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Resilient Farms Conference will help farmers explore ideas for creating new revenue

WISCONSIN - Faced with lower milk and commodity prices, many Wisconsin farmers are looking to diversify and add new revenue streams. Towards that end, Compeer Financial and University of Wisconsin-Extension have planned to host the Resilient Farms Conference, a one-day conference for farmers interested in exploring new business ideas for their farms.

At the conference, from 8:30 a.m. - 3:30 p.m., on Tuesday, Dec. 11 at the Wilderness Resort in Wisconsin Dells, farmers will have an opportunity to attend two dozen sessions to gather information, resources and tools that can help them explore potential new revenue streams. About 20 industry experts, including many farmers who have successfully implemented alternative enterprises, also will be available for one-on-one consultations.

Rebecca Binsfeld, client education consultant with Compeer Financial, said in addition to helping with “idea generation,” attendees will be able to connect with resources and tools to help evaluate shifts in business models and revenue streams.

A wide range of experts will be available for consultations during the day and for post-event follow up,” said Binsfeld. “Creating alternate farm revenue streams isn’t a one-day process and analyzing the business, financial and market components are a key next step. Creating relationships with these resources and team members will ease the uncertainty that can revolve around business change.”

The goal of the conference is to provide ideas and resources to farmers and producers interested in starting something new and diversifying their revenue stream.

“It’s planned as a farmer-to-farmer, peer-to-peer opportunity for farmers who are brainstorming or exploring ideas for additional revenue for their farm, many of which may already have worked successfully for their peers,” Trisha Wagner, UW-Extension Farm Management Program.

Session topics will include value-added production ideas, marketing and business strategies, business planning and analysis, and guides to regulatory and licensing processes.

Conference attendees will have a variety of sessions to attend at which various ideas will be discussed.

Full Article: https://bit.ly/2z77mKA
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This Houston urban farm honors veterans with jobs

HOUSTON, TX - When Gracie and Bob Cavnar launched the Recipe for Success Foundation in 2005, their main goals were to battle childhood obesity by changing the way children understand, appreciate and eat their food, and to provide the community with healthier diets. Today, their hands-on curriculum is the largest outreach of its kind in the nation, empowering over 4,000 children every month through various initiatives. But rather than sitting on their laurels, the couple became inspired to do even more. In the historic Sunnyside neighborhood of southeast Houston, they found the ideal location for an urban farm to expand their mission.

Thanks to a generous seed grant from Wells Fargo Foundation and support from the UnitedHealth Foundation and other corporations and philanthropists, the Hope Farms Showcase and Training Center came to life in one of the city’s largest food deserts. To further their important mission, Hope Farms instated a grant-supported program to train U.S. military veterans to become new urban farmers.

Hope Farms integrates farming, education and community engagement on seven beautiful acres where they use organic methods to grow a wide variety of crops. A constant work in progress, Hope Farms provides jobs and internships for neighborhood youth, cooking and gardening classes for all Houstonians, and operate an on-site farm stand that offers fresh produce, eggs and local honey.

“Hope Farms was always part of the vision of Recipe for Success, says co-founder Gracie Cavnar. “We knew that it would serve as training ground for us to work with people new to farming and expand the urban footprint of farms in Houston. In 2010 I came across research that showed how veterans with PTSD responded well to being on farms and farming, and that giving them the opportunity to grow food helped them to feel they were nurturing and providing substance instead of destruction. It’s a life affirming experience for them.”

The program select U.S. veterans as paid farmer trainees to participate in one- or two-year programs that teach sustainable horticulture, financial literacy, farm accounting, banking, marketing and sales, planning and product controls. Members of the Houston business community serve as mentors for the farmer trainees, who also benefit from coursework at Houston Community College to acquire the skills and knowledge they need to establish and grow their own urban farming enterprises successfully.

“With Houston having the third largest population of veterans in the country, it seemed natural that we would focus on a veterans’ program,” says Cavnar. She refers to it as “turning warriors into farmers.”

Full Article: https://bit.ly/2FxAHDJ
Christmastime preparations come early for this Wisconsin tree farm

ALMENA, WIS. - Thanksgiving turkeys are yet to be carved, but it’s already beginning to look a lot like Christmas at Snowshoe Valley Christmas Tree Farm north of Almena.

Like a pair of Santa’s most industrious elves, Joe and Sue Clark already are weeks deep into preparations to welcome people in search of the perfect centerpiece for holiday gatherings.

