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**To Plant or  
Not to Plant?  
Dry Conditions Plague the Region**

Details on Page 2

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# Richland & McKenzie Counties Experiencing Exceptionally Dry Year

By Anna Dragseth

McKenzie and Richland Counties have experienced a particularly dry year so far, which poses several negative impacts for the 2021-growing season.

“2020 leading into 2021 has been extremely dry. Not just in North Dakota but in quite a few states. McKenzie County is the driest it has ever been and there are huge concerns for getting crops into the ground let alone crops planted in the fall expected to germinate this spring,” said Devan Leo, McKenzie County Agricultural and Natural Resource Agent.

Currently, there is not enough moisture in the soil to germinate and sustain a seedling once it has broken through the soil surface. Leo said, “We need about 17 inches of total moisture to make up for the deficit loss throughout the summer, fall and winter. That’s a lot of moisture to accumulate.”

In addition to this, it is expected that there will not be enough soil moisture to sustain grass growth on the grasslands and pasture ground around McKenzie County. Stock water supply is very low - Leo heard that area ranchers’ stock water ponds and dams are completely dried up.

Leo explained, “Dams that have held water every year since they can remember, don’t have a drop in them now. There hasn’t been enough snowpack anywhere around to create any sort of runoff into ponds and natural waterways. Germination for spring green-up is going to be short and grasses are going to be way less dense than usual. Those turning out on spring grazing will need to be wary of germination rate. Those who typically turn out mid-April to beginning of May will need to hold off. The grass was hammered so hard through the summer and cattle were left out on forage for way too long. The grass recovery rate is going to be much slower with decreased yields compared to previous years.”

Leo’s best advice is to feed stockpiled hay and forages for as long as possible before turning out on normal spring grazing. As far as water goes, she recommends testing stock ponds and dams that contain water to be tested. North Dakota Extension agents are on a water-monitoring program and can test ranchers’ stock water free of charge. She said, “We are expecting high levels of TDS (salts) in water this year due to evaporation leaving behind higher concentrates. Livestock will not willingly drink bad water, but if forced to, they will. If the water contains high levels of TDS, it could be very toxic to livestock.”

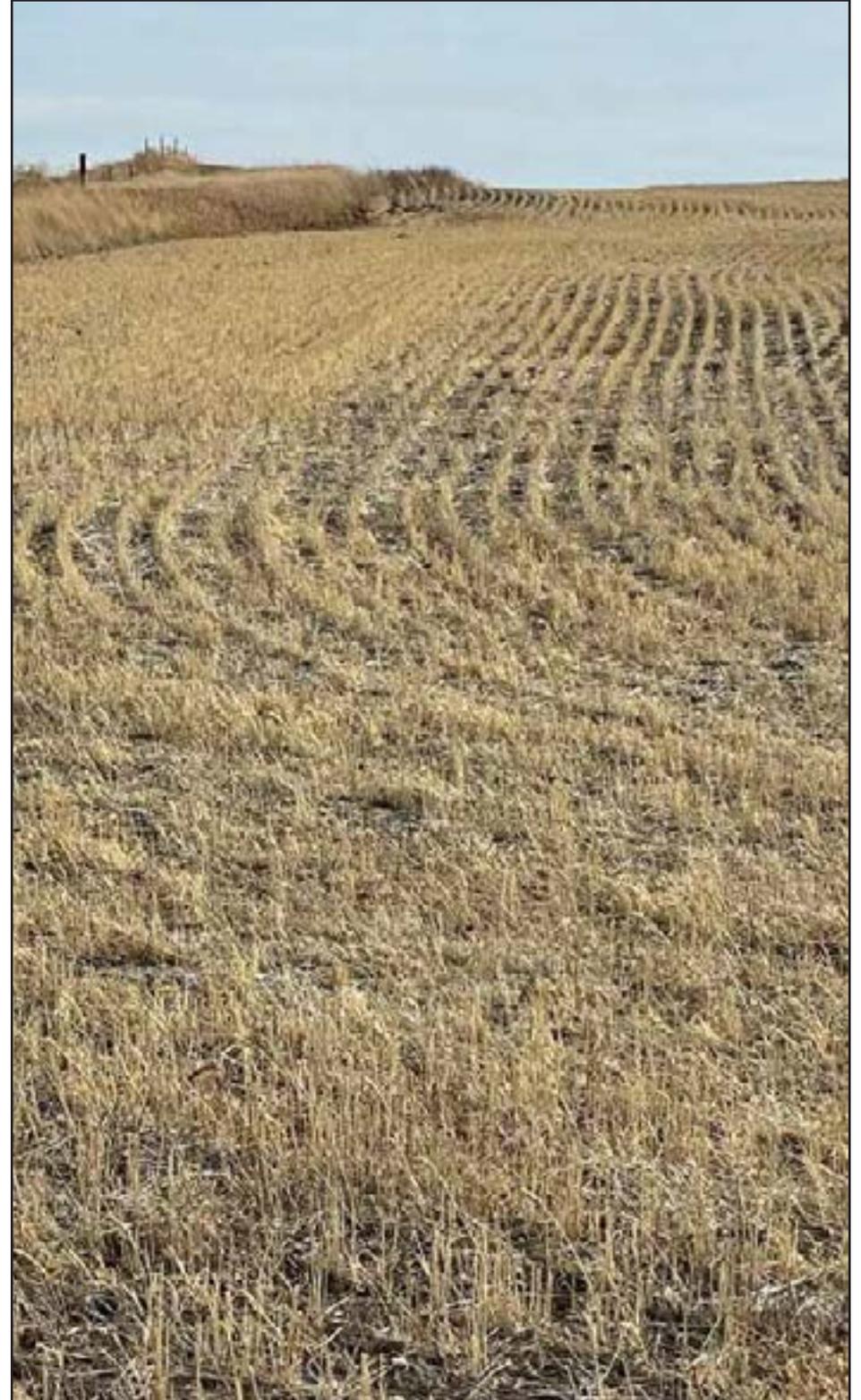
For Richland County, the lack of moisture will also be having devastating effects on both farmland and rangeland.

