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COVID-19 subsidies could mean high income levels for farmers

By **REBEKAH TUCHSCHERER**
Sioux Falls Argus Leader

SIOUX FALLS (AP) – South Dakota farmers could have what many would consider a successful bottom line for 2020, a fact that's, ironically, thanks to COVID-19.

Net farm income is expected to reach just shy of \$120 billion in the U.S., its highest point since 2013 and a more than 43% increase from 2019, according to data from the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA). However, a substantial amount of that increase is attributed to subsidies.

Direct government payments for farmers more than doubled from 2019 to 2020, increasing from \$22.4 billion to a forecasted \$46.5 billion, according to the USDA.

All in all, that \$46.5 billion makes up nearly 40% of forecasted net farm income.

In 2019, about 39% of South Dakota farmers' net income was funded by direct payments. Farm income data is not yet available on a state-by-state basis for 2020, the Sioux Falls Argus Leader reported.



Bryon Houlgrave/The Des Moines Register via AP

In this Aug. 26, 2020, file photo, a farmer discs over a corn field on a farm north of Woodward, Iowa. The corn was damaged beyond salvage by the recent derecho. Thanks to the government paying nearly 40% of their income, U.S. farmers were expected to end 2020 with higher profit than 2019 and the best net income in seven years, the Department of Agriculture said in a recent farm income forecast. Farmers faced challenges throughout 2020 that included the impact of trade disputes; low prices that drove down cash receipts and weather difficulties.

While direct farm payments were common from the late '90s until about 2009, federal institutions have largely switched to crop insurance programs to support farmers in a more sustainable fashion, Evert Van der Sluis, a professor of agricultur-

al economics at South Dakota State University, said.

"There's a widespread expectation that these payments are not sustainable, either financially, economically or politically," Van der Sluis said. "It's highly likely they're

not going to last. But, nobody can see into the future."

Where did the direct payments come from?

By far, the largest increase in these subsidies stems from supplemental and ad hoc disaster assistance, which includes payments from the first two rounds of Coronavirus Food Assistance Programs (CFAP 1 and CFAP 2) and loans from the Small Business Administration's Paycheck Protection Program (PPP).

CFAP was implemented to help offset COVID-19-related losses and included an estimated \$10 billion in round one and \$14 billion in round two. The most recent \$900 billion coronavirus relief package includes \$13 billion for farmers that will be distributed in a third round.

So far, South Dakota has received about \$551 million in CFAP payments, according to data from the USDA. Cattle and corn producers received the majority of those funds, at a combined \$356 million, but soybean and pig farmers also received substantial amounts of direct payments.

Iowa farmers have received the highest amount of direct

payments at total of about \$1.14 billion.

Why do farmers need these payments?

According to Van der Sluis, crop and livestock farmers were both facing financial difficulties, but for different reasons as COVID-19 spread through the U.S.

Crop producers were already facing a slump in grain prices, partially because of trade wars that began prior to COVID-19. Livestock farmers – particularly swine and poultry producers – were occasionally forced to euthanize their animals because of disruptions in the supply chain. This included both meat processing plants stalling production and people eating more often at home than at restaurants.

"Consumers were shifting their purchases," Van der Sluis said. "The supply system wasn't set up to make that instant switch."

Net income data for South Dakota farmers is currently being collected, according to Erik Gerlach, a state statistician with South Dakota's USDA's National Agricultural Statistics Service field office.

