Dare to be different

With a diverse lineup of offerings that continues to grow, Zavels Family Farms is leaving a lasting impression on the Knoxville-area agricultural scene.

Also inside

- Farmers see rare occurrence of triplet calves born from embryo transfer - p. 8
- TFC celebrates 50 years of membership in Cooperative Research Farms - p. 12
- Blue Monarch helps women recover from addiction in a rural setting - p. 22
A pelleted, higher-fat formula designed to provide performance level nutrition to horses in a variety of life stages and activity levels.

FEATURES AND BENEFITS
- Versatile feed, appropriate for multiple classes of horses.
- Fully fortified with organic trace minerals for strong hooves & improved immune function.
- High-fat feed with controlled levels of sugar & starch.

A textured, fully-fortified feed with added fat for growing, maintenance, and performance horses.

FEATURES AND BENEFITS
- Highly palatable formula to ensure consistent intake.
- Unique blend of digestible fibers, grains & vegetable fat to supply proper energy balance.
- Added amino acids & organic trace minerals to support growth and performance.

A textured, higher-fat/higher-fiber feed for performance horses, hard keepers, or those horses requiring a lower carbohydrate diet.

FEATURES AND BENEFITS
- Balance of calories from multiple sources for sustained energy.
- Added electrolytes, organic trace minerals & omega-3 fatty acids for increased performance.
- Ideal for horses requiring a higher fat, lower carbohydrate diet.

SEE YOUR LOCAL CO-OP FOR THIS PRODUCT AND EXPERT ADVICE.
Governor challenges, thanks FFA leaders
Annual Legislative Breakfast is highlight of Tennessee FFA’s “Goodwill Tour” across the state.

Divine bovine
Lawson Family Farms experiences rare feat of having triplet calves born through embryo transfer.

Co-op Feeds’ essential ingredient: CRF
TFC celebrates 50 years of membership in cooperatively owned animal research organization.

Broken wings
Blue Monarch residential program helps repair the lives of women recovering from addiction.

Above and beyond
An equipment shed expansion gives farmer Gary Hall a chance to upgrade his fuel system.

Life-changer
Pepper enthusiasts Joe and Kay Paul build a hot business around a homegrown product.

As I Was Saying
Jerry Kirk has a white-knuckle drive home on an icy Cooperator deadline night.

Our Country Churches
Hartman’s Chapel United Methodist Church in Greene County.

New at Co-op
Learn about 11 new products available at your hometown store.

Neighborhood Advice
Soybeans behind soybeans, forage quality.

What’s cookin’?
Welcome spring with spinach recipes.

Every Farmer Has A Story
Meet Jeremiah and Candace Malone, who have built their Hereford farm on quality.

TenneScene
At the historic Sam Davis Home and Plantation in Smyrna, visitors see the antebellum structure much as it was when the famed Civil War figure lived here with his family. Built around 1810 by Moses Ridley and renovated in 1850 by the Davis family, the home contains more than 100 original Davis family pieces and is located on a 160-acre farm where cotton still grows. In addition to tours, the plantation also hosts special events throughout the year, including this month’s Easter Eggstravaganza on Saturday, April 4, from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. For more information, visit samdavishome.org. — Photo by Allison Morgan
Icy roads make for dicey deadline day

When I retired from Tennessee Farmers Cooperative 14 years ago this month, I thought I’d never again have to cap off a busy, 15-hour Tennessee Cooperator deadline day by driving home late at night on slick, icy, snow-packed streets and roads.

Wrong!

I’m fortunate — and flattered — that since my April 2001 retirement, I’ve been allowed to come back to TFC headquarters in LaVergne to help get each edition of the Cooperator ready for the printer — something I love doing!

Monday, Feb. 20, was deadline day for the March issue, and when I left home in Brentwood early that morning for LaVergne, streets were covered by a slippery mixture of ice, sleet, and snow. I made it a point to get away extra early, knowing that my 17-mile trek could be treacherous. Cautiously and carefully navigating challenging hills and a lengthy but mostly idle construction site on my route, I was surprised at the number of people trying to make it to work that morning. I took it easy, concentrating on what I was doing as well as looking out for other drivers who were way more venturesome than I.

“Thank you, God,” I said aloud as I pulled into the Co-op parking lot an hour after leaving home. What I was doing as well as looking out for other drivers who were way more venturesome than I. Nature was doing her thing outside — sending more ice, sleet, freezing rain, and snow — along with colder temperatures — our way. The result was a thick layer of frozen precipitation on everything, including our vehicles. Having our cars in a secure area was a real bonus: We were able to let them run for a while to melt some of what had accumulated!

After leaving the office a little after 11 and successfully navigating Co-op’s sprawling LaVergne complex, I got a quick taste of what lay ahead as I pulled onto Murfreesboro Road. By this time of night, what had once been tire tracks were deep ruts of frozen ice. Thankfully, conditions were considerably better on Waldron Road, an impressive, relatively new multi-lane connection between Murfreesboro Road and I-24 in LaVergne.

Once on I-24 and headed west toward Nashville, though, conditions worsened. I knew immediately, for example, that taking my usual route home was not an option. Normally, I get off at the first exit, Old Hickory Boulevard, but it was clogged by a trio of tractor-trailer rigs trying to get to a popular truckstop. I had no choice but to keep going. As I eased past the Old Hickory exit in the far lefthand lane, I saw that several cars and trucks alike were having trouble making it up the next gradual grade. Thankfully, my Ford Focus made it with no problems.

The 2012 Focus, while handling relatively well in ice and snow, has no navigation equipment, so what lay farther ahead for me and my car was pretty much anybody’s guess. Then I thought of son Chris, who had earlier made it home to Brentwood from Tennessee Electric Cooperative Association in Nashville. I punched his single-digit speed-dial number on my cell phone. “I’m sitting here right now watching the TDOT (Tennessee Department of Transportation) SmartWay website,” Chris said. “From what they’re showing, I’d say your best bet is to get off at the Bell Road [Highway 254] exit and take a left.” That sounded really good to me. I know Bell Road well and was approaching the exit as Chris and I talked. For the next 30 minutes or so after turning onto Highway 254 and relaxing as much as I could while nearing home, I made it a point to really notice, enjoy, and appreciate the sheer beauty of the wintry spectacle that surrounded me. Then, as I turned into our driveway, I lifted up another heartfelt “thank you” to God!
Governor challenges, thanks FFA leaders
By Sarah Geyer

When Gov. Bill Haslam spoke to state FFA officers and outstanding chapter members from across the state on Feb. 26 in Nashville, he had a pointed, poignant message for the young leaders:

“You are in the middle of a sweet spot for three things that are important to the Tennessee General Assembly. You represent a portion of our population who is committed to rural economic development, education, and the political process. On behalf of six and a half million Tennesseans, thank you for that.”

Addressing an audience of 150 that also included legislators, corporate sponsors, and parents at the 35th Tennessee FFA Legislative Breakfast Feb. 26 at Nashville’s Downtown Sheraton, Gov. Haslam stressed that agriculture plays a key role in both rural economic growth and his emphasis on education.

“We need people who care about the process,” the governor added. “It’s easy for people to make fun of politics, but everything depends on having good men and women who are willing to run for office.”

Despite a substantial snowfall the night before, nearly a third of the members of the General Assembly attended the breakfast that also featured remarks from Lt. Gov. Ron Ramsey, House Speaker Beth Harwell, AT&T Tennessee President Joelle Phillips, and Andy Nash, vice president of Farmers Bank in Portland.

FFA State President Kevin Robertson of Gladeville, a student at the University of Tennessee Martin, emceed the morning event at which Ramsey was given a 2015 Tennessee FFA print of “The Rising Sun” by renowned Tennessee artist Ralph J. McDonald and sponsored by TFC.

Another highlight of the morning came with the introduction of the FFA creed presentation by Amy Morgan, a student at the University of Tennessee Knoxville. The FFA state treasurer proudly described how her younger brother, Nathan, learned the creed along with her as she prepared for her first competition several years ago. Then she introduced Nathan, now a ninth-grader and member of Cookeville FFA, (See FFA, page 6)

News briefs
Learn sheep shearing April 24, 25
Seasoned sheep shearer Doug Rathke returns to Middle Tennessee State University in Murfreesboro on Friday and Saturday, April 24 and 25, to conduct sessions for beginners and advanced participants alike in the 2015 Tennessee Sheep Shearing School.

Tennessee Farmers Cooperative is a sponsor of the school along with the Tennessee Sheep Producers Association, University of Tennessee Extension, and MTSU’s School of Agribusiness. Held at the Tennessee Livestock Center, sessions begin at 10 a.m. Friday and 8 a.m. Saturday. Cost is $125 per person. Pre-registration is required, and participation is limited to the first 15 paid applicants. For more information and to download a registration form, visit http://bit.ly/ShearingSchool2015.

Clark to lead Tennessee 4-H, ALEC
Richard Clark, who had been associate director of agricultural education at the University of Illinois College of Agricultural, Consumer and Environmental Sciences since 2009, has joined the staff at the University of Tennessee Institute of Agriculture (UTIA) as the new leader of Tennessee 4-H and Agricultural Leadership, Education and Communication (ALEC). The two units — service-oriented and academic — have been merged to “better serve Tennessee youth,” according to a UT release.

“Dr. Clark brings a diverse background and experiences that make him an ideal leader for our new 4-H/ALEC Department,” says UTIA Chancellor Larry Arrington.

Clark’s main responsibilities will be providing leadership to the state 4-H staff in Knoxville and county 4-H agents across the state. He will also serve in an academic capacity, developing curriculum for faculty and students at UTIA.
who gave a rousing recitation of the FFA Creed.

The breakfast ended with Robertson presenting Haslam with Co-op’s 2014 commemorative 4-H/FFA Case knife, telling the governor, “In the time I have spent with you as a member of FFA, you have inspired me to pursue a career in public service to Tennessee.”

The 35th Tennessee FFA Legislative Breakfast was part of a statewide Goodwill Tour the FFA officers took in celebration of National FFA Week. On the trip, they visited with current and potential sponsors, agriculture corporations, FFA chapters and various student groups.

This year’s weeklong adventure, from Feb. 21-28, also included visits to AgCentral Farmers Cooperative in Athens, First Farmers Cooperative in Lexington, and Tennessee Farmers Cooperative in LaVergne, where they were joined by FFA members from Stewart’s Creek High School in Smyrna and LaVergne High School. Other stops were Wampler’s Farm Sausage in Lenior City, Tennessee Farm Bureau Federation in Columbia, Tennessee Walking Horse Breeders and Exhibitors Association, and various other stops.

