro-agriculture resolutions, solidifying their support for the state's economy's largest industry. These are just a few of the bipartisan efforts our members take to share agriculture's story and how our local, state and federal lawmakers can support our farmers.

I believe elected officials, agency representatives and regulators appreciate the integrity with which IFB operates. We might not always agree on issues, but we

are going to be forthright in explaining our position. We listen and show respect to others, even those with opposing points of view.

Our elected officials have an obligation to work together to find responsible solutions for policy issues. With the expiration of the 2018 farm bill at the end of September, we need our lawmakers more than ever to find ways to work together. In my conversations with fellow farmers, the question I hear the most is "What happens next?"

The farm bill guides U.S. agriculture and food policy over a period of five years and is traditionally rooted in bipartisanship. Congress has passed 18 iterations of the farm bill since its inception in 1933, and the farm bill expired Sept. 30.

Farm organizations have worked collectively for months on a new farm bill, and IFB continues meeting with Illinois House and Senate ag committee members to pass a farm bill that meets the needs of all sectors of agriculture.

Failure to take any farm bill action before year's end would cause serious disruptions: cutting off enrollment in important safety net and conservation programs; pausing research; and reverting back to 1930s farm policy.

IFB understands the realities of the legislative calendar and recognizes that an extension might be needed to avoid serious disruptions, but we also urge Congress to move forward with a new farm bill. The farm bill has a long tradition of bipartisan support and now, more than ever, it's important for lawmakers to work together to ensure America's farmers can continue to provide the safest, most affordable food supply in the world.

I'm confident that our legislators from Illinois understand the importance of the farm bill and are committed to getting the legislation across the president's desk.

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McDonald's sees value from pork industry partnerships

By DANIEL GRANT
FarmWeek

McDonald's, the world's largest restaurant chain, is not only a large end user of pork but also a net exporter of "The Other White Meat."

The Illinois-based company therefore has found great value in partnering with the pork industry to ensure it sources high-quality products in a sustainable system.

Jeff Edwards, manager, U.S. quality systems for McDonald's USA, discussed its work with farmers and the value of pork at the Illinois Pork Producers Association's annual meeting in Springfield. The event kicked off the Illinois Pork Expo.

"We're committed to delivering safe, high-quality products," Edwards said. "How do we do that? We get involved in every step (from the farm to the restaurant).

"We strive to partner with (farmers) as much as possible," he noted. "We understand ag is a good ally."

McDonald's sourced more than 200 million pounds of pork in the U.S. annually as of 2021, with roughly 10% of that coming from Illinois (the nation's fourth-largest pork producer).

Globally, McDonald's consumes about 440 million pounds of pork and serves a wide variety of pork products in an estimated 75 countries. It sources more than 70% of all pork used in the restaurant chain from the U.S.

"We've seen growth in the pork category internationally the last five years, especially with strip bacon. It's become very popular in Europe," Edwards said.

"We're committed to delivering safe, high-quality products," Edwards said. "How do we do that? We get involved in every step (from the farm to the restaurant)."

—Jeff Edwards, McDonald's

But, while pork products continue to sell like hotcakes, McDonald's responded to consumers and pressure from non-government organizations to phase out the use of gestation stalls from farms where it sources pork.

So, back in 2012, McDonald's announced plans to purchase pork from farms that phase out the use of gestation stalls by 2022. But, due to animal disease pressure and the COVID pandemic, McDonald's extended the deadline to 2024, with a goal to purchase 85-90% of pork from those farms as of last year.

While the move represented a major challenge to the industry, McDonald's partnered with pork producers and is on track to meet the goal. It purchased more than 90% of its pork from farms that phased out gestation stalls last year.

"We did meet the goal for 2022," Edwards said. "Continued engagement with producers was the difference maker."

McDonald's began sending employees and executives on tours of hog farms to better understand the industry and also implemented animal health and welfare training.

"McDonald's values partnerships. It's engrained in our business model since 1955," Edwards said. "Consumers increasingly want to know where their food comes from and how it's produced. Engagement allows us to have better, more meaningful conversations."

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Happy Thanksgiving!

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Centenarian still farming in Mercer County

By DANIEL GRANT
FarmWeek

It's been quite an amazing career in agriculture for Donnie Peterson, 101, whose earliest memories include farming with horses through the Great Depression in the 1930s in western Illinois.

