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Prep for growing season with Indiana Small Farm Conference

ORGANIZERS of the Indiana Small Farm Conference remind farmers that it’s never too early to gain new insights ahead of the growing season.

“The longer and busier days will be here soon enough,” said Tamara Benjamin, assistant agriculture and natural resources program leader and diversified agriculture specialist for Purdue Extension and a conference organizer.

“The Indiana Small Farm Conference is a great way to learn what’s new and what’s next in production, marketing and other areas to make the most of your efforts in 2021 and for years to come,” she said.

Featuring keynote speakers Richard Perkins and Dan and Julie Perkins, the ninth annual conference and trade show will take place March 4 through 6 with live and on-demand content delivered through the interactive Microsoft Teams application. All content will remain available to participants after the conference is over.

Registration is open, and the fee to attend is $35 per person. This year’s conference offers several tracks, from which attendees can choose sessions that best align with their farming operations and goals:

- **Advanced livestock** with a focus on pasture renovation and management and breakout sessions on beef, goats, sheep and poultry
- **Advanced vegetable** production with panels on leafy greens, soil health and cover crops and on-demand crop-update/growing technique content
- **Beginning farmer**, which will help newcomers set themselves up for success through sessions on developing farm stands and diversifying enterprises
- **Farm business and marketing** plans with suggestions from successful vendors to increase sales, presentations on e-commerce and tax benefits and more
- **Regenerative agriculture** featuring a grower panel and a presentation by Ray “The Soil Guy” Archuleta, a soil scientist with more than 30 years of experience
- **Urban agriculture** with a variety of sessions covering urban farms, soil health, pest management and community engagement
- A youth track will offer sessions on careers in agriculture and small farms to middle school and high school audiences.

On March 5, an exploring agriculture and small farm careers panel will showcase interactive discussions about careers in horticulture, organic farming, livestock farming,
agricultural entrepreneurship and more.

The March 6 show-and-tell sessions will feature presentations on beekeeping, horticulture, livestock management and more.

The Purdue Ag Ambassadors and Purdue chapter of Minorities in Agriculture, Natural Resources and Related Sciences will discuss their collegiate agriculture experiences.

“It’s exciting to see the next generation, including Purdue agriculture students, take the lead on Saturday (March 6),” Benjamin said. “The future of farming depends on inspiring young people to consider what they can achieve now and in the years ahead.”

The Purdue Extension Farm Stress Team also will provide prerecorded on-demand videos and resources related to mental health, including resources specifically related to the COVID-19 pandemic.

“With the unique challenges of 2020 added to existing stress for agriculture professionals, it was essential to offer focused content about mental health and well-being,” Benjamin said.

The conference will feature on-demand availability for virtual tours of such Indiana farms as Four Flags Farm, Freedom Valley Farm and Maple Hills Farm. Testimonials from farmers about how they have persevered through COVID-19 also will be available on demand.

Keynote speakers for the 2021 conference are:

Richard Perkins (12:30 to 1:30 p.m. March 5), who is co-owner, director and lead designer of Ridgedale Farm AB in Värmland, Sweden, author of the internationally renowned “Regenerative Agriculture” and producer of the series “Making Small Farms Work.”

Full Article: https://bit.ly/2OG0n5P
An a'maize'ing challenge for young and old

ABOVE: Whoop, whoop, the maze is open! Zoe Baker, 12, Paul Baker, owner, and Ollie Baker, 10 invite locals to test their navigational skills in the Omaka Maze.

RIGHT: Can you answer the question correctly and find your way through the maze, or will you find a dead end?

BLENHEIM, New Zealand - After a break of two years, a farm just outside Blenheim has once again been transformed into a playground for the region’s families.

According to farm owner Paul Baker, the Omaka Maze on Dog Point Rd attracted around 240 people last Sunday, with fun seekers up to the age of 80 joining in the adventure.

Don’t delay though if you plan to join the dash through the 8-hectare maize field in search of clues, as the season is limited to 8 weeks, by which time the maize is drying and ready for harvest.

If you miss it, it will be another two years before you have a shot at this a’maize’ing opportunity.

Maize is ‘quite hungry’ on the ground and requires a lot of watering, says Baker. For this reason, it is necessary to give the paddock a break, so they plan to open the maze only every 2nd year.

Over a period of about 2 weeks, as the maize is growing, Paul and wife Cath spend their spare time cutting intricate pathways through their maize fields, turning the paddock into mazes of adventure for young and old alike.

The season culminates with two nights of “horror”, when the Bakers hire a crew of 14-15 actors in costume to infiltrate the mazes and bring some adrenaline-filled “fright” into the fun.

This year, the season will end with the ‘CarnEvil’.