“It’s difficult to say what is “abnormal” anymore. It seems that we have not had an “average” year for some time now. But this winter was pretty open, windy, and warm. That coupled with the dry fall that we had have really just exacerbated the problem,” stated Tim Fine, MSU Richland County Extension Agent.

Fine explained that Richland County was fortunate to have had some moisture the last couple of days, but it didn’t amount to much and wasn’t enough to increase the soil moisture. This lack of moisture is bad news for farmers.

“Farmers unfortunately do not have a whole lot of options. Delaying planting in hopes of moisture to get crops out of the ground and possibly switching to crops that are either drought tolerant or don’t need as long of a growing season are some options. But if the drought persists or gets worse there just are not a whole lot of viable options for an industry that relies so heavily on the weather and sufficient rainfall,” explained Fine.

Ranchers may have a few more options. Fine said, “They can take a look at their herd and make serious decisions on what animals to keep or cull and early weaning of calves helps reduce impacts on rangeland.”



An extremely dry stubble field in McKenzie County.

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# Ballots Needed by April 16 to Help Pass Montana Oilseed Crop Checkoff

By Anna Dragseth

The Montana Oilseed Advisory Committee is proposing a 0.5% checkoff for canola, camelina, flaxseed, mustard, safflower, soybeans, and sunflower crops.

This checkoff means that growers can voluntarily have 0.5% taken off their sale price when they sell their crop and that half a percent will be used to benefit the overall production of oilseed crops and growers.

If this checkoff is passed, then the Montana Oilseed Advisory Committee will help advise the Montana Department of Agriculture on how to invest those funds for market development, research, and education.

In order to be passed, the Committee will need to receive several ballots supporting this checkoff by Friday, April 16.

“The Oilseed Committee can take those funds and decide how to spend them to support oilseed production in Montana. For example, we can choose to send them to research projects that would help the growers better understand how to grow the crops, send them to market development projects to help find local processing options or help start local processing options to encourage different uses for the crops, and then also education to make sure that whatever we’re doing is getting back to the producers,” said Jeannie Rude, PRO Co-op Ag Center Agronomist and Montana Oilseed Committee member.

The committee decided to include canola, camelina, flaxseed, mustard, safflower, soybeans, and sunflower crops because they are the seven largest acreage oilseed crops in the state.

According to the National Agricultural Statistics Service, Montana oil crops added over \$54 million in value to the U.S. economy in 2019 and Montana ranks second in the nation for production of canola, flaxseed, and safflower.