With some 11,000 trees on 10 acres from which to choose, they’re likely to find it at Snowshoe Valley.

“The best part … is all your customers are coming here and they’re happy; you always have happy customers,” Joe said. “It’s a memory they won’t forget, and you see the generations coming back.”

Joe said his parents bought this Barron County farm when he was 12 years old, operating it as a small dairy. When Joe took over, he modified the barn into a shop, keeping seven stanchions “just in case.”

But it wasn’t long before notions of milking cows were relegated to the past. He started planting trees in 1987 and offered his first Christmas trees for sale in 2001.

“When we bought the farm, the fields where trees are were all ag,” Joe said, adding that they rented the land out to a neighbor for corn, hay and other crops.

Just across the Hay River, which runs through the farm, the Clarks planted a few trees on some idle land.

“We thought we’d sell a few and give the kids something to do,” he said, “maybe make a little money.”

They built a bridge that their guests could cross to get their Christmas tree, calling it “Mistletoe Bridge.” Joe calls that field “the wild side.”

“People just love going over there, the adventure of going over there,” Joe said.

From there, the Clarks gradually added more trees throughout their 108-acre farm, taking fields out of typical agricultural use and planting a patch of trees at a time.

They built trails through the woods and along the river, intending to open them up to guests for snowshoeing. They used to advertise the availability of a sledding hill, too, but Joe said they can’t always rely on having enough snow for that.

Planting for the future

Running a Christmas tree farm has been a natural fit for Joe, who has a college degree in forestry and did hardwood and pulpwood management consulting.

“I like working outdoors,” he said.

He said they usually sell a couple hundred Christmas trees annually, with sales spread out over the three or four weekends between Thanksgiving and Christmas. People can cut their own or buy a pre-cut tree.

“We usually sell more trees every year,” he said. “It keeps growing.”

Turnout at the farm is heavily dependent on the weather; if it’s warm or there’s fresh snow, the Clarks can expect a crowd. Bitter cold is a deterrent, as is a Green Bay Packers football game. But shortly after the game ends, they can count on a steady stream of people.

“People come in swarms,” Joe said.

Full Article: https://bit.ly/2zOhhEk
On-the-farm fun is all grown up

Many farms offer elegant farm-to-table dinners that may include fresh and local foods, star chefs, live music and even tastings of local wines, whiskeys or beers. The events can provide a unique experience right in the field or in a beautiful barn with personal attention from the farmers, chefs and artisans. Some farms hold folk and square dancing with traditional live bands and callers.

On-farm “glamping” in themed campers is also mostly focused on adults. Geared for girls’ weekends and other groups who want to get away together, some farms offer activities as diverse as fishing and canoeing to classes in traditional farm arts like yarn spinning, textile dyeing and cheese making.

Find nearby agritourism farms, wineries, and all kinds of fall events at picktnproducts.org and with the Pick TN mobile app. Pick Tennessee is the service of the Tennessee Department of Agriculture to connect customers to local farm products. Follow Pick Tennessee on social media for seasonal updates and information about Tennessee foods, artisan farm products and fun.

Source: https://bit.ly/2RPJAJZ

NASHVILLE, TN. – As children race through the corn maze or rush to find the perfect pumpkin, more of Tennessee’s agritourism farms are now also featuring fall fun that’s just for grownups.
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Brewery faces opposition over agritourism events

NEWBURG, OREGON - The Wolves & People Farmhouse Brewery in Newberg will seek approval for its agri-tourism permit on Thursday before the Yamhill County Board of Commissioners.

The brewery, founded in 2016, recently had its permit to hold agri-tourism events and a food cart, increased to 18 times annually. It additionally holds a permit allowing it have daily beer tastings year round.

The brewery had faced contention from neighbors in the past over its agri-tourism events. In February of 2017, for example, the board faced a challenge when neighbor David Wall filed an appeal of the brew pub’s application to host events.

While Commissioner Mary Starrett noted her initial concern in 2017 about some of the language in the permit - such as the number of cars, people and duration of events - she conceded county ordinance allows wineries to host the same types of events.

"If wineries are permitted this similar use, how do we then deny the same uses and permissions to an enterprise that really just does the same thing with a different type of product?" she asked at the 2017 meeting. "If a winery was there and permitted, how do we turn around and say if you replace it with a brewery - it didn’t make any sense to me."

