



U.P. Ag Connections Newsletter

September 2018

Agricultural News from MSU Extension and AgBioResearch

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It's a big world out there...and where do I get good farming information?

Sometimes the U.P. agriculture community can seem like a mighty small and close-knit group. After all, many (most?) farmers do business with the same small set of supply and service companies. If you are in the ag supply or service business, the same idea applies in reverse... supply and service companies doing business with the same small set of U.P. farmers. Access to experienced U.P. farmers and knowledgeable supply and service company reps provides a valuable source of information on all kinds of important decisions.

Additional sources of reliable information include your local Michigan State University Extension and other university staff, commodity organizations (dairy, beef, corn, potatoes, wheat, dry beans, dairy), county conservation districts, USDA Natural Resource and Conservation Service and Farm Service Agency people. Local food organizations such as municipal farmers markets, the U.P. Food Exchange and regional food co-ops can also provide great information on local marketing opportunities.

There are, of course, less reliable sources of information, too. Every kind of viewpoint and advice imaginable is available on the internet. You can 'google' any topic, but be careful what you believe. There are plenty of sincere people promoting their theories and views on-line, some defensible and some not. Also a lot of others whose motivations are questionable. Television and radio offer a mixture of solid ag-related information, but sometimes include questionable, incorrect or misleading content. This is nothing new, and certainly not confined to agricultural issues. The coffee shop is a good place to exchange local farming news, but for serious issues some further investigation is suggested.

Many farmers and ag businesses subscribe to good farming periodicals to stay up-to-date. It is easy to pick out people who keep current...they always ask the toughest questions. There are many options for these kinds of subscriptions, including several free on-line options. It's also a great idea to find university information on your topics of interest. For example, I often refer to the [MSU Forage Connection](#) and the University of Wisconsin Extension [Team Forage](#) website for good, U.P.-applicable forage information. Extension information from Minnesota, the Dakotas, other northern U.S. states and Ontario can also be valuable.

Speaking of Ontario...I attended an agricultural field day in Thessalon, ON on August 22, mostly to get a look at some alternative perennial forage legumes they are trying, including [galega](#) and [sainfoin](#). The field day was put on by the Rural Agri-Innovation Network (R.A.I.N.), a branch of the Sault Ste. Marie Innovation Center. I figure that if these crops show promise there, they might be of interest to U.P. farmers. Was I impressed with galega and sainfoin? Not yet. But galega was interesting and I'll be paying attention to the results from plots in Ontario.

Bottom line: There's a big world of information out there. Making a good effort to sort out the good sources from the poor ones is important. It pays off to be well-informed and getting information from a variety of sources, local and broader, can help you make the best decisions.

Jim Isleib, Extension Educator

How Safe is Your Produce Farm?

For produce farmers, safe food is more emphasized than ever, thanks to the FDA's Produce Safety Rule, the first federal law on produce safety. Lucky for us, Michigan is one of the leading states paving the produce safety road and is currently the only state employing Produce Safety Technicians dedicated to helping farmers increase their on-farm food safety.

So how safe is your produce farm? Do you know the criteria used to gauge the safety of produce? Produce safety can be measured in terms of risk. Is your produce in a high-risk category, or are you taking sufficient steps to minimize risk? Total risk will never be eliminated – life happens, after all – but risk can and should be minimized to prevent foodborne illnesses. To gauge the risk of your unique produce operation, ask your local Produce Safety Technician about performing a Produce Safety Risk Assessment. In the assessment, you will learn what the Produce Safety Rule requires and recommended practices. The risk assessment is organized into low, medium, and high-risk farm activities, and is easily modified to fit any farm scale.

In the assessment, the Produce Safety Technician will review: the farmer's understanding of food safety, worker health and hygiene, water use, animals and wildlife, compost and manure use, soils, field sanitation, harvesting and transportation, field packing and packing house use, traceability, chemical use, and post-harvest storage. If needed, the Produce Safety Technician may write an Improvement Action Plan for the farmer to minimize the farm's food safety risk. Participating in a produce safety risk assessment is free and confidential for all produce farmers. Farmers will keep all assessment materials and improvement plans for their own records.