Rude explained that the crops included in this checkoff are a broad group because they represent both dryland and irrigated growers. She said, “Montana growers are typically involved in more than one of these crops. If a grower is



interested in oilseeds, they are probably producing more than one of these, and so it kind of made sense to lump these seven crops together rather than pursuing seven different checkoffs.”

Rude believes that checkoffs provide an immense number of benefits to producers. She said, “You have to look at other checkoffs just to see how valuable they are to growers. Forty four percent of the wheat and barley checkoff goes into research and 28% of it goes to market development. The research of the wheat and barley checkoff goes into everything from variety trials to how to fertilize wheat/barley crops to get better yields. Montana varieties that are developed in Montana by MSU scientists are funded by the wheat barley checkoff.”

Rude is involved with the oilseed checkoff because she sees the benefit of other crops that have checkoffs and believes that there are opportunities with the oilseed crops both in research and market development. She said, “If growers believe in the role of the checkoff, but are pretty busy getting ready to seed, then I can’t argue much with that, but we really need them to mail the ballots back if they support this checkoff.”

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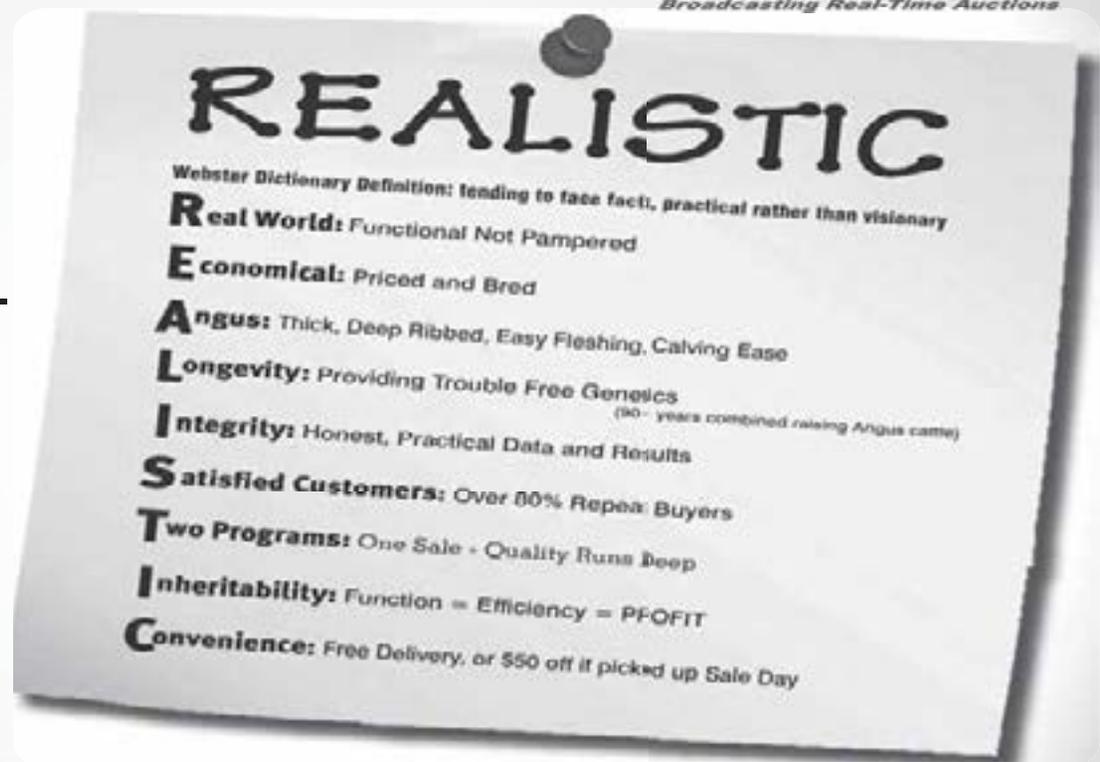
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# Noxious, Troublesome Weeds Spread Through Manure

Weed seeds pass unharmed through the digestive tracts of animals such as cattle and sheep.

By NDSU Agriculture  
Communication

Using manure as fertilizer can lead to the spread of noxious and troublesome weeds.

“It is a known fact that weed seeds pass unharmed through the digestive tracts of ruminant animals (cattle, sheep),” says Mary Keena, livestock environmental management specialist based at North Dakota State University’s Carrington Research Extension Center. “This means that whatever weed seeds are in the feed or bedding you’re using are still viable when they exit the animal as manure.