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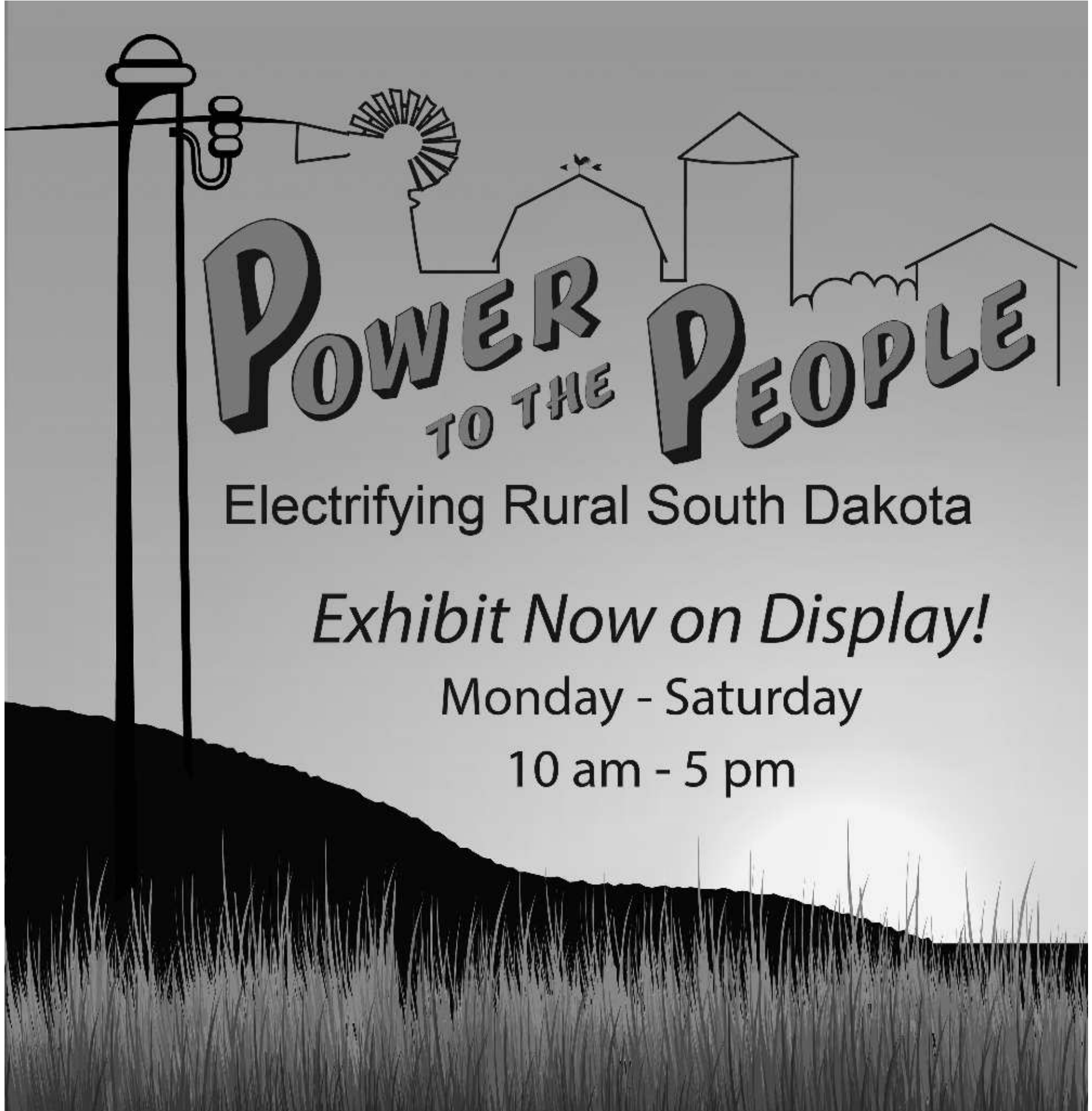
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SDSU Extension launches new AgritourismSD program

BROOKINGS – Do you farm or ranch and want to share your passion and excitement for agriculture with others? Are you interested in diversifying your operation's income? Are you willing to invite people onto your operation for hunting, tours or pasture walks? Are you interested in becoming involved in local foods or farm-to-table ventures? Have you thought about providing lodging or starting a bed and breakfast as an additional enterprise?

If you answered "yes" to any of these questions, then SDSU Extension has the program for you. AgritourismSD is an opportunity for any working farm or ranch that is interested in drawing visitors while providing a supplemental income for the owner. A new, two-year intensive educational program, AgritourismSD will provide the tools and skills needed to start and develop an agritourism enterprise that can help farmers and ranchers diversify their business.

During the two-year program, participants will engage with each other and experts through face-to-face workshops and interactive webinars, networking and out-of-state learning experiences where they will meet with Case Study Coaches that have strong agritourism enterprises. Participants will be coached through the process on how to enhance or develop their agritourism business

plan, with the goal of launching it by the end of the two-year class period.

An additional component of the AgritourismSD program is that three communities (Faulkton, Timber Lake and Wall) have been selected to participate as agritourism hubs. Participants in the program that live near these communities will work together with other local partners to foster that community as an agritourism destination. These hubs will serve as models that other participants can recreate in their own local communities. The three sites will be holding recruitment meetings in January.