This year’s weeklong adventure, from Feb. 21-28, also included visits to AgCentral Farmers Cooperative in Athens, First Farmers Cooperative in Lexington, and Tennessee Farmers Cooperative in LaVergne, where they were joined by FFA members from Stewart’s Creek High School in Smyrna and LaVergne High School. Other stops were Wampler’s Farm Sausage in Lenior City, Tennessee Farm Bureau Federation in Columbia, Tennessee Walking Horse Breeders and Exhibitors Association, and various other stops.

The eight officers also met with Joan Cronan, retired University of Tennessee women’s athletic director, read agriculture stories to students at Rock Springs Middle School in LaVergne, visited the State Capitol, and toured former Governor Ned McWherter’s library in Dresden.

These farmers and agribusiness representatives are 2015 graduates of the AgStar leadership development program in West Tennessee. In front, from left, are Jonah Horner and Adam Joyner, Gibson County; Hannah Davis, Fayette County; Jesiogg, Weakley County; Wes Rodgers, Crockett County; and Dustin Graham, Madison County. In back are Matt Adams, Tipton County; Justin Hargrove, Gibson County; Zach Burrows, Gibson County; Bill Kelley, Tipton County; Justin Chilcutt, Henry County; Clint Workman, Obion County; and administrator Matt Fennel, Tennessee Farm Bureau Federation. During their course of study, the participants met once a month for intense, hands-on sessions involving ag issues and opportunities, technology, communications, and government. The last session involved a trip to Nashville, where participants met with Tennessee Department of Agriculture leaders and toured Ellington Agricultural Center before visiting one-on-one with their state legislators at the Capitol. The program is annually sponsored and developed by some of Tennessee’s top agricultural organizations, including TFC.

— Photo by Allison Morgan
As Co-op in Tennessee celebrates its 70-year anniversary in 2015, the Cooperator proudly highlights monumental moments and milestones that paved the way to our becoming one of the nation’s strongest federated cooperative systems. Look for seven facts in each issue from now to December for a total of 70!

1. Seeds for establishment of a statewide farm supply cooperative system in Tennessee were sown by the Tennessee Farm Bureau in early 1944. For several years, Farm Bureau’s delegate body had passed resolutions advocating that co-op associations be set up to benefit various commodity producers in the state.

2. TFC began in 1991 using their rolling fleet of tractor-trailer rigs to promote — via vibrant four-color images — Co-op’s line of pet foods, including Big Red, Li’l Red, and Action Ration.

3. Some 4,000 people attended “Tennessee Day” on July 17, 1963, to get a close-up look at TFC’s “Green Charger” nitrate facilities in Chattanooga. The facility produced anhydrous ammonia, ammoniating solutions, prilled ammonium nitrate, direct application solutions, and urea.

4. Nearly three months to the day after becoming TFC’s new president and chief executive officer in 1992, Philip R. Walker announced the formation of Ag Distributors Inc., a fertilizer company that represented TFC’s first venture into nonmember business.

5. When TFC completed its new warehouse at LaVergne in 1953 at a cost of $52,000, operations from Lea Avenue and Fogg Street warehouses in Nashville were moved to the new location. Headquarters offices were also relocated from Nashville to the sprawling LaVergne warehouse.

6. Knoxville radio icon John Ward began in 1988 encouraging Tennesseans all across the state to “Go Co-op!” As the wildly popular voice of the University of Tennessee’s football and basketball teams, Ward quickly became a favored fixture of our Co-op family, too.

7. At its annual meeting on Dec. 18, 1975, TFC proudly announced that it had reached the $1 billion mark in total sales in just three decades.
Odds of being struck by lightning: 1 in 700,000.
Odds of holding the winning Powerball ticket: 1 in 175 million.
Odds of a cow having triplets: 1 in 105,000.
Odds of a cow having triplets through embryo transfer: 1 in 8 million, according to the late Dr. Edwin Robertson, a Harrogate veterinarian and pioneer in the practice of embryo transfer who collected over 28,000 donors, transferred some 119,000 embryos, and froze more than 86,000 embryos in his lifetime.

Chris Lawson hasn’t dodged a lightning bolt or gained instant wealth through the lottery, but the Ewing, Va., cattleman can lay claim to another once-in-a-lifetime occurrence: owning identical Angus triplets that were born through embryo transfer. The extremely rare feat occurred on Nov. 25, 2012, at Lawson Family Farms, a 300-head registered Angus operation Chris runs with wife Amanda, his father, Morris, brothers Travis and Tracy, and farm manager Burt Redinger.

The calves weighed in at 54, 52, and 48 pounds, respectively. Dr. Robertson, who passed away last year, flushed the embryo out of Angus Alliance Donna 962, member of a nationally known cow family.

“The only other time Dr. Robertson had seen triplets through embryo transfer was in a group of Holsteins back in 1988,” says Chris, who, along with Morris, owns Lawson Building Supply, an agricultural and construction equipment dealership in neighboring Rose Hill, Va., that’s been in business since 1945. “Twins are a little bit more common, but you just don’t see one egg splitting into identical triplets. It’s a pretty miraculous event.”

As the sun started to rise on the morning of the birth, Chris ventured over to the field where the recipient heifer calved, not realizing initially the magnitude of what had taken place.

“I thought she had twins because I only saw two calves up and wobbling around,” he recalls. “When I went in to get a closer look, I noticed there was another calf laying in the opposite direction. I said, ‘Oh, my goodness, she’s had triplets!’

But seeing that the third heifer calf was inactive while her siblings got their legs under them alerted Chris that the youngster needed immediate attention.

“The chore with having triplets is getting all of them to live,” says Chris, who entered the registered Angus business in 2002. “The two calves that had gotten up were pretty aggressive and trying to nurse. The other one wasn’t making any movements at all, so I went ahead and took it to the barn and got it some milk. She didn’t stand up until the next day; we kept her in the barn and brought the other two inside about a week later.”

Although this may look like a fairly typical photograph of three Angus heifers, 8-million-to-1 odds say that it isn’t. That’s because the trio, shown with one of the heifer’s calves, are embryo-transferred identical triplets that were born in November 2012 at Lawson Family Farms in Ewing, Va.

Lawson Family Farms owner Chris Lawson, left, and farm manager Burt Redinger make extensive use of artificial insemination and embryo transfer work to improve the quality and genetic makeup of their 300-head Angus herd.
Besides having the triplets together in one location, Chris says there was another reason for housing the youngsters in the barn:

“After I had done some research and realized just how rare this situation was, I didn’t want to leave anything to chance. I’ve had to run coyotes out of my fields before, so it just made good sense to bring the calves inside.”

Next step in the process was to establish a nutritional program to help the triplets flourish. For that, Chris called on longtime friend, fellow cattleman, and Claiborne Farmers Cooperative LaFollette branch manager Mike Welch. The Lawsons are members of Claiborne Farmers and buy from all three of the Co-op’s locations.

“We talked about the challenges Chris was facing in growing the calves and came up with a plan,” says Mike. “I had some Holstein cows that I had raised calves on, so I loaned Chris one of them that was real gentle and would let anything nurse. The triplets nursed from my cow and from the birth mother, and they were one big, happy family. We also put the calves on a ration of Co-op 15% Pelleted High Stress Beef Starter [94250] to get them growing, and they took to that really well.”

From that point, the triplets have thrived, and one already has a calf of its own, born in February. And while this extraordinary trio has elicited plenty of excitement, discussion, and pride around Lawson Family Farms, Chris emphasizes that the focus of their ever-expanding operation has remained the same.

“We want to continue utilizing the latest advancements to build a top-quality black Angus herd with outstanding genetics,” says Chris, who serves on Southwest Virginia Angus Association’s board of directors. “Our goal is to develop good, sound seedstock and build long-term relationships with other producers looking to buy Angus bulls. We rely on being honest and doing the right things to gain repeat customers, whether it’s with our cattle business or our equipment business.”

One of the main ways Lawson Family Farms reaches out to its customer base is through its annual bull and female production sale, which debuted in 2011. This year’s Spring Bull and Female Sale, set for Saturday, April 25, at the farm, is expected to attract more than 300 prospective buyers and feature some 50 bulls and 40 head of registered cattle.

“When I got into the cattle business, I never dreamed we would progress to the point of having our own sale,” Chris says.

“We always just used to take our bulls to the test stations to see how they stacked up against others. Since we did quite well, we decided to try selling them and create a market right here.”

It’s all part of the plan, he adds, to keep Lawson Family Farms among the top tier of cattle operators for years to come:

“Hopefully, we’re building a herd that the next generation can continue to grow and improve upon.”

To learn more about Lawson Family Farms, visit www.lawsonfamilyfarms.com.

For more information about Co-op’s complete line of cattle feeds, visit with the professionals at your local Co-op.
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Fly Bullets are made of tough polyester and acrylic and in Virginia Extension tests, the rubs and bullets were the best of all controls, including both horn flies and face flies. Horn fly control was virtually perfect and for 6 weeks of the test, it was 100 percent.

“The total cost of materials this year to treat the rubs and keep the flies off 112 head of steers was $65.” Dr. John Tomlinson, DVM, Lewisburg, WV from a Drovers’ profit tips article.

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Face flyps wick solution directly from the rub onto the face, giving effective pinkeye protection and face fly control. Each pack contains 22 flyps for one rub.

“It’s the most effective and economical fly control we have used.” Wiese and Sons Manning, Iowa

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Your road to bright eyes and no flies.

Co-op Animal Health
n 2015, the Co-op system celebrates its 50th year of membership in Cooperative Research Farms (CRF), and the organization’s science-based approach to animal nutrition has never been more relevant.

Recent improvements in Co-op dairy and beef cattle rations, the new line of Pinnacle Horse Feeds, and many other innovations have been made possible by CRF, the world’s largest animal nutrition and management research association that serves producers across five continents. Since its inception in 1954, the cooperative has conducted thousands of trials and provided technical advances to allow CRF members to formulate and manufacture industry-leading feeds.

“It wouldn’t be possible to quantify the pounds of milk or beef or added years on a horse’s life, but undoubtedly CRF has benefited our customers and our industry,” says Dr. Paul Davis, who joined Tennessee Farmers Cooperative as a nutritionist in 2005 and now manages the Feed and Animal Health Department. “It’s a perpetual influence, with each nutritionist who comes on board making it part of what we do. We never formulate without that research in the back of our mind because we know it’s real and has value. CRF has certainly left its mark.”