“There is also a line of thought that says there is an extensive weed seed bank in most fields already and applying manure gives them the nutrients they need to grow,” she adds. “Either way, manure does promote plant growth.”

Producers have tools to minimize the amount of viable weed seeds in fresh manure, one of which is composting. Information about composting is available in a self-paced online workshop at <https://tinyurl.com/2020Composting-Workshop>. To learn the reasons behind these composting operations, check out <https://tinyurl.com/2020CompostProducerOperations>.

Another tool more commonly used is herbicide control. Applying a pre-emergence herbicide will help reduce competition between weeds and newly seeded crops.

But what happens when those herbicides don’t work on specific noxious and troublesome weeds? How do you keep noxious and troublesome weeds at bay when you need to spread manure but know hard-to-control seeds such as Palmer amaranth and waterhemp are present?

“Even in direct competition with a crop, these plants can still produce up to 100,000 seeds in a year,” warns Joe Ikley, NDSU Extension weed specialist.

Due to this extensive seed production, the ability of the weeds to germinate throughout the growing season, and widespread resistance to glyphosate and Group 2 herbicides, herbicide programs for control of severe infestations of waterhemp and Palmer amaranth often will cost two to three times the amount of money spent on a weed control program in fields without these two weeds, he says.

In addition to the added cost of controlling these weeds, weed scientists in the U.S. have documented herbicide resistance in Palmer amaranth to every herbicide mode of action that can be used in row crop production.

“This is why it is important to scout fields for these two pigweeds before they become established,” Ikley says. “In many cases where the weeds are spread in



Manure is being spread at the NDSU Carrington Research Extension Center. (NDSU photo)

contaminated manure, the infestation starts with a manageable level of plants and the population can be managed by hand pulling if correctly identified.”

Producers have a few steps they can take to help mitigate and monitor the potential impacts of these weeds. One is to keep records of where they spread manure so they can monitor that field throughout the growing season.

Another step is to clean spreading equipment before moving to a new field.

“This is probably one of the most important and least popular steps you can take,” Keena says. “If you are doing custom work for someone, this is especially important as you do not want to take one client’s issue to the next client.

“Clean the spreader with an air hose for dry manure or a pressure washer for wet manure,” she advises. “This takes time and can be messy but can save years of headaches down the road. Make sure to record where cleanout occurs so you can monitor that spot during the growing season.”

She recommends spreading weed seed-heavy manure on tame grass pastures or grass hayfields because more options are available for herbicide control on them.

“It is never recommended to spread manure on native rangeland,” says Miranda Meehan, NDSU Extension livestock environmental stewardship specialist. “Adding additional nutrients can benefit invasive grass species such as Kentucky bluegrass and smooth brome.”

For more information about noxious and troublesome weeds or manure management, contact the NDSU Extension agent in your county. Visit <https://www.ag.ndsu.edu/extension/directory> to find the Extension office in your county.

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Kill Date	10/14/2020
Head Count	41
Condemned Cattle	0
Carcass Starting Price	\$171.50

Pricing Information	
Number of Cattle	41
Avg. Live Weight	1292
Dressing Percent	64.31%
Avg. Carcass Weight	831
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Pen Number	CHINA
Kill Date	10/13/2020
Head Count	41
Condemned Cattle	0
Carcass Starting Price	\$171.50

Pricing Information	
Number of Cattle	41
Avg. Live Weight	1498
Dressing Percent	63.37%
Avg. Carcass Weight	949
Total Live Pounds	61404
Total Carcass Pounds	389.12
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The MonDak Heritage Center has recently added a temporary display of historical photos and artifacts from Sidney Sugars. The photos and artifacts date back to the beginning of the company in 1925. There is also a Power Point with approximately 100 photos and descriptions for the public to watch.