"This program will provide participants with not only the tools and resources they need to be successful in agritourism, but it also is a great stepping stone for our South Dakota communities to really put themselves on the map," said Peggy Schlechter, SDSU Extension community vitality field specialist.

"Today's visitor to South Dakota is different," says Jacey Ellsworth, Industry Outreach and Development

Representative with the South Dakota Department of Tourism, who is also involved with the project. "Visitors are looking for more unique, off-the-beaten path experiences. They visit our state and drive by all our farm and ranch land and there really is a desire to learn more. This is a great opportunity for producers to educate those visitors on agriculture."

Workshops during the program will take place throughout the state and participants are expected to provide their own transportation to most in-state events. Other expenses associated with the meetings (hotels and meals) will be covered by AgritourismSD.

The program is open to all farmers and ranchers who have less than 10 years of agritourism experience. Producers must have started an agritourism business or possess a strong desire to add one to their operation. Up to 20 operations will be selected based on an application and a webinar interview. Husbands and wives, siblings or direct family members can apply.

Participants must make a two-year

commitment to the program and take an active role in all program components. The registration fee is \$1,250 per individual. The program will start summer 2021.

AgritourismSD was developed after the SDSU Extension team saw the impact the beefSD program was having on participants, connecting the love of agriculture between beefSD alumni and those eager to share their agriculture story. As a result, the program follows the beefSD model of an intensive, educational program that puts the participants front and center and exposes them to new ideas and opportunities. Alumni of beefSD who wish to develop an agritourism enterprise are encouraged to attend.

The program is funded by a USDA National Institute of Food and Agriculture Beginning Farmers and Ranchers Development Program grant (<https://extension.sdstate.edu/news/sdsu-extension-beefsd-team-awarded-600000-beginning-farmer-and-rancher-development-program>).

For questions or more information about the program, contact Stacy Hadrick, SDSU Extension associate and program coordinator at 605-374-1195 or stacy.hadrick@sdstate.edu or Krista Ehlert, SDSU Extension range specialist at 605-394-2236 or krista.ehlert@sdstate.edu.

– From SDSU Extension





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SDSU scientist uses satellite images to track growing seasons

BROOKINGS – Plants awoken in the spring in response to warming temperatures, but the start and end of the growing season varies each year.

Tracking those variations using satellite sensor data helps us understand changes in environment and climate, according to South Dakota State



Xiaoyang Zhang

University professor Xiaoyang Zhang, co-director of the Geospatial Sciences Center of Excellence.

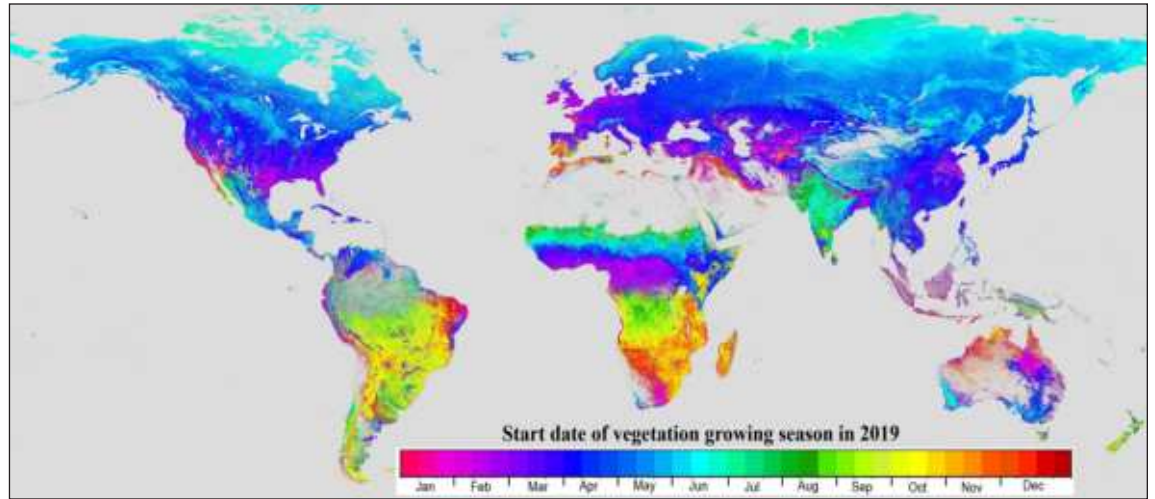
Since 2014, Zhang has been working on a NASA project that allows scientists to track the growing season globally – for free. Zhang develops remote-sensing algorithms and computing code that make the data available to scientists through the NASA land surface phenology product. A new version was pub-

lically released in July 2020 through the land processes distributed active archive center, a partnership between the U.S. Geological Survey and NASA.