CRF was originally formed as Cooperative Feed Testing Farms when Southern States Cooperative, Inc., purchased a farm in Delaware to conduct research on broiler nutrition. Early on, organizers realized the value of sharing research data. Within the next few years, the testing facility expanded its concept of broiler research to include turkeys, layers, swine, beef and dairy cattle, and rabbits, in that order, and research farms were relocated to areas of concentrated production. Short-term research on sheep and goats has also been conducted.

Additional cooperatives — and later, other feed manufacturing companies — became interested in this joint effort. TFC became a member in 1965. Even with the dramatic changes that have occurred in the animal agriculture industry since then, the organization’s research has been a key ingredient in the Co-op system’s feed-manufacturing process through the years, says John Niver, retired TFC nutritionist and Feed Department manager whose history with CRF started in 1972 as an employee of Landmark Cooperative in Ohio.

“The work of CRF was essential to the day-by-day decisions I made during my cooperative career,” says Niver. “And CRF has remained important to TFC because of constant changes in genetics of the animals, the feedstuffs that are available, new products coming on the marketplace, agricultural practices, and the industry in general. CRF provides an independent source of research that can be directly incorporated into Co-op feeds. Otherwise, that information wouldn’t be available in a timely manner or even available at all.”

Today, CRF, headquartered in Richmond, Va., is a multi-national cooperative that comprises seven regional feed manufacturers. In addition to TFC and Southern States, also based in Richmond, members are Co-op Atlantic of Moncton, New Brunswick, Canada;
La Coop Federee, Montreal, Quebec, Canada; Federated Co-operatives Limited, Saskatoon, Saskatchewan, Canada; InVivo, Saint-Nolff, France; and Kalmbach Feeds, Inc., Upper Sandusky, Ohio.

CRF conducts its research on animal nutrition and practical feeding problems at member research facilities as well as through external contracts with various universities and private companies. Through the Co-op system’s participation in CRF, Tennessee producers benefit directly from the results of that research.

“If you’re trying to maximize growth, production, and efficiency, the little things really begin to matter,” says Jim Godfrey, a veteran TFC employee with nearly 30 years in the feed and operations areas. “For farmers, that’s where the money gets made. It all comes down to knowing that what you recommend has value and will benefit the producer financially. Our market share shows that TFC has given us knowledge to work with over time.”

Representing the concept of cooperation at its best, CRF’s structure allows it to be flexible and responsive to member needs while sharing the research cost among its owners.

“Research is very expensive when one entity is trying to do it alone, and that’s why sharing resources through CRF is so important,” says Davis. “It’s a responsible use of funds and provides a proving ground for our products before we ask a customer to use them. He or she has more than our word that it works; we have data to back it up.”

Each member of CRF contributes people, funding, and, most importantly, the original research concepts to the organization, explains Dave Ott, who has been CRF’s general manager for 15 years.

“CRF is not me sitting in Richmond, Va., deciding what research is being conducted,” says Ott. “It’s the members who get together and decide what’s needed to answer questions and find solutions for their producers. The members can then research those areas collectively and cost-effectively, and you’re not taking your resources and people power to do that. CRF is doing that.”

Combined, CRF members represent more than 6.2 million tons of manufactured feeds, 99 member-owned feed mills, and 8,200 employees, including 224 highly skilled individuals working in research and development and technical support. That network vastly expands the knowledge base of TFC’s own animal nutrition staff.

“For most of the members, the networking is just as valuable as the research,” says Ott. “Collectively, we have a lot more brain power. We share ideas, not just for research projects but also for situations we face out in the field, in feed mills, anything like that.”

CRF itself operates with a lean staff that consists only of Ott, an administrative assistant, a full-time research manager, and several part-time or shared employees. Personnel at the research facilities do the trial work, and employees of the member cooperatives and companies serve on research teams.

At TFC, Davis is currently serving on the board of directors and twice chaired the beef research team. All three nutritionists also have responsibilities: Dr. Jennifer Earing will begin chairing the equine research team in June; Todd Steen serves on the overall research committee, which he has also chaired along with the dairy, equine and specialty, and beef research teams; and Royce Towns serves on the beef research team and communications committee.

“Being involved is highly critical because we are able to gain information as research is being conducted,” says Niver, who chaired CRF’s overall research program and served on all research committees except poultry during his cooperative career. “It also provides insight into the direction CRF is heading so the members have plenty of opportunity to prepare for changes in formulations or manufacturing.”

To illustrate, Niver mentions such groundbreaking innovations as rumen available carbohydrate (RAC) technology for dairy rations, swine grower and finisher feeds that improve feed efficiency and growth rate, creep-feeding programs that allow lambs to be weaned at a younger age, and a poultry starter feed program in which one product can be used from the time chicks are hatched to the time they enter the layer house.

More recently, Davis says the Co-op system has benefited from CRF research related to improving forage utilization in beef-feeding programs and low-starch formulations for equine diets. Today, CRF has seven trademarked and patented technologies.

Ott believes that the ability to keep in step with the ever-evolving agricultural industry will help CRF maintain its position as a leader in animal nutrition research now that the cooperative has entered its seventh decade of innovation.

“We’re in our 61st year, and the reason we are is because we’ve adapted so much,” he says. “We haven’t been so rigid that we become irrelevant. Our biggest challenge in the future is trying to do as much research as possible at the lowest cost for our members and continuing to offer what fits their business and the needs of their producers.”

For more information, visit online at www.crfarms.org or talk with your local TFC feed specialist. Future Cooperator articles will feature information from Co-op’s current nutritionists Earing, Steen, and Towns with more details about CRF’s contributions to the dairy, beef, and equine industries.
Popular rodeo set to stir things up in Franklin
Action-packed competition will be main draw for 2015 Rotary event May 14-16

The 66th edition of the tradition-rich Franklin Rodeo will make its three-day 2015 run from Thursday, May 14, through Saturday, May 16, at Williamson County Ag Expo Park located just south of the city on Interstate 65.

A noon parade through Franklin’s historic downtown district on Saturday, May 9, will set the stage for this year’s edition of the heralded rodeo sponsored annually by the Franklin Noon Rotary Club. The parade, to begin at Fifth Avenue North and Bridge Street, will wind its way along Third Avenue North, down Main Street, and up 11th Avenue North before ending at Colberson Boulevard.

The real action of the rodeo will come when fans and participants alike head for the ag expo park and the competitive events themselves. Rodeo proceeds will go to Williamson County charities, including the Breast Health Center at Williamson Medical Center, Boys and Girls Clubs of Franklin, Tucker’s House, academic and music arts programs at high schools in the county, and Habitat for Humanity.

Every year, the rodeo also makes a donation to the University of Tennessee at Martin’s rodeo team to benefit participants in this program.

Returning this year is the popular — and free — “Franklin Rodeo Experience, Down in the Dirt Kick-off Party,” from 6 to 10 p.m. on Wednesday, May 13, at the ag expo park. Organizers say the event gives fans an opportunity to “get down in the dirt in the arena” for behind-the-chutes tours, meet-and-greet opportunities with rodeo personalities, live music, food, and pony and mechanical bull rides.

Rodeo officials promise, too, that Thursday, Friday, and Saturday night events “will be action-packed from start to finish.”

Rodeo tickets are $20 for adults and $10 for children ages 12 and under. All seats are reserved, and tickets can be purchased at the rodeo’s website: franklinrodeo.com.

Correction
In the March issue of the Tennessee Cooperator, the article, “We’re still here,” concerning the state’s tobacco industry, did not include the official contact information for the Burley Stabilization Corporation (BSC).

Inquiries about BSC should not be directed to Michael Brown as listed in the story. All inquiries about BSC, including current information on its business operations, should be directed to Daniel Green, Chief Executive Officer, at 615-212-0508, daniel@bscleaf.com, or visit the BSC website at www.bscleaf.com.
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THAT MAKE
AN IMPACT.

FSG 115 BMR FORAGE SORGHUM
- Dwarfing gene increases leaf-to-stem ratio and provides superior standability
- Significantly lower stem lignin concentration
- Improved digestibility and palatability equals milk production of corn
- Requires 1/3 less water than corn for same production
- Grain-producing hybrid
- Silage harvest approximately 95 days after seeding

FSG 315 BMR HYBRID PEARL MILLET
- BMR gene technology reduces plant lignin content versus conventional hybrid pearl millets, which results in a highly digestible forage with improved nutritional quality
- Extensive tillering capacity
- Dwarfing gene increases the leaf-to-stem ratio, improves standability and allows heavier grazing pressure
- Adapted to a wide soil pH range
- No Prussic Acid concerns

FSG 214 BMR SORGHUM X SUDAN
- Up to 20% increase in digestibility
- Significant increase in palatability
- Dry stalk gene improves harvest timing
- Multiple uses: hay, grazing, greenchop and silage

GREENGRAZER V SORGHUM X SUDAN
- Small-seeded and thin-stemmed type
- Dark green color with Green Top trait
- Anthracnose and Downy Mildew resistant

Farm Science Genetics is dedicated to providing agronomically and nutritionally superior forage varieties that fit into a wide range of management situations and withstand the most challenging growing conditions. Through careful breeding, in-depth research, and quality-controlled production, Farm Science Genetics offers the latest seed innovations to maximize profitability on the farms of forage producers across North America. For more information, stop by your local Co-op® and find a better way to grow.
New at Co-op

Weed Razer

Weed Razer (#6806206) is a unique V-shaped tool with razor-sharp blades that help make it the most efficient and effective lake weed-cutting implement available. Weed Razer will cut or shear almost any type of rooted aquatic vegetation – milfoil, lily pads, pond weed, and even cattails! Its blades easily shear through water and lake weeds, cleaning a 4-foot width with each throw. Weighing in at just 8 pounds, it is light enough to toss 30 feet or more yet heavy enough to sink to the bottom.

• Works great to cut in deep or shallow water
• Cuts at the base of the weeds
• Encounters little resistance because it slices the water weeds rather than dragging them

Suncast PB2600 Resin 31-Gallon Patio Storage Seat

The Suncast Weather-Resistant Patio Storage Seat (#6809713) offers convenient, compact storage for loads of outdoor gear while doubling as a handy bench seat. With a comfortable arched back and arm rests, this patio bench seat opens up to reveal 31 gallons of storage space for yard tools, pool supplies, or patio cushions. Available in light, neutral taupe and constructed of heavy-duty poly resin, this lightweight unit is fade-resistant, durable, and hassle-free. Its unique stay-dry design quickly drains water to help protect your stored items. Interior storage dimensions are 26 inches long, 16.75 inches wide, and 14.86 inches high. The seat is three feet wide.