What's maybe even more amazing is he's not ready to hang up his work boots just yet. In fact, when people ask this humble centenarian who farms near Aledo (Mercer County) when he's going to retire, he has a simple, yet straightforward, answer.

"All I've ever done is farm. I don't know of any other occupation," Peterson, who also spent some time in the service, told the RFD Radio Network during an on-farm interview.

"I don't have hobbies; therefore, I'm still doing it," he continued of his career in farming, which spans 11 decades counting his childhood on his family's farm in Henderson County. "But I couldn't do it without help."

Peterson was born in 1921 when Woodrow Wilson was president and the price of corn averaged 98

cents per bushel that marketing year, according to USDA.

Since that time, Peterson grew up in ag and operated his own farm under 18 additional U.S. presidents, from Warren G. Harding to Joe Biden.

Corn prices throughout the veteran farmer's life increased slowly but surely from \$1.05 in 1922, \$2.38 in the post-World War II boom in 1947, \$3.67 in 1974, \$4.58 in 1996, \$7.58 in 2008 and more recently to \$7.81 in May 2022 — with many peaks and valleys in between.

Meanwhile, corn yield averages, which were stagnant in the 20- to 35-bushel range in the age of open-air pollinated crops from 1866 to 1930, began to improve in the late-1930s with the rapid adoption of hybrid corn.

"It was quite a different method for putting the crops in — we had horses back then," Peterson said of the technological advances over the years. "Then we graduated up to tractors. But it's basically the same principle putting the crops in."

"Now, with all the equip-

ment we use, the information available and the seed is much better," he noted. "That helps us (be more productive and efficient)."

Other crop advancements that pushed yields over the years include improvements in genetics, stress tolerance and the increased adoption of nitrogen fertilizer in the 1950s to the introduction of transgenic hybrids, with insect and herbicide resistance, in the mid-1990s.

Farmers have also refined and improved farming practices and management styles over the years.

"We did a lot more tillage on the ground when I started than we do now," Peterson said. "And the size of the units has changed. It takes less time (for fieldwork) now."

Just last year, Illinois farmers set new state yield records of 214 bushels per acre for corn and 79 bushels for wheat. In Mercer County, farmers averaged a whopping 226.6 bushels per acre for corn and 65 bushels for soybeans in 2022.

Looking back, Peterson has fond memories of raising sheep and training horses

back when he was in 4-H.

But his formative years were also some of his most difficult times living through the Great Depression. The bright side of operating a farm at that time is there was at least enough food to eat on most days.

"Living on a farm we had things — foodwise," Peterson said of the Great Depression. "But the money situation was bad."

"It was difficult to have money to do anything, so we stayed home most of the time," he continued. "It was pretty tough getting through that period."

Peterson encourages

other farmers to embrace new technology and farming methods, but to make sure to research the best ideas for each individual farm. He remains an avid reader and mostly enjoys farm publications.

"I like to read a lot," he said. "There's always something new coming along."

He also owns his own cellphone but comes from a generation in which he prefers doing business with a handshake.

"I have a cellphone, but I seldom use it," he said. "I don't like to do business on the phone."

Peterson joined the Mer-

cer County Farm Bureau in 1972 which, along with Illinois Farm Bureau, was founded in 1916.

As for advice or tips for a long life, Peterson said there are no magic bullets. He just tries to give his best each day and hopes for a little luck along the way.

"Live your life as you can and go along," he added. "You don't know what will happen."

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Donnie Peterson, 101, poses on his Mercer County Farm. (Photo by Denise Hampton, Mercer County Farm Bureau)

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U.S., Brazil in a 'tug-of-war' over soybean exports

By DANIEL GRANT
FarmWeek

With a majority of soybeans in the bin (76%) so far this harvest, the U.S. is in position to boost exports in the months ahead.

But competition remains strong in South America, where farmers are sitting on ample stocks and planting the 2023-24 crop.

"There are more old-crop soybeans in Brazil than there's ever been," Aaron Edwards, commodity risk adviser for RoachAg, told the RFD Radio Network. "But there's also more demand in Brazil than in the past.