**Above: Visitors discuss interesting details in photos displayed in the lobby of the MonDak Heritage Center.**

**Below: One of the artifacts on display is the Polarscope. Sugar syrup saw placed in the tube and a lens at the far left would be adjusted to check the quality of the syrup.**





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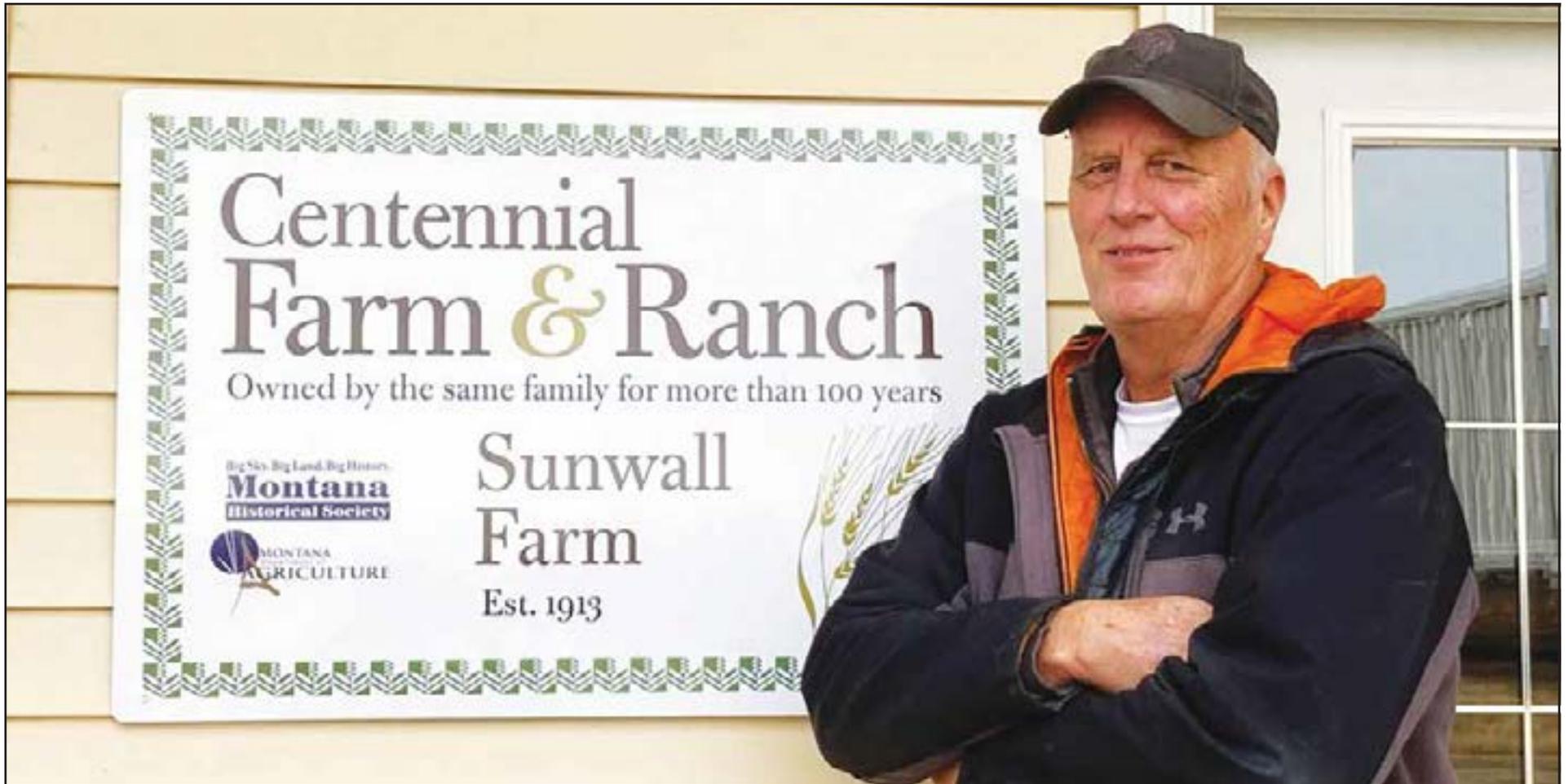


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# Sunwall Farm Recognized By MT Historical Society



Greg Sunwall stands in front of the Sunwall Farm sign. (Photo submitted)

## By Anna Dragseth

Located five miles northwest of Froid sits the Sunwall Farm. This farm has been in operation for well over 100 years. "My grandpa, Anders Sunwall, homesteaded here in 1906, but he finally got the title to the land in 1913," said Greg Sunwall, the current owner of Sunwall Farm.

Last fall, the Montana Historical Society recognized the farm, along with eight other family farms that have been in operation for over 100 years. In the future, the Historical Society will be publishing a book about each of the Montana farms.

Greg Sunwall grew up on the land his grandfather homesteaded on. He said, "I grew up working out in the fields. I started helping my dad when I was really young - I was driving the tractor when I was 10 years old."