Weed Raker

The Weed Raker (#6806207) is a lightweight tool designed specifically to remove floating lake and pond weeds. A perfect match to the Weed Razer, the Weed Raker quickly and easily removes cut water weeds from the water’s surface, reducing weed regrowth. The longest and widest aquatic lake rake available, the Weed Raker is also great for removing roots plus organic matter at the bottom of your ponds or lakes, again reducing weed regrowth. The Weed Raker features a four-section handle that snaps together to give you up to 11 feet of reach. It features a 37-inch-by-8-inch head and high-strength composite tines. Weighing less than 7 pounds, the Weed Raker is also designed to be tossed into the water with a simple underhand motion and retrieved via 43 feet of nylon rope.

Fill-Rite® RD812NH Portable Pump

The Fill-Rite RD812NH Portable Pump (#63362) is the only portable 12V DC pump that’s UL Listed for use with gasoline and other flammable liquids. The RD812NH lets you position the inlet and outlet hoses to fit your needs. Remove two bolts, rotate the flange, and you’re done. Offering bung, foot, or handheld mounts, the unique unit is versatile enough to fit your application.

Product Features

• Up to 8 GPM (30 LPM)
• Aluminum construction with ¾-inch inlet/outlet
• Low profile
• Thermally protected
• Self-priming with a 30-minute duty cycle
• Smooth in-line switch

Includes pump, manual nozzle, 8-foot discharge hose, 6-foot suction hose, and 10-foot quick-connect power cord with alligator clips.
**New at Co-op**

**Rooster Booster Poultry Insect Repellent**
Rooster Booster Poultry Insect Repellent (#6809347) is great for raising healthy, happy backyard poultry, fowl, pigeons, gamebirds, and gamefowl and poultry management. All-natural repellent made with Port Orford Cedar Oil and citronella. Safe and effective in repelling pests that bother birds and can spread disease. Contains 1% Port Orford Cedar Oil, 0.5% citronella oil, 0.3% peppermint oil, water, and coconut oil.

**Fresh Cab® Rodent Repellent**
Fresh Cab® Rodent Repellent (#6809350) keeps mice out of homes, cabins, basements, attics, garages, sheds, and storage units. It repels mice from pet food, bird seed, and livestock feed — just about anything that attracts mice. Fresh Cab® is the only botanical rodent repellent effective enough to be registered by the EPA and trusted by licensed pest control experts for both effectiveness and safety. For preventive use in noninfested areas, simply place one pouch for every 125 square feet. The scent lasts up to 90 days. For use in currently infested areas, increase use to 1 pouch per 8 square feet of floor space, and replace every 30 days.

**TYTAN Sisal Twine**
TYTAN Premium baler twine delivers all the strength, durability, and consistency you demand. TYTAN is made from high-quality sisalana fibers, which are longer and more durable than other fibers to produce a stronger twine that requires a lower twist. Available this spring in either Gold or Green, 9,000-foot or 10,000-foot runnage for square bales or 16,000 feet for big round bales. Since TYTAN twine is made from sisalana, it will naturally biodegrade when its job is done and won’t accumulate on your land.

**TYTAN PLUS**
TYTAN PLUS offers more ultraviolet protection for our area. This product is a high-density, polyethylene knitted material designed for full-width coverage of your big round bale. It is white in color with a blue tracer and has a marker approximately 175 feet from the end of the roll.

**TYTAN Standard**
TYTAN Standard is a high-density, polyethylene knitted material designed for full-width coverage of your big round bale. This product is white in color with a blue tracer and has a marker approximately 175 feet from the end of the roll.

**TYTAN Poly Twine**
TYTAN Plastic Twines are imported, mid-grade, and made from continuous strands of plastic. They are clean, uniform, knotless, and unattractive to rodents or insects. They come in a variety of product sizes tailored for your production needs. Available in 4,000-, 7,200-, 9,000-, 9,600- and 20,000-foot lengths with some double-spool and single-spool sizes and varying degrees of tensile strength.

For more information on TYTAN International twine or netting products, see your local Co-op.
More than likely, some growers are still watching the markets and planning their crop rotations on at least a few of their acres. While what will grow on the bulk of these acres, especially irrigated, has been decided for quite a while now, the question still arises: Is it OK to grow soybeans behind soybeans?

Obviously, a continuous rotation of the same crop can be hazardous, but with today’s technologies, growing soybeans back-to-back in the same field is just fine for short term. The key is to manage the situation correctly.

Let’s look at a few things that would be good to consider in a soybeans-behind-soybeans scenario:

First, pay close attention to your soil test. Consider what was applied the previous season. Sometimes we forget that soybeans actually remove more potassium than corn. Potassium provides disease resistance and drought tolerance. Don’t shortchange phosphorus, either. If you do not have a current soil test, pull one when conditions allow.

Second, make adjustments in your management program if you had any disease present last season. This ranges from seed selection through foliar fungicide applications. Don’t forget about seedling diseases either. A number of great seed treatments are available.

Third, take a closer look at seed treatments. Not all are created equal, so check with your local agronomist for the best options. For example, Warden CX has double the active ingredient as some other treatments on the market and has the highest rating on Phytophthora, Pythium, Rhizoctonia, and Fusarium. Whatever product you select, choose one with multiple modes of action to guarantee the broadest spectrum of both disease and insect control.

Fourth, assess what your weed control program looks like early in the process. With the weed-control issues we face today, it is more important than ever to start clean and finish clean. The old days of “a quart of one product” doesn’t cut it anymore.

Fifth, choose the right product. Just because a certain soybean variety worked great in a certain field last year is no assurance that it will happen again. Not only should you choose a variety based on yield maturity and yield potential, but you must also consider both disease and insect pressure. Diseases such as Soybean Cyst Nematode (SCN) and Soybean Death Syndrome (SDS) and Phytophthora can hang around in the soil for many years. For best disease management, plant later or even plant a shorter-season variety to reduce risk.

Sixth, pick fields with the least amount of potential trouble. Low-lying, wet fields are not optimal as they hold the greatest risk for diseases like Pythium and Phytophthora. If your options are limited, then choose varieties that are adaptable to the conditions and avoid planting too early. These acres will no doubt need most of our management attention. The list could go on and on and include more and more detail. But the main goal is to get a consistent, even stand, placing you in the best position to manage your soybean crop all season long. Hopefully, the steps listed above can point you in the right direction to achieve maximum yield and satisfaction.

Cultivate a strong finish.

Make this a championship season for your operation. Start crops off with WinField™ seed treatments for a healthy beginning and season-long benefits. WinField™ offers Warden CX®, an insecticide-fungicide seed treatment to protect high-value soybean seed from yield-robbing seedling disease and insect pests. To learn more, talk to your local agronomist or visit winfield.com
FORAGE provides low-cost nutrition to livestock, and for ruminant, equine, and other herbivores, forages should be high quality to aid in animal performance and possibly reduce feeding costs.

Forage quality relates to digestibility and how the animal utilizes nutrients after digestion. Whether harvesting and preserving forage as silage, baled hay, green chop, or pasture, consider these factors in producing high-quality, digestible forage:

- **Plant maturity** – Plant development greatly affects forage quality. As plants grow, lignin accumulates and has negative effects on digestibility in that digestibility will decline every two or three days past optimum maturity. Thus, extended harvest delays can impact forage quality.
- **Environment** – Rainfall, temperature, and the amount of sunlight directly impact forage quality. Higher temperatures will increase lignin accumulation and lower digestibility.
- **Forage species** – Substantial differences exist in nutritional quality between grasses and legumes. Legumes typically have higher protein content and faster digestibility. However, consider the environment, soil fertility, and harvest date before making decisions to plant forages.
- **Forages are generally evaluated physically and chemically. Following is a guide to important points in determining quality:**
  - **Physical**
    - **Stage of maturity** – Examine for presence of seed heads, flowers, or seed pods. These can indicate greater maturity of the plant at harvesting.
    - **Color** – A bright green would suggest minimal oxidation or sun bleaching. This could affect vitamin content.
    - **Leaf:Stem ratio** – Determine whether stems or leaves are more obvious. Higher-quality forages have more leaves.
    - **Foreign objects** – Look for mold, weeds, or poisonous plants. Notice other objects such as wire.
    - **Smell** – Quality forages will have a fresh aroma.
    - **Touch** – Note the forage’s stiffness. Hay should have a fine, pliable stem.
  - **Chemical**
    - **Dry matter/moisture** – Moisture content determines how well the forage will preserve. Hay should have a moisture concentration between 15 percent and 18 percent.
    - **Acid detergent fiber (ADF)** — ADF measures the more digestible portion of the cell wall reflecting the degree of lignification and, to some degree, digestibility. Higher values indicate lower quality forage.
    - **Neutral detergent fiber (NDF)** — NDF measures total cell wall content indicating maturity and also gives an indication of forage intake. A higher NDF value indicates greater maturity and lower quality.
    - **Crude protein** – Protein content can reflect on forage maturity as well as fertilization. In general, higher protein forage (within specie) are higher in quality.

Evaluate total forage requirements and select the crop, variety, and acreage that best meet the needs of the animals to be fed. It ultimately comes down to economics; better-quality forage produces greater responses for the animal. Contact your Co-op feed and animal health specialist to determine your forage needs.
Ashley Stapleton knew she’d hit rock bottom. Her methamphetamine addiction had taken over her life. The 24-year-old was homeless, helpless. She was sleeping outside in frigid temperatures, suffering from hypothermia.

She’d lost custody of her 2-year-old daughter, Maylee. She’d been in and out of rehab, in and out of jail.

“It was bad, and I was miserable,” Ashley says. “I knew I was going to die or go to prison. I needed to get clean, and I needed help to do that.”

Last November, she found that help at Blue Monarch, a long-term residential center in rural Coffee County for women recovering from addiction and abuse. Here, women like Ashley not only find a soft place to land. They’re also given the tools to get back up and thrive.

“It’s been everything to me,” says the Chattanooga native as she talks candidly about her experiences. “When I look in the mirror, I don’t even recognize myself anymore. I feel like I have purpose in this world now.”

On this clear, cold February afternoon, Ashley is anxiously anticipating a visit with her daughter and hopes to soon regain custody. Unlike most other addiction-treatment facilities, Blue Monarch will allow Maylee to live with her mother at the center, where founder and executive director Susan Binkley says the focus is both recovery and reconnection. Since the center opened in 2003, nearly 200 children have re-established relationships with their mothers who had lost custody.

“We realized early on that when a mom didn’t learn how to parent her children sober for the first time, then that could be the biggest relapse trigger of all,” Susan says. “We really started focusing more on what we do for the children and how we help women be effective mothers.”