"The real question is do new-crop U.S. soybeans get the China business or do old-crop Brazilian beans get the China business?" he said. "It's a pretty strong tug-of-war."

U.S. soybean export inspections for the week ending Oct. 20 jumped from 2.04 million tons to 2.46 million as China purchased a majority of shipments for the week.

Overall, USDA estimates U.S. soybean exports could decline 35 million bushels this year to 1.76 billion due to increased competition from South America.

However, U.S. soybean crush is expected to increase 10 million bushels to 2.3 billion driven by higher soy meal exports and domestic demand for soy oil.

"Personally, I think we could get a friendly demand story for U.S. bean exports," Roach said. "As of now, that's a neck-and-neck race."

One factor that could tilt the competition in favor of the U.S. near-term involves weather challenges as Brazilian farmers plant the 2023-24

soybean crop. The challenges could tempt Brazilian soybean users to hold more of the old crop rather than export it.

Planting progress ranges from 20% complete in parts of Brazil up to 60% complete in Mato Grosso, Brazil's top soy producing state responsible for nearly one-third of output, as of the last week of October.

"Some of it will need to be replanted (in Brazil)," Edwards said. "In the south, some of it got flooded out and, in the north, it was too dry to get some out of the ground."

The weather extremes occurring during planting in South America are part of a shift from a La Nina pattern to El Nino.

"We've had three years in a row of La Nina and now we're in year one of El Nino," Edwards said. "El Nino tends to produce more rain in the south and less rain to the north (in South America)."

Brazilian farmers are expected to plant a record 112 million acres of soybeans for 2023-24, up 2.5% from the past season, while cutting corn plantings by 5% to 52 million acres, according to the National Supply Company in Brazil.

If realized, Brazilian bean production could reach a record 5.95 billion bushels in the year ahead while corn output could slip 9.5% to 4.7 billion bushels. Brazilian corn exports subsequently could decline by 27% in the year ahead.

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A field of soybeans awaits harvest in LaSalle County. Soybean exports picked up recently, with China placing an order for 2 million tons the third week of October, as harvest progress reached 76% in the U.S., 9 points ahead of average. (Photo by Catrina Rawson)

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2023 farm bill: A look at extension versus expiration

By **TIMOTHY EGGERT**
FarmWeek

Certain USDA programs will begin to go dark unless Congress authorizes a new farm bill that covers the next five years or passes a short-term extension of the existing legislation.

That's already been the case for some programs with funding tied to the fiscal year that ended Sept. 30, such as organic farmer support programs like the National Organic Certification Cost Share Program.

The Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) is also being impacted by the expired farm bill because the Farm Service Agency's authority to authorize new CRP contracts expired when the bill expired.

Although payments on existing CRP contracts will continue, farmers will not be able to enroll new land in the program or re-enroll land if a contract expired until there's an extension or a new farm bill.

A \$450,000-per-farmer annual payment limit for projects under the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) expired on Sept. 30, too.

And enrollment into the

Price Loss Coverage and Agricultural Risk Coverage programs for the 2024 crop year is also on hold under a lapsed farm bill. Payments for the 2022 crop year, however, will continue because the money was authorized before the 2018 bill expired.

In total, about 19 separate farm bill initiatives with mandatory funding that don't have a baseline will temporarily cease if the pot of money they were given in 2018 runs out.

Other program funding is linked to the crop year or marketing year, and most of USDA's farm programs, including those covered under the Commodity Title and dairy support measures, officially expire Dec. 31.

Title II conservation programs were extended through fiscal year 2031 under the Inflation Reduction Act and will continue to receive funding until then. The Federal Crop Insurance Act is authorized with permanent funding, meaning it never expires and funding will keep flowing.

And although the farm bill crafts regulations around the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, funding for the food

In total, about 19 separate farm bill initiatives with mandatory funding that don't have a baseline will temporarily cease if the pot of money they were given in 2018 runs out.

aid measure is tied to annual appropriations.

Were Jan. 1, 2024, to come without an extension or a new farm bill passed, then the U.S. farm economy could turn "chaotic," according to USDA Secretary Tom Vilsack.

Specifically, farm programs would automatically revert to "permanent law" status, meaning existing programs would be replaced with a set of permanent provisions tied to the Agricultural Acts of 1938 and 1949.