“This is one of the most reliable, consistent data records with which to do scientific research on climate change and the environmental impact of human activity,” said Zhang, who has received nearly \$1.4 million funding for the project. Three postdoctoral researchers and two doctoral students have also worked on the NASA project.

Vegetation phenology refers to the timing of the developmental stages of plant life cycles. That can mean anything from when a tree begins to leaf to when a soybean crop dries so it can be harvested. The NASA phenology product can track, not only when plant growth begins, but also when and where drought and plant disease outbreaks occur, Zhang explained.

Climatologists and meteorologists use the phenology data in their forecasts, he pointed out. “Seasonal vegeta-



Courtesy image

This map shows the beginning of the growing season globally in 2019 based on satellite data through NASA’s land surface phenology product. South Dakota State University professor Xiaoyang Zhang, co-director of the Geospatial Sciences Center of Excellence, has been working on the project since 2014.

tion greenness changes influence surface energy variables that, in turn, impact weather modeling and also affect hydrological conditions.”

The NASA phenology product uses data from the visible infrared imaging radiometer suite, or VIIRS, aboard the Suomi National Polar-Orbiting Partnership satellite, which was launched

in October 2011, and the Joint Polar Satellite System satellite, which was launched in November 2017. The sensor suites produce digital images composed of pixels that measure energy reflected from the Earth surface. Each pixel captures energy readings from a 500-meter area on the Earth’s surface.

The VIIRS phenological

data allows scientists to track up to two growing cycles per year globally beginning in 2012, Zhang explained. Plans to launch three more JPSS satellites between 2022 and 2031 means scientists will have a reliable data source for the next few decades.

– From SDSU Marketing & Communications

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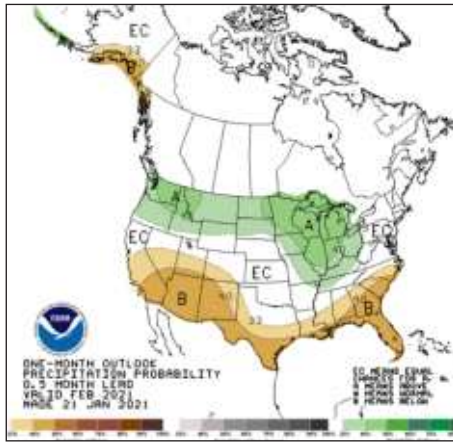
Drought conditions continue to deteriorate across S.D.

BROOKINGS – South Dakotans' apprehension of an impending drought has been growing, and rightfully so, says Laura Edwards, SDSU Extension state climatologist. According to the latest National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration climate outlook, there will be minimal moisture reprieve in the months to come.

The U.S. Drought Monitor map released January 21 shows over 60 percent of the state in Moderate (D1) to Extreme (D3) drought categories. The remaining nearly 40 percent is in the Abnormally Dry (D0) category. Three months ago, only 42 percent of the state was in the Moderate to Extreme drought categories

Edwards says the lack of precipitation recently has made a dry situation worse, as soil and surface water are also evaporating during this abnormally warm winter.

"The lack of snow cover is not able to protect winter wheat from possible frost damage, should areas see extreme cold temperatures," Edwards says. "People who enjoy outdoor winter recreation have struggled without snow for snowmobiling, sledding and cross-country skiing. Ski areas in the Black Hills have had to improvise, making snow for their runs in order to stay open for business this season. Thin ice on many lakes and waterways has made ice fishing unsafe."



The NOAA Climate Prediction Center's February precipitation outlook shows slightly wetter than average conditions for most of the state except the far southern tier along the Nebraska border.

Last week, the NOAA Climate Prediction Center released its February outlook as well as its three-month outlook through April. Temperature expectations for South Dakota in February start with a bit of uncertainty, Edwards says.

"Currently, computer models are showing some fluctuations between colder and warmer than average for the start of the month ahead," Edwards said. "The outlook indicates this uncertainty with equal chances of warmer, cooler

or near-average temperatures for the month overall. For the three-month period of February through April, odds start to lean towards warmer than average temperatures for all but the far northwest corner of the state."