Situated on 50 pastoral acres, Blue Monarch’s peaceful setting contrasts sharply with the turmoil its residents have experienced. For every story like Ashley’s, there are dozens more, each equally heartbreaking and heartwarming.

For example, there’s 27-year-old Cortneye Jones, a binge drug-user since age 15. “This is the most incredible place I’ve ever been. My kids are doing so well here. I’ve reconnected with them; I’m getting to know them as little people. When you’re on drugs, you don’t look at stuff like that. This beautiful place has given me an opportunity to know what real love is and to be happy with who we are and what we have, which is each other.”

Such life-changing experiences are only possible because of a life-changing dream Susan had nearly 20 years ago.
“In this dream, I was expected to read every page and detail of a thick book,” Susan says. “It was basically a business plan of how you put something like this together. When I woke up, I joked that I must have intercepted someone else’s dream. It didn’t have anything to do with my life.”

In 1998, she and husband Clay and their daughter, Mary, moved from Williamson County to bluff-view property near Tracy City. Along the way, Susan noticed the old Grundy County High School building. She’d seen it years before but was surprised to recall that it had appeared in that powerful dream.

A couple of years later, they opened a bakery and coffee shop, The Blue Chair, in nearby Sewanee. Here, Susan began hearing terrifying stories from some of her female employees about abuse and addiction.

Though she had no social work background, she began thinking of ways to help.

“I thought it would be awesome to set up a commercial kitchen and give jobs to these women who were struggling so much,” says Susan. “I realized it wouldn’t do any good just to give them a job; we’d need to provide services and maybe let them live there with their kids in a safe place. All of a sudden, it hit me that it was exactly what I’d dreamed about. I felt like that was what God was asking me to do.”

At first, Susan figured the center was destined to be located in the Grundy County High School building, which was now vacant. After several unsuccessful attempts to secure the building, she almost gave up. Then she heard about a local bed-and-breakfast that was for sale. The owners were moving to Israel and leaving it fully furnished. The big problem, though, was its $1 million price tag.

“I knew I wasn’t a qualified buyer, but I told them my whole story,” recalls Susan. “When I finished, the woman got tearful and said, ‘We always knew that God had asked us to build this place for someone else, and we always thought it would be for women who were hurting. We’re glad you finally showed up.’”

Susan knew acquiring the money was an issue, but that’s when the old high school came into play. Through her exploratory visits there, she’d met Madeline and Howell Adams, founders of the local Rotary Club, which met on site. Inspired by her idea, the couple generously offered to secure the loan and allow Blue Monarch to make the payments. Susan took possession of the property in April 2003, and the note was paid off in 2014.

In naming the new venture, Susan chose a butterfly for its symbolism of transformation and specifically the monarch because of its resilience. She added “blue” from the name of her café, which she sold in 2012.

“A monarch is special because it survives the winter when all the others die,” she says. “A monarch is fragile and yet so determined.”

Accommodating 10 to 12 families at a time, the sprawling Blue Monarch campus includes three main houses and a cottage for program graduates in a “transitional” phase.

“It’s a one- to two-year program, with a transitional program of 12 to 18 months, which is offered to everyone who graduates,” Susan explains. “Sometimes, they just need that extra time to gradually regain their freedom and privileges while still having accountability here.”

Women find Blue Monarch in different ways: court referrals, Department of Children’s Services, friends and family, churches, or others who have been through the program.

Most are dealing with drug addiction in addition to other struggles such as alcohol abuse, poverty, imprisonment, domestic violence, and estranged relationships with their children. There’s no cost for the residents of Blue Monarch, which is mainly funded through donations and grants. When the women start earning an income, they contribute 10 percent while completing the program.

“We look for women who have a desire to change,” says Susan. “It’s a huge commitment to come here because they’re expected to change every single aspect of what they do. Many of them come from generations of dysfunction.”

Described as an “intensive, self-help program,” the Christian-based curriculum combines individual counseling and treatment with classes on parenting and life skills, anger management, budgeting, and work ethics as well as Bible study.

“The women have a really full day, structured like a work schedule,” susan says. “They have to get their kids ready for daycare or school in the mornings and establish that routine. They have chores assigned to them and take turns cooking meals.”

The expectations and guidelines are stringent, and women can be dismissed for breaking the rules, being uncooperative, or violating safety. Susan says regular “family” meetings allow the residents to “hash out” any issues and learn how to resolve conflict in a healthy manner.

(See Wings, page 24)
Wings

(continued from page 23)

While the youngest woman has been 19 and the oldest 32, most are in their mid-20s. Children up to age 12 can live with their mothers, and older children are allowed to visit. The on-site children attend the local elementary school or day care facilities and receive their own curriculum of counseling, mentoring, and tutoring. Susan is also proud of the fact that 12 babies have been born while their mothers were at Blue Monarch.

“We had a reunion last year of the kids who lived with us the first year, and it was really powerful to hear them talk about their experiences,” says Susan. “They told us they wanted their kids and grandkids to live like they did here. That’s exactly what we’re hoping for. If we can change the perspective of the child, then we will be impacting future generations. We like to say we’re changing the family tree.”

Agriculture also plays an important role in Blue Monarch’s therapeutic approach. The center is home to a small herd of goats and a flock of exotic chickens, and residents are expected to help care for them. The benefits are numerous, emphasizes Susan, who purchases feed and other supplies from Coffee Farmers Cooperative in Manchester.

“Being on the farm provides an amazing atmosphere for children who have been through so many traumas,” says Susan. “They’re able chase goats, gather eggs, and run through the fields. These are activities moms and kids can do together, engaging them in a way they’ve never been before.”

Working with livestock also gauges the women’s sense of responsibility, which can factor into custody decisions, says Susan.

“Before we can tell a judge with confidence that a woman is prepared to care for her child, we observe how she takes care of our goats and chickens,” She explains. “It looks good if we can show that we trust her to take care of the animals properly.”

Admittedly, Susan says, not all women who come to Blue Monarch find success, but many do. A perfect example is former meth addict Dona Masters of Sparta, a graduate of the program who now runs Blue Monarch’s “Out of the Blue” granola kitchen in the basement of the main house.

The granola business, launched when Susan still operated her café, gives residents a chance to earn income while they’re in recovery and provides funds and awareness for Blue Monarch. The product is sold at local grocery stores, including Piggly-Wiggly and Kroger, as well as Whole Foods in Franklin, Nashville, Knoxville, and Chattanooga.

For Dona, working in the granola kitchen allows her to give something back to the program that has given her so much.

“I was in a 15-year meth addiction and went to jail several times,” says the 50-year-old grandmother of three. “Three years ago, I was caught with my son selling meth in a school zone. I knew I didn’t want that life anymore, but I didn’t know how to get out of it until I came to Blue Monarch. It’s just miraculous. I got clean, and I’m going to stay that way. I would like to encourage anyone, if you don’t think you can get out, you can. There’s a way.”

As Blue Monarch enters its 12th year, Susan says the program continues to grow and evolve. At first, the center only served surrounding counties but now accepts women from across Tennessee and other states as well.

“Over the past couple of years, it seems like we are finally reaping the benefits of all the hard work and hard lessons we’ve gone through in our first decade,” she says. “I feel like our program is stronger than it’s ever been, and the women and children who come here get a really, really rich experience.”

Fresh from the barn where she’d been caring for two newborn baby goats, Ashley beams as she brushes stray strands of hay from her flannel shirt and expresses what Blue Monarch has meant to her after the dangers and despair of a 10-year meth addiction:

“I have my life back,” she says. “I’ve never had support, and I feel like it’s a family unit here, with fun and healthy relationships I haven’t seen before. I love the chance to feed and take care of the animals, which makes me feel like I’m needed. And best of all, I finally get to be a mom, the way I’m supposed to be.”

To learn more, donate, or become involved with Blue Monarch, visit online at www.bluemonarch.org.
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THE RATION for the PASSION

CO-OP
logging through the mud on a dreary day tailor-made for late February, Mike Zavels is joined by sons Zack, 22, and Charles, 19, in a messy game of chase.

What the trio is pursuing — a lamb from among their flock of 80 Katahdin and Barbado sheep — proves to be quite elusive. The lithe little one darts in every direction to avoid being captured, zigging while the Zavelses zag.

Ironically, the lamb’s movements are similar to the strategies of the animal’s owners at Zavels Family Farms, a 300-acre diversified operation on the Knox and Grainger county line near Blaine. Their approach? Never stand still, dare to be different, and keep exploring avenues to broaden their agricultural offerings, which, in addition to sheep, includes commercial beef cattle, multiple varieties of produce, specialty hay and straw, and even a sawmill.

“We do a little bit of everything around here,” says Mike, a Knox Farmers Cooperative director who was 14 when his late father, Mose, then a Knoxville real estate magnate, established the farm in 1975 to run a beef cattle herd. “It’s rewarding to be able to make a living off of the land and try things that are unique. If you’re doing the same thing that everyone else is doing, you’re missing out on a lot of opportunities.”

To Mike’s point, the family’s lamb meat, fruits, and vegetables are direct-marketed at seven area farmers markets each April through October and to notable restaurant clientele such as Blackberry Farm in Walland and acclaimed Knoxville eateries Bistro by the Tracks, Café du Soleil, and the Knox Mason. Sure, the Zavelses offer the tried-and-true favorites like tomatoes, corn, and beans, but they also grow a number of nontraditional items, such as purple carrots, exotic peppers, and 17 — yes, 17 — varieties of eggplant. (Who knew that many kinds of eggplant even existed?)

“We’re kind of known as the ‘weird produce people’ at the farmers markets,” chuckles Charles, a freshman at the University of Tennessee in Knoxville, as he surveys a row of kale being grown in one of the farm’s high-tunnel greenhouses. “That’s fine by us. We like to grow things that most everyone else doesn’t do so that we can carve out our own niche. If there are 20 people at the same place selling the same corn and beans, your odds of success go down.”

And it’s not just what the Zavels family brings to market that differentiates them, according to Zack, who will graduate next month from Carson-Newman University in Jefferson City and join his father full time at the farm. It’s also how they determine the goods to take.

“We don’t pick stuff and store it in a cooler or refrigerator for weeks before we haul it to market,” says Zack, who leads the family’s Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) venture in which participants purchase “shares” of the farm’s harvest. “If we take something to market, it was picked that morning. You don’t get much fresher than that.”

This niche-market mentality also extends to the animal ag side of Zavels Family Farms. Last year, the Zavelses obtained their retail meat license and added Katahdin sheep to the Barbado breed, which Mike has been raising for more than 20 years.