"It would give me, secretary of agriculture, incredible discretion to discern the level of parity for most of the basic commodities and which farmers would benefit and which farmers would not," Vilsack said Oct. 16 during a farm visit in rural Kankakee County.

A "very unusual circumstance" would follow, wherein if a farmer had acres allotted for wheat production in the 1940s, for instance, then that farmer would continue to receive support while a recent wheat producer would not get support, Vilsack said.

While a full farm bill

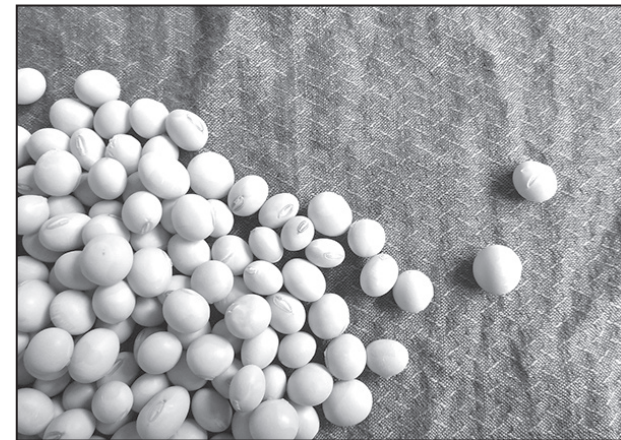
expiration hasn't happened before, Congress has experienced lapses in the legislation.

The "current record holder for the longest stretch" is held by the 2014 farm bill, which was supposed to have been reauthorized in 2012 after the 2011 legislation expired, according to Jonathan Coppess, University of Illinois associate professor and director of the Gardner Agriculture Policy Program.

And the 2018 farm bill, conversely, is the only farm bill in recent history that was reauthorized within the year of the previous bill's expiration, Coppess said during a recent webinar.

"It typically does take more than one Congress in one year to get a farm bill done," Coppess said. "So, if in fact we get into extension territory, or this drags out past 2023, we are not in an anomalous situation."

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Goodyear producing sustainable soy-based tires for city transit and waste haul fleets

ST. LOUIS – The Goodyear Tire & Rubber Company recently announced that two lines of its commercial tires are now made with a renewable soybean oil compound. The Goodyear Metro Miler G152 and G652 tires for transit buses along with the popular Endurance™ WHA waste haul tire are now made with soybean oil, which replaces a portion of the petroleum-based materials used in their production. Both the Metro Miler tires and the Endurance WHA waste haul tire continue to deliver the expected high-performance benefits. The new soy-biobased tires build on the soy check-off's research investment and longstanding partnership with the global tire company.

"Goodyear's roll out of their first soy-biobased tires for waste haul and city buses is a breakthrough for U.S. soybean growers and the cities that depend on high-performing and sustainable tires," said USB Chair Ralph Lott, a soybean farmer from Seneca Falls, New York. "City and other fleet leaders have told us they want soy in tires for such heavy equipment. These big tires are another exciting way to deliver sustainable soy to more lives, every day."

Goodyear had a goal to increase the use of soybean oil in place of petroleum-based oil by 25% by the end of 2019. Goodyear met, and far exceeded, this goal by increasing its soybean oil use by 90% in 2019, 73% in 2020 and 13% in 2021. Goodyear has a long-term goal to fully replace petroleum-derived oils in its products by 2040. This commitment drives additional demand for U.S. Soy products, grown sustainably by U.S. soybean farmers.

The Metro Miler and Endurance tires are just a few of various commercially available soy-biobased tires resulting from the checkoff research investment with Goodyear. The soybean SKUs also feature technology designed to resist sidewall damage, enhance toughness and provide long tread life.

"The use of soybean oil in the majority of the Metro Miler G152 and G652 tires in production today is a significant Goodyear innovation that reduces the amount of petroleum-based materials needed for production," said Dustin Lancy, commercial product marketing manager, Goodyear North America.

Goodyear's sixth line of tires containing soy are its popular Endurance waste haul tires.

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'Farming' looks different for everybody'

By ALLISON PRESTON
FarmWeek

Natasha Lehrer Lewis grew up amid the hustle and bustle of the Chicago suburbs. She remembers her second-grade teacher spiraling a book she wrote, securing her future as an author.