The precipitation outlook shows February slightly more likely to have wetter than average conditions for all parts of the state but the far southern tier along the Nebraska border.

"This is still in our winter season where precipitation is historically low, so a couple of big storms could easily bring the monthly total above average," Edwards said. "For the next three months into April, there is more uncertainty and almost all of the state is shown to have equal chances of wetter, drier or near-average precipitation."

To get any substantial relief from drought conditions, spring precipitation will be more important than ever this year, Edwards said.

"Many areas of the state were four or more inches below average precipitation in 2020," Edwards said. "The winter warmth is allowing for more moisture loss when it is often 'locked' in as frozen soils and waterways."

As a result of the dry period from late summer through January, nearly everywhere in the state is carrying a shortage of soil moisture to start the 2021 growing season for grasses, pastures, row crops,

gardens and trees. Edwards said while winter precipitation can help in improving drought conditions, it can also run off frozen ground instead of infiltrating into the soil.

In addition to a dry winter, La Niña conditions – driven by colder waters in the Pacific Ocean near the equator by South America – are in place this season. These conditions often can change the jet stream patterns over North America. For South Dakota, past La Niña winter seasons have brought colder than average temperatures, but Edwards says that has not been the case this year.

"Since 1950, there have been just four La Niña winters with warmer than average temperatures in our region, the most recent being 2011-2012," Edwards said.

Finally, Edwards said there is another factor at play this year – the Arctic Oscillation over the northern latitudes around the North Pole.

"That has been more prominent over our region in preventing colder air from moving south into the Dakotas," Edwards said. "Many climate forecasters see the Arctic Oscillation in its current phase weakening, and thus allowing more cold air to come into the northern U.S. states as is shown in Montana and North Dakota's outlooks this month."

– From SDSU Extension

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Noem orders agriculture, natural resource department merger

By **STEPHEN GROVES**
Associated Press

PIERRE (AP) – South Dakota Gov. Kristi Noem on Jan. 19 issued an executive order to merge two departments overseeing the state's agriculture industry and natural resources.

The Republican governor's order created the Department of Agriculture and Natural Resources that she billed as a "one-stop" shop for farmers and ranchers that would save the state about \$450,000 by eliminating five positions. While the influential South Dakota Farm Bureau praised the move, other farmers' groups focused on conservation opposed the merger, saying it impacted the protection of resources including water, oil and soil.

Hunter Roberts, the current Secretary of Environment and Natural Resources, will head the new department.

"With this merger, we are fostering sustainable agriculture and conservation that we can pass on to our kids and grandkids," Noem said in a statement.

Noem's move is a continuation of efforts she calls a "streamlining" of the government's oversight of the agriculture industry. She announced the merger in August, a move which caught farmers unaware. As the state's farm groups digested the repercussions of the merger, they split in supporting the idea.

"We think there are efficiencies to be

gained," said Scott VanderWal, the Farm Bureau president.

He said the merger would help farmers from getting caught between two departments.

But other groups, including the South Dakota Farmers Union and Dakota Rural Action, a conservation group, came out in opposition.

"Being a jack of all trades is not always a good answer when it comes to protecting human health and natural resources," said Doug Sombke, the president of the Farmers Union.

He said Roberts, the current Secretary, would do well leading the department, but pointed out that the job of leading a department that both oversees the state's largest industry and regulates its natural resources was a mammoth task.

Rick Bell, a member of Dakota Rural Action, worried that the "checks and balances" created by having separate departments was being eliminated. With agriculture and environmental inspectors housed in one department, he also saw the potential for increasing workloads.

Dakota Rural Action is pressing lawmakers to sponsor a resolution to block the merger, but to pass it would require a significant number of Republicans, who hold super-majorities in both chambers, to defy the governor.

Registration open for SDSU Beef Day

BROOKINGS – Cattle producers across the state will have the opportunity to explore the 2021 market outlook as well as the latest beef research from South Dakota State University faculty and staff at the second annual SDSU Beef Day. This year's event will be held virtually Tuesday, Feb. 9, and will begin at 1 p.m.