“We talked about getting into retail beef, but our thought process was that we could do better with lamb because it is more of a niche market,” explains Mike.

“But we still didn’t know how many people in East Tennessee would actually eat lamb when we started last year. Well, we couldn’t keep enough meat on hand — about every 10 days, we

Mike Zavels, center, is flanked by sons Zack, left, and Charles as he holds one of the lambs from their flock of Katahdin and Barbado hair sheep at their family’s multi-faceted farm near Blaine. The Zavelses have built a loyal following at area farmers markets with their lamb meat and the more than 20 varieties of fruits and vegetables that they grow.

Mike says that Barbado sheep, which originated in Texas, are “easy keepers.”

“With a diverse lineup of offerings that continues to grow, Zavels Family Farm is leaving a lasting imprint on the Knoxville-area agricultural scene.

Story and photos by Chris Villines
would have a batch processed over at Snapps Ferry [in Greeneville], and it would sell out quickly.”

This new way of presenting lamb direct to the public is a vast improvement over the method previously used by the farm, adds Mike, who holds a degree from UT Knoxville as does wife Tammy, a former educator. Their daughter, Lindsey, 25, is a Carson-Newman graduate and former Knox Farmers Co-op employee who is now an interior design specialist for all Knoxville-area Home Depot stores.

“We were just selling the whole animal direct to individuals,” Mike says. “There was a big Muslim population that would come and buy the sheep and process it themselves. We weren’t making any money doing business that way so we made the switch last year and have been pleasantly surprised.”

In nearly all aspects of the farm, the Zavelses rely on products from their local Co-op, including a range of Co-op feeds to help their sheep stay nutritionally sound. Depending on stage of development, the animals receive Co-op’s 12% Pelleted Ewe Developer & Gestation Feed-CTC (#355), 16% Coarse Lamb Grower/Finisher-CTC (#359), or 14% Pelleted Ewe Lactation (#3553).

“We have a group of 25 Katahdins that we’ve separated out for processing, and we’re feeding them the #359,” says Zack, who attended Tennessee Farmers Cooperative’s 2014 Leadership Advance Tour. “Our ewes start on the #355 and switch over to the #35353 after they’ve lambed. We utilize the creep feeder for the lambs so they can get their share of feed, because the big ones will sort of push the little ones to the side when we bulk-feed. And we always supplement their feeding program with a lot of high-protein hay.”

Co-op Sheep Lyc Tub (#RB0714R) is another supplement that Mike “firmly believes” has a profound positive impact on the flock’s growth and development. “We try not to run out of them, because it seems like as soon as you do, the milk production on the mamas goes way down, and the babies don’t grow nearly as well,” he says.

“A group of soon-to-be processed sheep jockey for position at the bunk feeder as Charles pours in Co-op 16% Coarse Lamb Grower/Finisher-CTC (#359), one of three different Co-op sheep feed varieties utilized by the Zavelses.

“We saw about anything that was never more important than the past two months when plummeting temperatures combined with snow and freezing precipitation tested the mettle of many Tennessee farming operations.”

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“Those tubs are a real asset as far as keeping the sheep healthy and looking good, and they last for a long time.”

“Those tomatoes were huge,” says Charlie. “They were so big that we had to cut them in half to get them through the processor.”

“Speaking of tomatoes, several varieties of the juicy Southern staple are grown in the farm’s greenhouses over the winter. The crop of yellow tomatoes that filled one greenhouse this year particularly impressed Charlie, whom Mike and Zack agree has the ‘green thumb’ of the family.”

“Those tomatoes were huge,” Charlie says. “They were the best yellow ones we’ve ever grown. That sun would come through the plastic and help bring out the natural sugars of the tomatoes.”

With the 2015 calendar signaling the arrival of spring, the cycle of growing, selling, greeting repeat customers, and welcoming new ones begins anew for the Zavelses.

“By the middle of April, all of the cool-season crops we’ve been growing will be transplanted out into the field,” says Mike. “Most of our markets open in April, and this year’s going to be a real challenge to have enough for those first few weeks. But I’m excited to get it going again.”

For more information about Zavels Family Farms, call 865-640-6209 or search for their page on picktnproducts.org.

To learn more about Co-op Sheep and Lamb Feeds, visit with the professionals at your local Co-op.
Tennessee’s Co-op family sent 23 outstanding representatives to the 2015 Young Leaders Conference Feb. 27 and 28 at Drury Plaza Hotel in Franklin, a popular event staged annually by the Tennessee Council of Cooperatives (TCC) and Tennessee Farm Bureau Federation (TFBF).

Co-op attendees joined some 300 others — many of them members of Farm Bureau’s Young Farmers & Ranchers organization — from across the state for the annual weekend of motivation, recreation, and education. Sponsored by Co-op were Matt and Rebecca Blount, Lincoln Farmers; John and Mary Margaret Chester and Chris Fowler, Weakley Farmers; George Robert and Elizabeth Cline, Jefferson Farmers; Ethan and Caroline Huffines, Robertson Cheatham Farmers; Zach and Heather Jolly, White County Farmers; Andrew and Cassie Massey and Kyle Markum, Maury Farmers; Kyle and Miranda Owen, Smith Farmers; Ryan Pilkinton, Tennessee Farmers; Cory and Kerri Thompson, Knox Farmers; Jamie and Ashley Weaver, Coffee Farmers; and Danny and Brandi Wilson, Cumberland Farmers.

The conference brings together couples and individuals from across the state who are eager to learn more about cooperatives, share their views about agriculture, and discuss current issues facing rural Americans.

“It’s humbling and inspiring to see a new group of young leaders every year at this conference,” says Keith Harrison, TCC’s marketing manager and president of TCC. “Our future is in the hands of these incredibly bright young people who want to make their mark in improving our state’s rural economy.”

With the theme, “Cooperatively building a better Tennessee,” the 2015 conference offered a wide range of sessions, from leadership skills to issues facing rural Tennessee to an overview of Farm Bureau’s Ag-in-the-Classroom program. Middle Tennessee State University’s Dr. Alanna Vaught led a breakout on “Preparing the Next Generation,” and University of Tennessee Institute of Agriculture’s Lisa Stearns discussed “Raising the Profile of Tennessee Agriculture.” Bill Johnson, chief executive officer of Farm Credit Mid-America, addressed the group in a general session, and Cowboy Dan and his band entertained attendees.

Conference participants also toured Second Harvest Food Bank in Nashville, where they donated 211 pounds of food and volunteered to pack boxes for families struggling with hunger.

Dan Wheeler, former Tennessee Commissioner of Agriculture, was presented an annual award given by TCC to an individual who has shown dedication to the cooperative cause in Tennessee.

Wheeler, who grew up on a family farm in Cumberland County, spent 30 years with the Tennessee Farm Bureau Federation. In 1995 he became the state’s 42nd commissioner of agriculture, leading the development of 38 key initiatives to help build Tennessee’s farm and forestry industries.

In 2002, he became the director of UT’s Center for Profitable Agriculture, retiring in 2007. He and his wife of 49 years, Carol, live in Columbia.

In the award presentation, Wheeler’s legacy was described as “building partnerships and cooperation among producer groups, government, education, and agriculture. One of his top strengths has always been his ability to bring people together to make things happen.”

TCC made a $1,000 contribution in Wheeler’s honor to the John Willis Memorial Scholarship fund, which provides financial aid to deserving college agriculture students in the state.

At the conference, TCC elected Scott Lewis of Farm Credit Mid-America as its new secretary/treasurer. In addition to Harrison as president, TCC is also led by Bruce Bradford, River Valley Ag Credit, vice president; adult programs; and Todd Blocker, Tennessee Electric Cooperative Association, vice president, education. Co-op is also represented on the board by Paul Sullivan, Dickson Farmers manager, and Scott Cooper, Davidson Farmers manager.

For more information, visit tennesseecouncilofcoops.org.

Young leaders are ‘cooperatively building a better Tennessee’

Conference offers opportunity to learn about co-ops, agriculture, and rural issues

Tennessee Council of Cooperatives (TCC) President Keith Harrison welcomes attendees to the 2015 Young Leaders Conference on Friday night, Feb. 27, in Franklin. The event is jointly organized by the TCC and Farm Bureau’s Young Farmers & Ranchers.
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When the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) introduced new farm fuel regulations in 2002, Gary Hall of Sharon knew he’d eventually have to make changes to comply with the new requirements.

Like most farmers, he was in no hurry to rush out and spend money on a “dead” expense, but last year when he and his farming partners, son Glen and brother Gail, decided to expand the farm’s equipment shed an additional 37 feet — right into the path of the farm’s three fuel tanks — they seized the opportunity to upgrade their entire fuel storage system.

“It wasn’t a matter of whether or not to bring it up to code,” says Gary, a member of Weakley Farmers Cooperative’s board of directors. “It was a choice about creating a containment system that would last for a long, long time and meet every standard. Not only is it environmentally safe, but it’s much more convenient for us, too.”

The Halls are working to meet requirements found in the EPA’s Spill Prevention, Control and Countermeasures (SPCC) amendment, which specifies that farmers who store bulk amounts of oil products, including fuel, must have a written and implemented plan for preventing and handling spills. For farmers like the Halls who store more than 10,000 gallons of oil, the EPA requires a professional engineer to certify the farm’s SPCC. Farmers who store between 1,320 and 10,000 gallons of oil products can self-certify their plan.

In this document, farmers describe their plan in three categories — spill prevention, spill containment, and spill cleanup — which may include how the products are stored, location of storage units, the farm’s topography, steps to be taken in the event of a spill, a list of emergency contacts, personnel training efforts, security measures, record-keeping methods, procedures for inspecting and testing tanks, and plans for containing and cleaning up the effects of a spill. Plans are kept on the farm; the EPA does not receive a copy.

Gary Hall chose a centralized location for the upgraded fuel storage system on his family’s Sharon farm to allow easy access for farm equipment and fuel tankers from any direction. The new system includes three double-walled tanks supported by a reinforced concrete slab and protected by a shelter that has an attached room.

First step for the Halls — who raise wheat, soybeans, and corn on 3,600 acres that include land purchased by the family in 1959 — was to choose a more centralized location for their new fuel system that would allow easy access from any direction for tanker trucks and farm equipment. Then Gary added three double-walled tanks to replace his three single-walled units, one of them bought by Gary, left, upgraded the fuel storage system with his son Glen in mind. “I want it to last at least 50 years so he won’t have to worry about it.”
his dad, Calvin, in 1980 at a Missouri truck stop. The largest new tank, which holds 10,000 gallons of farm diesel, features an electronic fuel-level gauge and a 3-inch anti-spill hookup with a containment box that catches any overflow during fueling. The two smaller tanks, each holding 1,000 gallons, also have fuel-level gauges, and all three are equipped with leak detection gauges.