Wall led the appeal during a January 2017 public hearing, saying what the brewery was proposing would make it a "bar disturbing the peace and tranquility of my pastureland and that of my neighbors." Other abutting neighbors submitted written testimony as well.

Earlier this spring, the brewery received a $30,000 grant to help build The Vines-to Steins Trail after several reviews from the city’s Transient Lodging Tax (TLC) committee and passed with a vote of 10 to 2. The trail is a walking trail between Wolves & People and nearby A to Z winery.

Christian DeBenedetti, founder and head brewer at Wolves & People, spoke at a Newberg council meeting to explain to the members the intention of the trail.

"The trail is to be used to link the two businesses and it will only be open during business hours. It is more a private trail operated by our mutual businesses," DeBenedetti said.

DeBenedetti appeared before county planners in August, admitting the business did face significant amount of opposition to them renewing its permit.

He also admitted to beginning events at the brewery earlier than outlined in conditions, from noon to 8 p.m. instead of 2 to 10 p.m., but said he didn’t realize he was breaking the rules. He stated he complied with other conditions.

"I believe the use has significantly conformed to the conditions of approval," he said in August. "These events really are in support of the farm."

He added that food is only served at the events permitted. Unlike other brewpubs, which are required
There were a handful of testimonies from both proponents and opponents for the permit to be reapproved, including Wall, who also expressed doubt over the trail. He also indicated proper water tests were not done on area.

DeBenedetti called Wall’s and others’ accusations "cynical and negative and untrue."

"As someone who lives on the property with the brewery, the quality of life issues affect us directly," he said. "We live right next door to the brewery and any negative impacts affect our own quality of life. And we have a high quality of life."

The permit’s conditions were changed to allow the brewery to hold agri-tourism events for no more than three consecutive days, not to exceed five hours on a Friday, eight hours on a Saturday and five hours on a Sunday, with all events ending by 9 p.m.

Planners said this would address any neighborhood concerns about headlight interference.

The approval was appealed to the county commissioners by the land-use advocacy group Friends of Yamhill County, an offshoot of 1000 Friends of Oregon based in McMinnville that states it wants to protect family farms and forests and conserve natural and scenic areas.

Testimony will be taken at Thursday’s meeting at the Yamhill County court house.

Source: https://bit.ly/2FjbtZq
Split Congress could be good news for farm economy

WASHINGTON D.C. - The House flip could be a game-changer for the embattled farm bill, which must be renewed every five years, several policy experts tell Axios.

Why it matters: Major safety nets for farmers are in limbo while smaller agricultural programs have stopped receiving funding altogether, creating extra anxiety for farmers who are already reeling from tariffs and lower crop prices.

The 2014 farm bill expired in September, after the House and the Senate couldn’t reconcile their differences.

- The House wants work requirements for recipients of food stamps, and wants stricter rules for which farmers get subsidies.
- President Trump on Wednesday blamed Democrats for holding up the farm bill over worker requirements, but the GOP-controlled Senate did not include major food stamp changes in its version of the bill.
- "[The farm bill] provides five years of certainty. It reduces risk... so that bankers can be more at ease in terms of extending credit to farmers," explains Tom Vilsack, a former U.S. Senator and Agriculture Secretary who currently heads the U.S. Dairy Export Council.
- The broadest measurement of farm profitability, net farm income, has fallen 50% since the drought-driven peak in 2013.

While heavily-dependent on programs like crop insurance aren’t impacted, funding for 39 other programs was cut off when the current bill expired.

- One example is the Foreign Market Development Program, which helps U.S. farm groups promote their goods overseas - key for corn, wheat, and soybean growers.
- In a tense trade environment, the program is "increasingly important," and the lack of funding cuts off "vital market development resources," Kevin Skunes, president of the National Corn Growers Association, wrote in a statement.

House Republicans could have more incentive to negotiate before the new Democratic House is sworn in.

- House Republicans may believe they’ll "get a worse farm bill if [they] have to go back and rewrite a House bill under a Democratic chair of the House Agricultural committee," says Vincent Smith, an agricultural economics professor at Montana State University and a visiting scholar at conservative think tank AEI.
- Rep. Collin Peterson (D-Minn.) is expected to lead the House Agricultural Committee - taking the reins from Texas Republican Mike Conaway. Peterson told reporters on Wednesday that a farm bill deal could be "possible as soon as next week."