To gauge your farm's produce safety risk, make an appointment with your local UP technician:

Landen Tetil
Produce Safety Technician
Marquette County Conservation District
780 Commerce Drive Suite C
(906) 226-8871 x 105
Landen.mqtcondist@gmail.com

Cattle buyers to require Beef Quality Assurance certification

Coming soon –

fewer buyers for your cattle if you are not BQA certified.

Daniel Buskirk and Frank Wardynski

Marketing beef direct to processors or through many Michigan auction markets for full value will now require Beef Quality Assurance (BQA) certification. Common-sense husbandry techniques and scientific knowledge that demonstrate commitment to animal welfare, food safety and quality, safeguard the public image of the beef and dairy industries, and uphold consumer confidence in beef is conveyed in BQA. Recently, Wendy's, the third largest hamburger chain in the U.S, requested that their beef supply be responsibly produced under BQA guidelines. This has prompted Cargill Protein, and Tyson Foods (as of Jan. 1, 2019) to require that purchased cattle come from operations that are BQA feedyard certified. Other processors may soon follow suit. The feedyard certification is also highly recommended for cow/calf producers as this requirement may also affect the future marketing of cull cows and bulls. To market fed cattle in these markets, a producer must be able to supply their BQA certification number to the direct buyer, or have their number on file with the auction market. In lieu of BQA training one of the following certifications will also qualify youth, dairy, or Canadian producers. The BQA certification process can be completed in one of two ways: Online BQA certification or attend a local BQA certification. Currently, BQA trainings are being conducted at auction yards across Lower Michigan. For more questions regarding BQA training opportunities, contact Frank Wardynski at (906)884-4386.



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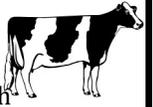
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Market Report

Choice Steers	\$95—\$112 per 100 lbs.
Holstein Steers	\$75—\$92 per 100 lbs.
Hogs	\$34—\$38 per 100 lbs.
Lambs	\$130—\$160 per 100 lbs.
Cull cows	\$45—\$55 per 100 lbs.
Calves	\$50—\$90 per 100 lbs.
Goats	\$200—\$240 per 100 lbs.

Breeding and Feeder Animals

Grade Holstein cows \$850—\$1350/head

Grade Holstein bred heifers \$850—\$1200/head

Feed Prices across the U.P.

	Avg. \$/cwt	Avg. \$/ton	Price Range
Corn	\$10.06	\$201.25	\$160-270
Soymeal	\$20.74	\$414.75	\$372-450
Oats	\$11.88	\$237.50	\$190-300
Barley	\$9.65	\$193.00	\$160-240

Average price/100 wt. for 1 ton lots

Gierke Blueberry Farm partners with students and teachers to promote sustainable agriculture

Students at Chassell Township Schools are surrounded by educators that care about providing meaningful opportunities for learning. One of these teachers, Mary Markham, involves students in experiences beyond the typical classroom lecture.

“I really like to involve students in projects that are real life situations. I teach a nature skills class where students have to try all kinds of things, like recycling, knot tying, composting, and starting seedlings that they can take home to plant. Hopefully some of the skills [they learn there] will become lifelong skills.”

Many of these nature skills can be applied in one place in particular: the farm.

According to the USDA’s 2012 Census of Agriculture, the average age of the American farmer is rising; the majority of farm operators are between 55 and 64 years old. Closing the generational gap in our food system is essential for the continued success of the sustainable agriculture movement. Farmers like John and Lynn Gierke, of Gierke Blueberry Farm, are aware of the future needs of their farm, which informs the way they operate now.

John, a Michigan Technological University professor and one half of the Gierke Blueberry Farm, says, “We have operated our farm for less than one generation, so we do not have first-hand experience in multi-generational approaches from a farm operation perspective. We do, however, think about this farm operating after we are finished and our aim is that it continue to evolve as a small-scale entity that strives to be environmentally and socially sustainable.”