Sunwall explained that there are several memories associated with the family farm. One prominent memory is during harvest time - Sunwall and his family would be working in the fields and his mother would come out and bring them food and they would have picnics in the field. He added, "It was kind of a big thing."

When asked why the farm has been in operation for so long, he responded, "My grandpa and my dad, did a good job managing it and then I took over it in the 1980s with the drought and poor prices - I started working at the bank so then I just did farming as a hobby and kept working. So, it did not get any bigger when I took over."

Sunwall took over the farm by chance. He explained that "My brother was helping my dad farm but then he left and then there was a job opening at

the bank in Froid, so I came back and started working there and it ended up being a full-time job at the bank and part-time farming- so I kind of did farming as a hobby."

Sunwall enjoyed farming, "It is like playing poker." He said, "You put your money in and hope you win - sometimes you do and sometimes you don't." His favorite thing about farming was the opportunity to be outside working the soil, seeding, and watching the crops grow. He said, "It is like a garden."

Sunwall retired from farming three years ago and now he rents out the land to area farmers. In the future, he hopes to pass the farm down to his son. "It would be nice to keep it in the family."

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# Dakota Gardener: Farms Of The Future

**Vertical farms produce fresh leafy greens & herbs in indoor environments to sell in local urban areas.**

**By Esther McGinnis,  
Horticulturist  
NDSU Extension**

When you hear the phrase “farms of the future,” what do you envision?

Drones detecting weeds and delivering the right mix of herbicide? Robots driving tractors in large soybean fields? While precision ag and automation in agronomic fields are one vision of the future, indoor vertical farms growing fresh vegetables in the city are another.

Vertical farms produce fresh leafy greens and herbs in indoor environments for sale within a local urban area. The first generation of vertical farms built state-of-the-art greenhouses on the roofs of warehouses and factories in cities to utilize wasted space and to capture the power of the sun.

As an example, Gotham Greens built a 75,000-square-foot greenhouse in Chicago, Ill., on top of the Method Products manufacturing plant. This greenhouse produces millions of heads of lettuce for the Chicago market.

In Brooklyn, NY, Gotham Greens greatly reduced its transportation costs by building its greenhouse on the roof of an organic grocery store. In its nine greenhouses totaling 500,000 square feet, the company can grow the same amount as a traditional 400-acre vegetable farm and only use -10 of the water of field production.

Second-generation vertical farms no longer use greenhouses because their horizontal footprint is too big and expensive for urban centers. New vertical farms are multi-story indoor plant factories with no windows or exposure to sunlight.

Instead, plants are grown in a multi-level shelving system with LED lights mounted above each shelf. They use soil-less systems that bathe plant root systems in a water solution or a mist that contains essential nutrients.

Third-generation vertical farms will improve on land-use efficiency by installing vertical columns of plants rather than using horizontal shelving to maximize space.

As you can imagine, enclosed vertical farms require a substantial amount of energy for lighting, heating and cooling, compared with a traditional farm. Why are we transitioning to such an energy-intensive mode of production when traditional



**Esther McGinnis, NDSU Extension horticulturist (NDSU photo)**



**This vertical farm in Finland produces hydroponic greens and herbs. (Photo courtesy of [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:IFarm.fi\\_Vertikal\\_farm\\_Finland.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:IFarm.fi_Vertikal_farm_Finland.jpg))**

field production is powered by the sun?

First, urban consumers desire fresh local produce and will pay a premium for it. Lettuce and greens grown in a vertical farm can reach the consumer within a day or two after harvest, thereby preserving peak flavor and nutrient levels, compared with produce that has been trucked in a refrigerated trailer across the country.

Indoor production of leafy greens is seen as a safer method to produce vegetables that are consumed raw. Foodborne outbreaks such as E. coli in the last few years have resulted in major recalls of outdoor grown lettuce and greens. Although not every outbreak was traced to a source, the potential exists for the contamination of field crops by feral animals as well as dust and runoff from cattle operations in those areas.

Finally, the future of vertical farms is bright because we need to significantly increase the amount of food grown to feed a population of 9 billion people by 2050. The planet does not have unlimited arable land to feed the world. Planning for land use efficiency and proximity to population centers will help provide the food security that the world needs.

For more information about gardening, contact your local NDSU Extension agent. Find the Extension office for your county at <https://www.ag.ndsu.edu/extension/directory/counties>.