Bonus scenario: If there’s no deal, the current farm bill has to be extended before the end of the year, or risk reverting to 1940s-era law that requires commodity prices to increase. Were that to happen, the new Congress would have to start all over.

Source: https://bit.ly/2yXb1us
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California dairymen see hope in new federal milk marketing order

CALI. - The likelihood of higher milk prices for California dairy producers is giving a beleaguered industry hope as Order 51 of the Federal Milk Marketing Order (FMMO) became real on Nov. 1. For the first time in California history, milk prices to dairymen are now regulated under the US Department of Agriculture. Economic projections suggest California milk prices could rise 30-50 cents per hundredweight for producers across the state as the federal government regulates fluid milk processing in the state. While processors of other classes of milk are not regulated by the new federal order there’s hope that the price of milk for these products will also increase for the state’s milk producers.

Dana Coale, deputy administrator for the USDA’s Agricultural Marketing Service Dairy Program, assures California milk producers that the federal process to regulate milk prices will be transparent and understandable by dairymen. The federal order regulates only the processors of fluid milk in California, according to Coale.

Full Article: https://bit.ly/2T972Dg
Indiana's Sky Farm grows crops on a city building's rooftop

INDIANAPOLIS, IN. – In summer, The Sky Farm at Eskenazi Health in Indianapolis is green and flush with vegetables. The Sky Farm produces between 2,700 and 3,700 pounds of food a year on 5,000 square feet of growing space, all while offering a unique view of the Indianapolis skyline. The space was designed by a team led by Land Collective, the Philadelphia firm that was contracted last month to design and plan phases 2 and 3 of Fort Wayne’s downtown riverfront. Eskenazi Health uses the produce generated by The Sky Farm for educational purposes, the hospital’s Sky Farmer Rachel White said last week.

White selects and plants all of the farm’s produce. The Sky Farm, now devoid of most plants as winter rapidly approaches, organizes planters into rows and features benches where the public can sit and rest. When the growing season is in full swing, The Sky Farm has unique beauty, White said. The Sky Farm opened in spring 2014, about a year after Eskenazi Health opened.

Working at The Sky Farm at Indianapolis’ Eskenazi Health is a challenge White embraces.

She doesn’t have a greenhouse, but uses a set of lights in her office to start seeds and prepare for planting. The seedlings are transferred to large planters arranged in rows around the rooftop.

Full Article: https://bit.ly/2PsUYhW
WARRENSBURG, MISSOURI - This maze isn’t your average, everyday corn maze. It’s a haunted corn maze filled with evil clowns, Michael Myers, guts and an angry farmer with a chainsaw - so enter at your own risk.

Travis Hume, UCM Farm manager and Agriculture Club advisor, started the haunted corn maze last year, sponsored by the Agriculture Club, to raise money for sending students to conferences. Hume plants the corn himself and mows through to create an intricate six-acre field maze at the University Farm along Mitchell Street.

“I set it up. I plant the corn and it’s a standard corn that anyone would farm anyway, but we have to plant it north and south and east and west because otherwise, people can see down the rows,” he said. “So I have to plant two different directions when I plant the field and then I just take a lawn mower and I go around and mow off the corn stalks in our maze.”

Hume said his student workers from the Agriculture Club help him maintain the maze and they are the ones who dress up and haunt the maze.

“It’s kind of a team effort between me and my student workers,” he said.

Hume said before the haunted corn maze, University Farm staff used to put on a haunted hay ride, but decided a maze would be better due to people “bailing off” the moving vehicle. This year was their second year doing the corn maze and Hume said the community enjoys it.

“They love it,” he said. “It’s a huge, huge deal. I mean, we (had) busses of students from high schools come. FFA chapters around the whole county bus the whole chapter in at once to go through it.”

Hume said planting the maze takes an hour or less, and then he waits two weeks for the maze to be tall enough to mow a design.

“There is no real planning for how the maze is going to look, I just run the mower through there and make a maze,” he said. “I know I have an entrance and I know I have an exit. Everything else in there is just kind of made up when I drive the mower through it.”

Hume said the Agriculture Club members dress up as all kinds of different characters to haunt the maze.

“They dress up however they feel dressing up,” he said. “They’ll go to Halloween stores and just buy some creepy masks or they’ll buy a bottle of paint and they’ll paint their faces. We’ve had girls that paint their stomach red and they get a…big bag of spaghetti or something and they’ll just throw guts on people and make it look like their guts are falling out.”