Or so she thought. In 2000, after following an ultralight glider in the sky to the Aurora Municipal Airport, Lewis' family felt an "unexplainable draw" to the rural community of Big Rock.

"We were just amazed at how beautiful it was and how close it was to where we lived," she recalled of the area.

Her dad planned to leave corporate America, so change was already on the horizon. Little did they know how much the family's life would change.

"Somebody knew somebody who knew somebody who thought that a house was going to be put on the market," Lewis said. "So we boldly knocked on the door and that is how we found our little 8-acre farm."

That was 23 years ago. Today, the farm is home to sheep, a few miniature horses and an organic vegetable garden called Big Rock Organics.

Esther's Place, the fiber arts studio Lewis opened upon graduating high school, is a few miles away. But before entering, consumers are greeted with a Big Rock Organics farmstand and colorful flower garden, available for U-pick and wholesale.

The studio offers classes, fiber art supplies and can be used to host parties.

"I wasn't quite sure what direction we wanted to go with the sheep," Lewis said. "But that became clear



Natasha Lewis feeds her sheep, which supply the fiber for Esther's Place. The fiber arts studio hosts classes and serves as a one-stop shop for materials and kits. (Photos by Allison Preston of FarmWeek)

when I started to develop an interest in fiber arts."

While Lewis has found her niche in fiber arts and running the farm, the transition wasn't easy for her or her family. It was like the modern-day Green Acres, said Lewis.

Within the first week, they got a tractor stuck in a foot-wide, foot-deep creek. Thankfully, neighbors stepped up with a chain and a truck to help pull it out.

And those same neighbors and others in the industry taught Lewis everything about farming. In fact, she never went to school for a degree in floriculture, animal science or art, which all lie at the heart of the farm.

Even without formal training, Lewis embraced the change and challenges.

"I definitely just felt like it was meant for me," she said.

And she considers herself lucky to have a group of women putting in work as volunteers and team members to support her passion.

"I think women are naturally nurturers and we pay attention to detail and all of that works really well in the operation that we do," she

said. "I feel like anybody who's doing an excellent job in their work, female or male, should get accolades or appreciation or a nod. So I am just out there trying to do the best that I can do."

Lewis said while she doesn't have three generations of history on her farm, she's thankful there's room at the table for every kind of farmer.

"That's definitely what I want to carry into the future is that farming looks different for everybody, and we support and appreciate whatever niche it is that we bring to the farming community."

Visit Esther's Place

The fiber arts studio, flower garden and farm stand are located at 201 W. Galena St. (Route 30), Big Rock. Go online, esters-placefibers.com, for video tutorials on fiber art, teacher resources and products, class schedules, gifts and more.

(This story was distributed through a cooperative project between Illinois Farm Bureau and the Illinois Press Association. For more food and farming news, visit FarmWeekNow.com.)



EQIP-IRA funding to aid farm management practices

CHAMPAIGN – The USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) Illinois State Conservationist Tammy Willis announced a new statewide funding opportunity for Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) funded by the Inflation Reduction Act (IRA). The new EQIP-IRA ranking pool will offer five management practices to include conservation crop rotation, cover crop, no-till, reduced tillage, and nutrient management. To address a natural resource concern, the management practices may be planned and contracted for up to five years.

The EQIP-IRA ranking for management practices will be administered with the ACT NOW process. Through ACT NOW, NRCS can quickly fund a ranked application when it meets or exceeds a determined minimum ranking score. ACT NOW is a funding process where applications will have a

much shorter turnaround time and contracts developed in a few weeks compared to the traditional process.

Applications are accepted on a continuous basis, however for EQIP-IRA ACT NOW, applications will be accepted through Jan. 26, 2024. Illinois NRCS will begin funding eligible applications after Jan. 5, 2024, and make funding decisions every two weeks as funds are available.

Producers who have an application on file with your NRCS field office should contact the office if you are interested in competing for EQIP-IRA funding. More Illinois NRCS application deadlines will be announced in the future, but applicants are encouraged to submit an application as soon as possible.

For information on EQIP or other NRCS programs, contact the local NRCS field office or visit www.nrcs.usda.gov/il.



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