A special highlight of the day will be the keynote address by Dr. Derrell Peel, Oklahoma State University Extension livestock marketing specialist. As the Charles Breedlove Professor of Agribusiness in the Department of Agricultural Economics, Peel's main program areas at OSU are livestock market outlook and marketing/risk management education for livestock producers. Peel also works in the area of international livestock and meat trade with a focus on Mexico and Canada and the North American livestock and meat industry. During SDSU Beef Day, the nationally recognized expert will provide his perspective on what beef producers might expect in the cattle market for 2021.

"We're excited to come together with producers and stakeholders across South Dakota to share the work being done to address the problems facing our industry," said Kiernan Brandt, SDSU Extension cow/calf field specialist.

More than 20 different research projects or Extension programs will be highlighted during the day. Graduate students and researchers will be available to interact with attendees and answer questions at the end of the program. Presentations will be grouped by discipline and will highlight the areas of cattle health, feedlot and meat science/food safety, along with an update on beef Extension programs.

Advance registration is available on the events page. Registration for this virtual event is free, and pre-registration will remain open through the morning of Feb. 9. Registered participants will be emailed the proceedings and a link to access the recorded event for 30 days following its conclusion.

– From SDSU Extension



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Speaker shares benefits of interseeding

By LURA ROTI
For the South Dakota Soil Health Coalition

Mechanic is among the many hats most farmers and ranchers wear.

“Every farmer and rancher modifies equipment – it’s the nature of the game,” explained Paul Winkler, a Newell rancher.

Always eager to learn more, Winkler was among many who tuned in to Loran Steinlage’s South Dakota Soil Health Coalition presentation, “Life Beyond Tech Support,” during the organization’s 2021 Virtual Soil Health Conference Jan. 6-7.

“Every farm or ranch is different, but the concepts can be applied,” Winkler said. “He gave a lot of practical information.”

A second-generation West Union, Iowa, farmer, Steinlage has always relied on his mechanical wit and abilities. But when he began embracing soil health practices, like interseeding of cover crops and relay cropping – modifying and re-designing equipment became essential to field success.

“Figuring out key pieces of equipment has opened doors for us,” said Steinlage, who – together with his family – farms 750 acres of extremely diverse crops. Recognized by machinery manufacturers for his talents, Steinlage also works in equipment design.

Throughout his presentation, Steinlage shared many images of modified equipment, but he focused most of the presentation on the why. He shared how soil health practices beyond no-till, like interseeding cover crops and companion crops, improved his overall farm and became the motivation behind many of his equipment modifications.

Steinlage began focusing on interseeding and relay cropping when he realized “weeds enjoy soil disturbance.” From that point forward, he added interseeding to existing no-till practices. Reducing weed pressure through interseeding has allowed him to dramatically reduce the use of herbicides and pesticides. And because of the soil health benefits from companion cropping, he has also reduced nutrient inputs. “Interseeding is a gateway drug. It opened doors for me...as soon as we saw success, we started scaling up,” he said.

Steinlage shared how interseeding helps control pests in two ways.

First, fields planted to a diversity of crops attract a greater number of beneficial insects. During his presentation he shared this example. “I had interseeded soybeans with buckwheat, intent on harvesting as a companion crop, and there were sweat bees eating pregnant soybean aphids.”

Results of field scouting showed no aphid larvae. “I never sprayed and got a food grade premium.”

In some cases, Steinlage said interseeding can create “the flypaper effect. As bugs come into a field to attack, the beauty of interseeding is they are always look-

ing for the easy score, and most often, the cover crop is the easy score.”

When deciding what plants to interseed, Steinlage suggests looking to nature for guidance. “Pay attention to nature. It will tell you what you need to be interseeding. Go around to your native pasture and see what thrives,” he said.

Additional interseeding tips Steinlage also shared are:

- Planting timing: Look at the weather forecast more than stage of growth. “If we are in a cool, dry growing season, we take the time and wait. If we are in a hot, humid growing season, we push ahead a bit.”

- Roll crimp, don’t shred: “When we roll something, we create a mat. Shredding breaks down too quickly.”

- What to plant: If planting into a corn-on-corn field, Steinlage focuses on legumes and brassica mixes. If planting into a corn-going-into-soybean field, he focuses on grasses. And if he’s planting into a soybeans-going-into-corn field, he plants winter wheat and barley.

- Uniformity is key: “Pay attention to details.”

Twin Brooks farmer David Kruger can relate to the challenge of getting details right when interseeding. Since 2018, Kruger has participated in an interseeding study for the South Dakota Soil Health Coalition.