Hume said they use a
chainsaw (with the chain off) to have an “angry farmer” character chase people out. He said they also have scary noises put in the maze such as crow noises, coyote calls, screaming and squealing.

“Last year one night, it rained a little bit. It got kinda muddy. Kids were running so quickly, there were seven pairs of shoes. They ran out of their shoes. Some kids would run in there and use their phone as a flashlight because they were scared. When they would scream, they throw their phone. We’d have to go in the maze and call phones.”

He said the maze is open to all ages, but he recommends ages 13 and up.

“If young kids come with the parents, we tell parents, ‘It’s scary; do it at your own risk,’” he said. “I give them my cell phone number if they have young kids and if they have a problem, they call me and I’ll go get them. The characters know if the kids panic that bad that they take the mask off.”

Hume said the maze is scary enough for adults.

“We’ve had football players run out of the corn crying,” he said. “UCM football players.”

Hume said this year, the Agriculture Club made about $800 and had about 250-300 participants visit the haunted corn maze.

Full Article: https://bit.ly/2RQITA4
CBICC and CPCVB announce joint effort to grow tourism

STATE COLLEGE, PENN. - The leaders of the Chamber of Business & Industry of Centre County and the Central Pennsylvania Convention & Visitors Bureau are working together to grow tourism and serve the economic needs in Centre County.

CBICC President and CEO Vern Squier and CPCVB Executive Director Fritz Smith said commercial air service and agritourism will be the focus of two newly formed committees. Both executives will serve as co-chairs of the respective groups.

Smith and Squier believe the timing is right to undertake a concerted, collaborative effort to capitalize on the opportunities both issues present.

“Agritourism efforts will be focused on highlighting our proud agricultural heritage, including providing more unique opportunities to attract visitors,” Smith said in a statement. “It makes sense for our organizations to explore ways to solidify existing successful agritourism ventures like the Central Pennsylvania Tasting Trail, while searching for fresh approaches.”

Squier said retaining and promoting existing air service, in addition to working to add air travel options is another area in which there is mutual benefit to core constituencies.

“The ability to easily and efficiently travel to and from Centre County directly affects business, education and tourism,” Squier said in a statement.

Full Article: https://bit.ly/2PtMF5K
Farmer in the Dell Pumpkin Patch brings fall to Auburn

AUBURN, AL. - About 15 minutes up Wire road from Auburn’s campus lies Farmer in the Dell, a quaint pumpkin patch that has quickly become the go-to location for students to visit with friends to ride the hayride, walk the corn maze and pick a pumpkin each fall.

The farm is family friendly with all activities being enjoyed by both young and old visitors. The farm offers a short hayride which takes people to and from the main pumpkin patch area. For others wanting to walk and take in the scenery, the pumpkins aren’t a far stroll from the main entrance.

There is also access to farm animals including goats, pigs, puppies and a white and brown spotted baby cow.

“I loved seeing the cow and goat roam free; it felt like I had come to a real farm, not just a place to pick a pumpkin,” said Anna Musulman, junior in microbiology at Auburn.

Immediately upon entering the farm there is an old white truck set up with a display of cotton, a plaid blanket, several pumpkins and a hand painted sign to welcome visitors. This area also makes for an ideal picture spot.

The entrance fee is only $2 per person, making it extremely affordable for college students and large groups.

The price of pumpkins varies depending on weight, but an average-sized pumpkin will cost about $12, and sunflowers are a dollar a piece. They accept all major credit cards, cash and check for payments.

“I loved the sunflower field,” said Brandy Baugh, sophomore in elementary education.

The sunflower field spans the farm with sunflowers sprinkled from the outskirts of the corn maze to the main pumpkin patch.

A giant corn maze separates most of the main entrance area from the pumpkin patch, and anyone over the age of 6 is free to wander the maze unaccompanied. When in season, customers are able to pick the corn right off of the stalk, and it is available for purchase at checkout.

There is also a small market at checkout with extra-festive items for sale such as baby pumpkins, fresh honey and hot chocolate.

The pumpkin patch itself holds a wide variety of pumpkins from small to tall, wide to skinny and rough to smooth. Visitors are free to explore the patch and pick whichever pumpkin they like.

The 2018 pumpkin season ended on November 1 this year but will reopen fall of 2019.

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