The tanks are anchored on a 32-by-36-foot sloped concrete slab reinforced with piers that were placed on top of one foot of sand, providing long-term stability for the tanks, which can weigh up to 120,000 pounds when full. The concrete area is covered by a metal roof and attached to a small, insulated storage room where the Halls store their grease and Diesel Exhaust Fluid (DEF), an additive for new diesel motors that must be stored away from sunlight. These barrels and jugs of oil are stored on platforms that catch and contain any leaks inside the room. Gary also keeps a supply of soaker pads used to catch or clean up any oil that might spill during the fueling process, in the attached storage area as well as biohazard containers for the used pads.

“Instead of just trying to meet the minimum standards set by the EPA, Gary has created a fuel storage facility that goes above and beyond,” says Charlie Cochran, a TFC tires, batteries, accessories/fuel specialist. “If I was building one, I’d want it to be exactly like this.”

Gary admits that he purposely did more than required.

“Besides wanting to meet all of today’s standards, I tried to anticipate what future standards might be because I don’t want my son to worry with fuel storage in his lifetime,” says Gary. “It wasn’t cheap, but when it’s still here in 50 years, it will be worth the extra expense.”

Gary adds that creating a whole new system with the most up-to-date equipment also gives him peace of mind.

“This set-up protects our farmland in two ways,” says Gary. “First, it keeps our land from being contaminated from a spill, and second, it protects us financially because a bad spill could cost us a lot of money. This was something I knew we’d eventually have to take care of. I realize the EPA hasn’t been enforcing these regulations up to this point, but it’s coming — at some point we’ll all have to show that we are trying to prevent spills.”

For more information about SPCC rules, visit www.epa.gov/oem/content/spcc or download a copy at www.epa.gov/oem/docs/oil/spcc/specfarms.pdf. The Asmark Institute, which works with the Co-op system on regulatory compliance, also offers an interactive web template at www.asmark.org/mySPCC to help farmers develop an SPCC plan. Additionally, University of Tennessee Extension provides SPCC resources at http://wastemgmt.ag.utk.edu/SPCC.

Visit your local Co-op store for information about double-walled tanks and other farm fuel storage needs.
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On Saturday morning at the Memphis Farmers Market, it’s not unusual to hear Joe Paul — sporting a beard, a baseball cap, and a wry smile — shout at a passing shopper: “Give me a minute, and I’ll change your life!”

The charismatic marketer admits that his outgoing personality probably attracts most customers to the booth where he’s selling his own Papi Joe’s pepper products, but he says it’s the quality of what he’s selling that gets people to make a purchase. “Once they taste it, they buy it; my hot sauce sells itself,” says Joe. “I just have to convince people to give it a try.”

At the 2014 Weekend of Fire competition in Fairfield, Ohio, where attendees — not a group of judges — vote for their favorites, Joe proved his point in a big way.

Sponsored by Jungle Jim’s International Market, the three-day event in October attracted nearly 4,000 participants who taste-tested 350 sauces and chose the best from categories including BBQ, salsa, and hot specialty product. In the most competitive category, hot sauce, Papi Joe’s Tennessee Pepper Sauce received the first-place trophy — for the third year in a row.

Quite a feat, considering the Collierville resident only started selling the sauce in 2011.

Six years earlier, Joe and his wife, Kay, began experimenting with Tabasco peppers from their backyard garden in hopes of creating the perfect hot sauce. “We had these peppers, and we love to experiment in the kitchen, so it just made sense,” he explains. “It wasn’t until after we started giving it away to friends that people suggested we bottle and sell it.”

In September 2011, after receiving Food and Drug Administration certification to process acidified foods, Joe began brewing and bottling batches of his spicy sauce at Jones Orchard’s commercial kitchen in Millington. “Before I cooked my first ‘official’ pot of sauce, I bought 500 empty bottles and then wondered what I’d do with all of them,” laughs Joe. These days, he often sells that many bottles within hours. As the popularity of his product grows, Joe takes pride in maintaining the same high standards and quality ingredients used in the very first bottles.

With every cooking session, Joe still carefully follows the original recipe, which includes local tomatoes, picked at peak ripeness and immediately blanched and frozen, and Joe’s homegrown, dehydrated Tabasco peppers. Vinegar, chopped garlic, and green chiles round out the sauce, which simmers for several hours before bottling.

Kay, a Collierville realtor, and 34-year-old daughter Katherine — mother of two — then label the product, apply shrink wrap, stamp lot numbers, and add the final touch to each bottle: a tied raffia string with a recipe card for Cheesy Bacon Dip. Attaching the recipe card to each bottle is a nod to the Pauls’ marketing flair — most of the time it’s one taste of Kay’s dip at farmers markets and festivals that sells the product.

Over the past few years, Kay has perfected several recipes that incorporate Papi Joe’s Tennessee Pepper Sauce. Eleven customer favorites are printed on a colorful 4-x-8½ inch laminated card that’s included with each purchase.

“I think including Kay’s card of recipes is key,” says Joe. “It gives our customer ideas on how to use our sauce in their cooking. Otherwise, people find them-
selves just eating it on crackers, which is OK, too.”

When the pair was invited to sell their product at Rossville’s Smokin’ on the Wolf barbecue festival two years ago, Kay instantly knew she needed to create something special for the event.

“I thought, ‘Why not create our own amazing barbecue sauce using Papi Joe’s signature sauce?’” she says. “We asked one of the competitors to use it, and he won second place. When people asked how they could buy it, Joe decided to start bottling it, too.”

In addition to selling their wares — with the help of son Don, 36 — at regional farmers markets and festivals, the Pauls also market Papi Joe’s sauces through 35 retailers in five states. With a focus on manageable growth and a commitment to quality, they prefer to have their products in small or family-owned businesses.

Jones Orchard, where Joe’s commercial venture began, is one of the first stores to stock the Pauls’ sauces. “I can’t say enough good things about Papi Joe’s sauces,” says Juanita Jones, co-owner of her family’s agritourism venue and member of Tipton Farmers Co-operative. “They have a unique product and are committed to the consistency of every batch. I can’t say enough good things about them or their sauce.”

Most Tennessee merchants carrying Papi Joe’s products are located in West and Middle Tennessee; East Tennesseeans can find Papi Joe’s sauces at the Knoxville Visitors Center and the Local Butcher Shop in Alcoa. A complete list of retailers, along with addresses and phone numbers, is available at www.papijoes.com.

However, the pair’s newest product, Papi’s Sassy Bloody Mary mix, made from pepper sauce by-products, is only available online or at farmers markets and festivals. The idea for this latest concoction germinated from a party where Joe, who always carries a flask of his sauce with him, offered it to delighted guests as an extra kick for their Bloody Marys. The concept blossomed into reality when Kay suggested he develop his own mix, using the derivative left over from the sauce-cooking process. The flavorful result received such rave reviews that the pair decided to sell it by the quart.

“Using both Papi Joe’s sauce and the leftover pulp gives this mix a unique taste that we believe is unmatchable,” says Joe. “We can hardly keep it in stock.”

With growing demand for their line of products, the Pauls could no longer justify the time spent traveling 75 miles roundtrip to Jones Orchard in Millington and started looking for a commercial kitchen closer to home last year. When they found a 100-year-old building available in the Rossville historic district, the pair jumped at the chance. After a six-month renovation, Papi Joe’s two-story kitchen and retail space include prep room, pantry, office, upstairs storage, and showroom with a gas stove; a 40-gallon, steam kettle; a large work table; and the focal point of the space, an original wooden counter from a general store that opened in 1917.

“Since I grew up working on a horse and tobacco farm in Lexington, Ky., the small-town feel of Rossville suits me just fine,” says Joe, a former Navy computer specialist. “The community has welcomed us, and we’re thrilled that we are able to open our first commercial kitchen here.”

The Pauls will officially celebrate their grand opening with a ribbon-cutting at 3:30 p.m. on Friday, April 24, and an open house on the following day from 2 to 5 p.m. Papi Joe’s is located at 505 Main Street in Rossville.

“This grand opening celebration means so much to me,” says Joe. “What I’m doing now is beyond my wildest dreams. I’m so proud to be able to share this pepper sauce with people. Like I said, it’ll change your life; it certainly has changed mine.”

For more information about Papi Joe’s products, visit papijoes.com, e-mail him at joe@papijoes.com, or call 901-604-5455. Follow Papi Joe’s on Facebook for the latest information on upcoming farmers markets, festivals, and in-store appearances.

LEFT: Dehydrated Tabasco peppers grown in the Pauls’ backyard star in Papi Joe’s Tennessee Pepper Sauce. RIGHT: Joe’s daughter Katherine, left, and wife Kay label and shrinkwrap the bottles for shipping.
Welcome spring with superfood spinach

The star of spring gardens, spinach is not only a welcome burst of green this time of year but also one of the world’s healthiest vegetables. Notoriously nutritious, spinach is rich in vitamins and minerals with twice as much fiber as most other greens and an excellent source of powerful, disease-fighting antioxidants.

What’s more, this superfood is an extremely versatile ingredient in all types of recipes, as proven by this month’s reader submissions. Delicious both raw and cooked, fresh and frozen, spinach is an easy, healthy addition to many meals. Our featured recipe, “Spinach Penne Toss,” is a tasty way to use all the leafy greens that will soon be filling gardens across the region. The recipe comes to us from Mildred H. Edwards of Lebanon, our Cook-of-the-Month for April.

Other featured recipes are Spinach Maria, Spinach Bacon Cheesy Dip, Spinach & Chicken Roll, Sausage & Spinach Casserole, Spinach Souffle, Spinach Dumplings, and Spinach-Topped Tomato Slice Bake.

Enjoy!

What you will need:

- 5 (10-ounce) packages frozen chopped spinach
- 4½ cups milk
- 1 teaspoon dry mustard or 1 tablespoon regular mustard
- 1 teaspoon granulated garlic
- 1¾ teaspoons crushed dried red pepper
- ½ medium onion, finely chopped
- 1 (6-ounce) package fresh baby spinach
- ¾ cup crumbled cooked bacon
- ½ cup crumbled feta cheese
- ½ cup oil-packed sun-dried tomatoes, chopped
- 2 tablespoons cider vinegar
- ¼ teaspoon pepper
- ⅛ teaspoon salt

Directions:

Cook pasta according to package directions. Meanwhile, in a large skillet, sauté red pepper and onion in 1 tablespoon oil for three to four minutes or until tender.