The farm, located in Chassell, is run as a U-pick operation from August through October. This marketing strategy aids John and Lynn in terms of labor (they don’t have to worry about hiring a harvest crew) and it allows the public to learn more about growing blueberries.

“A significant fraction of those who visit our farm have not had much hands-on exposure to agriculture and so the nature of our farm activities are well suited for integrating educational features either with posters or in-person interactions,” said John.

Markham, a long-time friend of the Gierkes, sees the connections between the social and environmental concerns of farming. She believes educators need to encourage young people to practice the lessons they learn in her nature skills course. “We have moved away from an agricultural society and I really hope that I can get students to move back to a growing culture,” she says. Markham has played an important role in motivating one of her students to grow his knowledge of sustainable agriculture with the Gierkes this summer.

“I enjoy the work on a farm since I grew up on one,” says Wyatt Gerner. He is a Chassell Township School student participating in experiential learning at the farm this summer. He is helping the Gierkes monitor their farm for the presence of spotted wing drosophila, an invasive fly that impacts blueberry yields. Gerner is also working on a GPS project with John to map when the different blueberry varieties on the farm ripen; this is also key for managing spotted wing drosophila populations.

The pest in question is a fruit fly of East Asian origin. Spotted wing drosophila have been spreading from the Western United States to the east coast for the past decade. They have

been found in Michigan’s Lower Peninsula in traps near grapes, berry crops, cherries, and other tree fruit. Fruit growers have good reason to be concerned about the flies, since they directly impact the salability of their crops. Spotted wing drosophila lay their eggs inside of ripening fruit, and fly larvae inside of any fruit will make it impossible to sell. Monitoring for spotted wing drosophila is one of the most critical steps in reducing the impact of these pests, for picking the crop just as it ripens or spraying insecticides at key intervals can reduce pest pressure.

The success of the Gierkes U-pick operation is dependent on their ability to monitor and manage pests like spotted wing drosophila. While they have not yet detected the insect in their fields, their proactivity is critical in running a sustainable operation. Guiding customers to the berries as they ripen is essential for them to continue providing berries for the community.

“On our farm we do not spray pesticides so our crop is vulnerable,” says Gierke. “This approach has worked for us for some time because we are a small operation and we do not depend on the value of our crop for our livelihood and we have been very lucky to date.”

Wyatt will be in a great position to understand the impact of spotted wing drosophila both now and in the future. He says, “I would like to see how big the population of the spotted wing drosophila is when the blueberries ripen, and which varieties of blueberries they go for first.” By helping to map the data he collects from the farm, the Gierkes – and any future farmers on their land – will be able to use that information to make informed management decisions.

In the fall, Gerner will have the opportunity to mentor his peers during a field day at the blueberry farm. What he learns this summer will give him the knowledge to explain the project to other students, as well as show them around the farm.

This partnership between the Gierkes and Copper Country Intermediate School District is one of seven across the U.P. funded by a Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education grant and carried out by Michigan State University Upper Peninsula Research and Extension Center. The goal is to bring students, farmers, and teachers together to overcome an obstacle to sustainability in agriculture.

“The public is aware that farmers work hard but they are not as familiar with how hard farmers have to think about all the facets of their farm and the considerations for the risks posed by weather, pests, and economic drivers like fuel and prices,” says John. “In the long term, we hope that this project increases awareness of the extraordinary effort that farming entails.”

Lindsay Mensch
Community Food Systems Intern
MSU UPREC

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Ontario groups studying alternative forage 'galega' for northern climate

Jim Isleib, Extension Educator

According to Dr. Tarlok Singh Sahota, Director of Research and Business at the Lakehead University Agricultural Research Station in Thunder Bay, Northwestern Ontario, galega, also called oriental goat's rue, is a perennial forage legume native to the Caucasus region (located at the border of Europe and Asia). Forage galega should not be confused with another galega species (*G officinalis*) which is a weed in Europe, New Zealand, South America and toxic to livestock. The Sault Ste Marie, Ontario 'Rural Agri-Innovation Network' (RAIN) staff planted small, replicated plots of perennial forage legumes, including galega, this spring at their Thessalon location.