“Plant spacing in 60-inch corn is more crucial than 30-inch. This has been a lot of my problem. My problem is a normal planter can’t plant accurate enough at that high of a population.”

Kruger appreciated Steinlage’s talk. He says learning from others focused on soil health when managing their acres gives him not only new information, but it often confirms possible solutions.

“Hearing someone else confirm the root of an issue gives me more confidence to invest in the solution. For me to go and get a different corn planter to get accuracy, which I may need to do if I continue with 60-inch corn, may mean I need to spend, \$80,000 to \$120,000,” Kruger explained. “That information helps me determine whether I feel that is a wise investment or is there a better way to accomplish the goals we are trying to accomplish with 60-inch corn.”

Connecting growers like Kruger and Winkler with other growers, soil health resources and information is a mission of the SDSHC and its annual conference, SDSHC Coordinator Cindy Zenk explained.

“Farmers and ranchers have a strong desire to make their land better,” Zenk said. “Like all of us, they are busy. So, we work to maximize their time through this annual two-day conference which brings many soil health experts and resources together.”

To connect with SDSHC resources, visit the organization’s website: www.sdsoilhealthcoalition.org. The website provides access to many online resources and staff who are available to work one-on-one with those eager to learn more.



Courtesy photos

Above, Twin Brooks farmer David Kruger was among many who tuned in for the South Dakota Soil Health Coalition 2021 Virtual Convention Jan. 6-7. Below, West Union, Iowa, farmer Loran Steinlage was among many soil health experts who presented during the conference.



Diversifying crop rotation through field peas, sorghum, polycropping

BROOKINGS – SDSU Extension will kick off the second month of its Crop Hour Series, with a week focused on field peas, sorghum and polycropping practices. During the virtual coffee hour Feb. 2-5, participants will get to hear the latest research in this area and why including these alternative crops in rotations is beneficial.

“We will share SDSU’s Field Pea Variety Trials as well as cover root and other common diseases of field peas and management options available to producers to help prevent these diseases,” says Ruth Beck, SDSU Extension agronomy field specialist. “We will also review SDSU’s Sorghum Variety Trials and herbicide options to manage weeds in sorghum. Finally, we will discuss ongoing research at the Dakota Lakes Research Farm near Pierre involving polycropping, which is the practice of growing more than one crop in a field at the same time.”

Growers and agribusiness professionals are invited to join the SDSU Extension team 10 to 11 a.m. CST each day during the Field Peas, Sorghum and Polycropping Week:

- Feb. 2: “Growing Field Peas and Other Pulse Crops in S.D.,” Chris Graham, SDSU Extension agronomist

- Feb. 3: “Managing Root Disease in Field Peas,” Audrey Kalil, NDSU Extension plant pathologist; “Other Common Diseases of Field Peas in S.D.,” Ruth Beck, SDSU Extension

- Feb. 4: “Sorghum Variety Trials,” Chris Graham, SDSU Extension; “Weed Management in Sorghum,” Paul Johnson, SDSU Extension weed science coordinator

- Feb. 5: “Polycropping with Annual and Perennial Crops,” Dwayne Beck, SDSU Dakota Lakes Research Farm manager

“There can be many benefits to including alternative crops in crop rotations. Diverse crop rotation is one of the five principles of soil health. Increasing diversity by including alternative crops in crop rotations also helps to break pest cycles and increase opportunities to utilize different herbicide chemistries,” says Ruth Beck, SDSU Extension agronomy field specialist. “In addition to these benefits, in dry years, field peas and sorghum

provide cropping options that utilize less moisture than more traditional options such as corn and soybeans. They are one more tool South Dakota producers can utilize during dry conditions.”

Each week SDSU Extension’s Crop Hour will cover a different area of agronomic production, from field crops and forages to water and weather. The webinar series began January 5 and will conclude March 26.

There is no fee to attend but participants will need to register for the weekly webinars on the SDSU Extension Crops page. Confirmation Zoom links and reminders will be emailed to attendees.

Educational credits (CEU’s) will be available for Certified Crop Advisers for each session.

For more information about the webinar series and to view the weekly topics and speakers, visit the Crops page on the SDSU Extension site (<https://extension.sdstate.edu/agriculture/crops>).

– From SDSU Extension



SDSU Extension photo

In dry years, field peas and sorghum provide cropping options that utilize less moisture than more traditional options such as corn and soybeans.

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