Drain pasta and place in a serving bowl. Add the red pepper mixture, spinach, bacon, feta cheese, and tomatoes. In a jar with a tight-fitting lid, combine the vinegar, pepper, salt, and remaining oil; shake well. Drizzle over pasta mixture, and toss to coat.

Yield: 10 servings.
excess water as possible out of the spinach.

Heat milk and spices in a 4-quart saucepan on medium heat to just below boiling. Reduce heat and simmer. Sauté onion in 1 tablespoon butter on medium heat for five to eight minutes; add to liquid.

Combine the 5 tablespoons melted butter with the flour in a small sauté pan to make a roux. Add to milk in saucepan and mix well. Cook until sauce thickens. Cut all cheese into cubes and add to saucepan. Continue to mix until cheese is melted and blended. (Be careful not to burn the cheese). Remove from heat; cool for 15 minutes.

Place the spinach in the bottom of a long, shallow casserole dish, spreading evenly. Pour cheese on top. With a fork, swirl the spinach with the cheese to mix well. Top with the grated Monterey Jack cheese. Bake at 350º for 12 to 15 minutes, until hot and bubbly.

Deborah Quillen Louden AgCentral Farmers Cooperative

Spinach Bacon Cheesy Dip

1 (10-ounce) box chopped spinach, drained
1 pound Velveeta cheese, cut in small squares
4 ounces cream cheese
1 can Rotel tomatoes, undrained
1 pound bacon, cooked and crumbled
½ cup finely chopped green onions

Put all ingredients into a microwave bowl; microwave until melted. Stir. Serve with your favorite chips.

Polly Dodd Toone Mid-South Farmers Cooperative

Spinach & Chicken Roll

½ clove of garlic
1 pound spinach
1 tablespoon oil
1 bag of precooked chicken strips
1 can crescent rolls

In skillet crush garlic; add spinach and oil and cook on medium heat for two minutes. Roll out crescent dough. Arrange chicken strips and spinach mixture on top; roll up. Cook for 30 minutes or until done. Serve hot.

Betty Rhodes Jackson Mid-South Farmers Cooperative

Sausage & Spinach Casserole

1½ pounds sausage
⅛ cup finely chopped onion
6 eggs
1 cup milk
¼ cup chopped fresh basil or 1 tablespoon dried basil
½ teaspoon garlic powder
Salt and pepper to taste
5 cups fresh spinach or 1 box frozen spinach
4 cups cubed bread
½ cup chopped artichoke hearts
8 ounces Monterey Jack cheese, divided

Brown sausage and onion until sausage is done and onion is tender. In a medium bowl, whisk together eggs, milk, basil, garlic powder, salt, and pepper. In a large bowl, combine spinach, cubed bread, sausage and onion mixture, artichoke hearts, and half the cheese. Add egg mixture and toss to coat evenly. Transfer to greased 11-x-9-inch baking dish. Cover and refrigerate overnight or for at least six hours.

Bake, covered, for 35 to 40 minutes at 375º. Remove from oven and top with remaining half of the cheese. Bake, uncovered, for an additional 15 to 20 minutes or until puffed and golden brown. Let casserole rest for 10 to 15 minutes before cutting.

Rebecca Ford Adams Montgomery Farmers Cooperative

Spinach Soufflé

5 ounces frozen spinach or 1 to 1¼ cups blanched fresh spinach, chopped
½ cup onion, chopped
2 eggs
⅛ cup shredded cheese
⅛ cup sour cream
1 tablespoon flour
2 tablespoons butter, softened
½ teaspoon salt
⅛ teaspoon black pepper
Mix spinach and onion together in bowl; set aside.

In a separate bowl, mix eggs, cheese, sour cream, flour, butter, salt, and pepper. Add spinach and onion; mix well. Place in a 1½-quart greased casserole dish. Bake at 350º for about 25 minutes or until lightly browned on top.

Agnes Schrock Monterey Overton and Putnam Farmers Cooperatives

Spinach Dumplings

1 box frozen spinach
2 beef bouillon cubes
1 small onion, finely chopped
2 tablespoons butter or margarine
2 cups soft bread crumbs
½ cup Parmesan cheese
1 teaspoon garlic
½ teaspoon pepper
Salt to taste
Thick tomato slices
Mozzarella cheese

Cook spinach in small amount of water with bouillon cubes. Sauté onions in butter. Stir in bread crumbs, Parmesan cheese, garlic, pepper, salt, and spinach.

Top tomato slices with mixture. Bake 15 to 20 minutes at 350º. Top with mozzarella cheese and return to oven for cheese to melt.

Serving suggestion: For a complete meal, place tomato on a fried or grilled pork chop.

Peggy Jeffers Jonesborough Washington Farmers Cooperative

Spinach-Topped Tomato Slice Bake

Yield: Six to eight servings.

Earleen Stark Dickson Farmers Cooperative

Cheese, please, for June Dairy Month

Just say “cheese” for our June “What’s cooking?” column! We’re celebrating the contributions of milk producers and the goodness of milk products during June Dairy Month by featuring your favorite recipes that include cheese — any type — as a main ingredient.

The person submitting the recipe judged best will be named Cook-of-the-Month and receive $10. Others sending recipes chosen for publication will receive $5. Each winner will also receive a special “What’s cooking?” certificate.

Monday, May 4, is the deadline for your cheese recipes.

Don’t forget: Only recipes with complete, easy-to-follow instructions will be considered for publication. Several recipes are disqualified each month because they do not contain all the information needed to prepare the dishes successfully. Recipes featured in “What’s cooking?” are not independently tested, so we must depend on the accuracy of the cooks sending the dishes successfully. Always use safe food-handling, preparation, and cooking procedures.

Send entries to: Recipes, Tennessee Cooperator, P.O. Box 3003, LaVergne, TN 37086. You can submit more than one recipe in the same envelope. You can also e-mail them to: amorgan@ourcoop.com. Be sure to include your name, address, telephone number, and the Co-op with which you do business. Recipes that appear in the “What’s cooking?” column will also be published on our website at www.ourcoop.com.
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Farming ‘first class’
Jeremiah and Candace Malone build their registered Hereford operation with a commitment to quality

Just as genetic traits tend to skip a generation, Candace Johnson’s farming “gene” lay dormant until she married Jeremiah Malone in 2006.

That’s when the newlyweds started their own livestock operation on land near Lawrenceburg where her grandfather, the late Flenoy Johnson, had raised cattle since the 1950s. His son, Doran — Candace’s father — chose not to farm, pursuing a career with National HealthCare Corp., where he is senior vice president.

“Granddaddy told Doran it would be hard to make a living on the farm, and he might want to go to town and get a job — so that’s what he did,” Jeremiah says. “When Candace and I got married, we wanted to farm here, not just as an occupation but as a legacy we could carry on.”

Though he grew up in Henry County, Jeremiah’s family had Giles County roots, and he met Candace while working at Browns Ferry Nuclear Plant in northern Alabama and running his own concrete business. With a passion for working with animals, Candace operates her own business, too — Canine Solutions — a facility that offers dog boarding, training, and grooming.

Together, the pair combined their love of agriculture and entrepreneurial spirit to establish JM Cattle Co. — as in “Johnson Malone,” not “Jeremiah Malone” — starting out with eight Angus cows. Recognizing the added value of black white-faced cattle in the marketplace, they soon switched to registered Herefords, seeking out the best genetics.

“We learned really quick that it doesn’t cost that much more to go first class,” says Jeremiah. “You get what you pay for. If you go out there, take your time, and get a higher-quality animal to take your genetics to the next level, you’ll see that reward come back.”

Today, the 38-year-olds have nearly 270 head of both red Herefords and the newer black Hereford breed, which has existed only since 1997. Black Herefords, Jeremiah explains, are bred to pass on desirable traits of the red Hereford — docility, maternal instincts, feed efficiency, and heavier weaning weights — while creating the black-and-white coloring that tends to bring more money at market.

“The Hereford is best for your straight Angus-based herd, but black Hereford genetics are best for mixed herds,” he says. “If you’ve got Charolais, Simmental, Gelbvieh, or anything that could throw an off-color calf, the black Hereford will dominate and produce black white-faced cattle that’ll bring a premium.”

The difference is in the dollars, Jeremiah says.

“Last year, on the steers we sold, we saw the same type of calves bring $125 more for white-faced cattle than straight black,” he says. “That’s a big difference in your profit margin.”

JM Cattle Co. is now one of the largest black Hereford operations east of the Mississippi River, listed among only a handful of breeders in Tennessee by the American Black Hereford Association (ABHA). The Malones focus on buying top-end cows, justifying the expense through an embryo transfer program that takes full advantage of that investment by producing more offspring.

“We really love the Hereford breed. It’s established and proven,” says Jeremiah. “But we like the new feeling of the black Herefords, too. It’s a really good time to be in that business.”

Starting out with land of their own gave them an advantage, the Malones admit, but they say young producers have many other challenges in building an operation from the ground up.

“We’ve been in the growth process, and it’s extremely hard, no matter what level you’re growing at,” says Jeremiah. “Like any business, you struggle with cash flow, and that’s been one of our biggest challenges.”

The rigors of the registered business are also demanding, he adds.

“Working cattle to the extent a registered breed is more hands-on,” he says. “We’re doing all the standard practices plus a little more, such as weights, ultrasound data, genomic testing — those things that put you into the next level. We live and die by our data.”

Even with such a young operation, the Malones have already built a solid reputation in the Hereford industry. They sold the highest-priced group of heifers at the 2013 ABHA National Sale, and they’re proud that one of their Hereford bulls, “Apollo,” is a trait leader in 13 categories.

On Sept. 19, the Malones will mark another milestone when they hold their first production sale featuring their cattle and those from select consignors. Jeremiah says the event represents a huge step forward.

“If you don’t have a vision of where you’re going to be, you’ll fall behind,” he says. “You can’t just live in today. You’ve got to see five, 10 years down the road. That’s what we see. We’re building something for our kids right here and preserving what was started by Granddaddy Johnson. When you start adding in the history of that, it makes everything seem more worthwhile.”

For more information, visit online at jm-cattlecompany.com, call 931-309-6805, or email jrmalone20@gmail.com.
This cabin is a replica of the home where Candace’s grandparents, Flenoy and Jewel Johnson, lived after they married in 1937. Named “Johnson’s Beginnings,” it was built in 1997 to commemorate their 60th anniversary. The Johnsons established the farm where Jeremiah and Candace now raise cattle. They’re proud of that heritage and hope to eventually pass the farm down to their children, Lathan and Savannah Grace.
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