A field day at RAIN's Thessalon, ON location on August 22, 2018 included a look at small, replicated plots including galega, alfalfa, red clover, sainfoin and birdsfoot trefoil. Also a look at a commercial scale (about 10 acres) of galega planted for haylage in June, 2018 on a local beef farm near Bruce Mines, ON.

Galega has potential in northern climates as an alfalfa, clover or birdsfoot trefoil substitute. Research in Europe and Ontario has provided a good start on understanding some of the advantages and limitations of this crop, which is mostly unknown in Michigan. There is only one commercial variety available in Canada, 'Gale'.

Advantages

- Long persistence, up to 15 years
- High protein content
- Tolerant of mildly acidic soils
- Consistent yields
- Winter hardy
- Earlier spring growth, as much as 2 weeks earlier than alfalfa

Limitations

- Best for silage or hay, as opposed to pasture
- Limited seed supply, Inoculant difficult to obtain
- Long establishment period without cutting, up to 2 years
- Lower maximum yield than other perennial forage legumes
- Does not tolerate poorly drained soils
- High seeding rate, 30 lbs/acre
- Does not tolerate competition during establishment (weeds, nurse crops)
- No current chemical weed control options

It is premature to decide whether galega has a place on Upper Peninsula and other northern Michigan farms. However, the work of our Canadian colleagues is of interest to those of us working in similar climates.

For more information on galega:

[Tips for Galega Cultivation](#), Thunder Bay Federation of Agriculture
[Galega Forage Management](#), Northern Ontario Farm Innovation Alliance
[Fodder Galega-The New Kid on the Block](#), Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada



Mikala Parr, RAIN research technician, discussing galega and other alternative perennial legume forages



Galega planted in early June 5

The North Farm Skill-Seeker Workshop Series

The Michigan State University North Farm will be offering its annual Skill Seeker Workshop series for the 2018 season. These workshops, focused on topics relevant to small-scale farmers, homesteaders and home gardeners, will provide participants the opportunity to learn from university staff, local professionals and seasoned farmers. All courses meet at the North Farm located at N5431 Rock River Rd.

[Registration is strongly encouraged](#) Please call Abbey at (906)439-5058 or register online at www.msunorthfarm.org.

Forest Resource Management • September 30 • 1-5 p.m.

Find out about forest resource management, developing a forest management plan and identifying the value of what may lie just outside your back door with Dan and Mary Rabine, Reh-Morr Farm, Holly Moss, MAEAP, and Matt Watkeys, District Forester.

Did you know....

About a dozen eagles are hit by cars in Michigan each year. That number is on the rise.

In Michigan, there are about 15,000 deer crashes per year, 1200 human injuries, 14 human deaths.

Cormorants eat about a pound of fish per day.

USA white-tail deer population in 1900, about 500,000.

Michigan white-tail deer population today, about 1,750,000.

Michigan gray wolf population is about 550-600.

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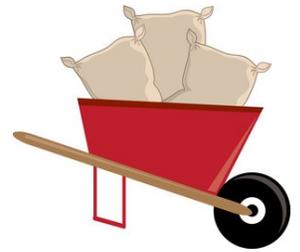
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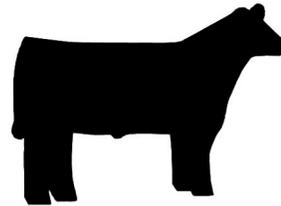
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Calendar of Events

Soybean Field day—September 4—Forest Biomass Information Center, Escanaba, 6-7:30 p.m. ET

Local Farm Tours — September 16 — BSB Farms, Reh-Morr Farm, Slagle's Family Farm, Seeds & Spores Family Farm, Cloverland Farm , 12-5 p.m.

North Farm Workshop —September 30—Forest Resource Management, North Farm 1-5 p.m.

Fall Classic Cattle Sale —October 13—UP State Fairgrounds, 1:00 p.m.

Remember to connect to virtual learning breakfasts every Thursday 6:30—7 am!

http://msue.anr.msu.edu/news/new_msu_extension_field_crops_virtual_breakfast_meetings_start_april_26

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