# MSU Extension, MSU Alumni Foundation To Offer Estate/ Legacy Planning Webinars

## MSU News Service

Bozeman - Montana State University Extension, in partnership with the MSU Alumni Foundation, will offer a five-part webinar series on estate and legacy planning. Thoughtful Thursdays will run from 10-11 a.m. beginning April 15-May 15.

In the first session, viewers will learn how to pass property without probate while saving more money for their heirs. The Montana Legislature has provided payable-on-death designations, transfer-on-death registrations and transfer-on-death deeds, and according to Emily Standley, MSU Extension Fergus/Petroleum County agent, viewers will understand how these designations override provisions written in wills.

The second session will discuss how traditional and Roth IRAs can be useful estate planning tools. Participants will discover how qualified charitable distributions from a traditional IRA can support your favorite charity or nonprofit while reducing your tax liability at the state and federal levels, said Kevin Brown, MSU Alumni Foundation associate vice president of development for estate, trust and gift planning.

The series' third session will touch on the Montana Endowment Tax Credit, which MSU Extension family economics specialist Marsha Goetting calls a major benefit for Montana taxpayers and Montana charities.

"This credit could provide a credit up to \$10,000 annually on your Montana income tax," she added. "This is a win-win for Montana taxpayers and Montana charities and nonprofits. Montana is one of just a few states to offer such a credit."

The fourth session will cover how charitable gift annuities are different from commercial annuities and how they can provide income, support a person's favorite charities or nonprofits and reduce state and federal income taxes.

The final session will explore how a charitable remainder trust could be a valuable tool in any estate plan.

Registration is required for the webinars. For more information and to register, visit <https://www.montana.edu/estateplanning/thoughtfulthursdays/>.



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MRC

# Calf Losses Before Birth A Concern

Several issues can cause calf abortions.

## By NDSU Agriculture Communication

Calf abortions can be a major concern for cattle producers.

An abortion is the discharge of the fetus prior to the end of the normal gestation period, according to Gerald Stokka, North Dakota State University Extension veterinarian and livestock stewardship specialist. Many abortions occur within the first 45 days of conception (called early embryonic death), and the embryos or fetuses are so small that they may not be seen.

Other abortions may occur near normal calving time, and determining whether the cow has aborted or a premature birth has occurred is difficult. A stillbirth is when a full-term calf is born dead, with no evidence of the cause of death.

Abortion is a response to a problem that negatively affects the normal function of any of the three main components in pregnancy: the dam, the placenta and the fetus. Causes can include physiological problems (such as hormonal imbalances), metabolic problems, toxicoses, genetic abnormalities and/or infectious diseases caused by protozoa, fungi, bacteria or viruses, says Brett Webb, NDSU Veterinary Diagnostic Laboratory director.

Abortions and stillbirths can be the result of a direct effect, such as viral, bacteria or protozoal organisms gaining entrance to the fetus. The fetus also may have abnormal development (congenital defects) that results in abnormalities noted at delivery, such as a lack of the anus opening or inside-out calf), or inherited genetic defects such as “curly calf” or “fawn calf” syndrome.

Indirectly, abortions and stillbirths can be a result of an interruption of the connection between the fetus and the dam, or illness of the dam. The fetus is nourished and oxygenated via the organ called the placenta. This is a very intimate connection between the two, and any disruption can impact the fetus negatively or result in its death.

Inflammation of this organ is called “placentitis.” Bacterial, fungal and protozoal infections can cause placentitis. Mycotic abortions are one of the more common



Producers hope calves are born without problems. (NDSU photo)

results of fungal infections.

Stillbirths can be frustrating because producers often see no indication of the cause or evidence of excessive labor. Stillbirths can result from an umbilical cord rupture, premature separation of the placenta or the placenta blocking the nostrils after the delivery of an otherwise healthy calf.

Regardless of the cause, abortions may be sporadic or they may occur as “storms.” The normal abortion or stillbirth rate would be 1-2% of cows in a herd. Losses greater than this are abnormal, and producers should seek veterinary assistance to identify the cause.

“The best chance of identifying what caused an abortion is prompt submission of fetal and placental tissues and maternal blood or serum to a diagnostic laboratory,” Stokka says. “Contact your veterinarian for assistance with diagnostic efforts, sample submission and identifying management strategies to reduce the risk of future abortions.”



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