Farm visits boost profits in 2020

One of the few bright spots of 2020 has been the popularity of agritourism for Illinois farms.

Farm stands and ancillary retail operations on farms increased profitability by 5.7%, a new survey by Professor Brenna Ellison of the University of Illinois Champaign-Urbana for the Illinois Farm Bureau has found as cited by and AgUpdate article.

In her recent presentation at the Illinois Specialty Growers Association virtual conference, Ellison reported that farm visits in 2020 were up 17% as compared to 2019, the article reported. A trend she attributes to people who were looking for entertainment and social interaction when so many other leisure activities were shut down because of the pandemic.

“While there are very few silver linings in COVID, this has been to the benefit of agritourism,” Ellison said. To define what agritourism is, is hard to pin down, Ellison said. The Illinois Extension website lists 217 farms that have agritourism operations. Those are only the farms that have registered with the extension, but no one knows exactly how many Illinois farms offer side businesses that attract customers to its operations.

The most common agritourism offerings are pumpkin patches, farm stands and pick-your-own produce or flower opportunities. Other attractions include tractor rides, corn mazes, cider sales, petting zoos, retail stores and even distilleries. Specialty foods such as cider doughnuts and apple slushies are popular. Some farms also offer picnic tables and swings and slides encourage people to linger.

Full Article: https://bit.ly/3jTGiV8
Georgia Ag Forecast: 2021 offers opportunity for ‘rural to shine’

The pandemic has put a strain on all sectors of the economy, and the agricultural and food industries were no exception. From supply chain disruptions that led to dumping milk and crops to increased consumer demand for plants, there were many ups and downs in 2020 markets.

University of Georgia agricultural economists recapped the unique year and prognostications for 2021 through the Georgia Ag Forecast seminar presented via webinar Jan. 29 and the annual report available online.

Since 2014, the agritourism farm gate value has grown more than 40% in Georgia, and a recent survey conducted by College of Agricultural and Environmental Sciences faculty shows that about 6 out of 10 motivated travelers seek rural or small towns when selecting a destination for a leisure trip.

“I don’t see a better time ever, in my personal history, where rural and agritourism has the chance to showcase itself,” said John Salazar, associate professor and coordinator of the college’s Hospitality and Food Industry Management Program.

“Rural communities have to be more marketing savvy, and agribusinesses have to collaborate with their local destination marketers. There’s no better scenario than for rural to shine.”

Agritourism activities may include festivals, farm tours, U-pick operations, horseback riding, farmers markets, farm vacations, wineries, picnic areas, biking and hiking trails, and special events including weddings and related educational programs.

“The urban markets have taken a big hit. People want to travel, and there’s still a portion of people that have money to travel, but they don’t want to go to places where they don’t feel safe. These activities really do align themselves well with social distancing.”

Greater spring and summer travel is anticipated compared to 2020; April and May were the two top months of planned travel in Georgia for survey respondents, with June and July following.

“There’s an association between rural and agritourism activities.

Full Article: https://bit.ly/3djfXyA
Nebraska Women in Ag brings agripreneurs together

NEBRASKA Women in Agriculture is bringing training and speakers to their growing audience through the “Open for Business: A Nebraska Women in Agriculture Agripreneurship Series,” a monthly webcast series that highlights the entrepreneurial spirit of women in agribusiness from across the state and offers unique insight into business success.

The conversations focus on surviving business shocks such as disasters, regulatory changes and shifting family dynamics. Female agribusiness leaders are interviewed by Jessica Groskopf, director of the Nebraska Women in Agriculture program.

“We know it’s a challenging time for our state, which is why we are excited to showcase the grit, determination, and success of female agribusiness entrepreneurs in Nebraska,” Groskopf said of the webcast series.

Groskopf said about one-third of the state’s ag operators are female as well as about 40 percent of landowners.

Full Article: https://bit.ly/3qEZMjb
Farm transitioning: Avoiding legal potholes

TRANSITIONING the farm business to the next generation can be an overwhelming process and a difficult conversation to start, said Minnesota Extension Educator Katie Drewitz. She and fellow Extension Educators Dana Adams and Nathan Drewitz for Stearns, Morrison and Benton counties, are teaching participants of their “Annie’s Inspired” interactive course on farm risk management.

While transitioning and succession planning can be an emotional journey, there are several legal tools that can be used to mitigate risks.

“Every business structure, including sole proprietorships and general partnerships carry legal and tax implications. Establishing a business entity can provide additional liability protections for farmers and can help shield personal assets in a litigious society,” she said.

There are three options farmers have when it comes to transferring asset ownership. That can be done by either gifting assets, selling them or by using an inheritance mechanism. Regardless of what strategy or combination of strategies that the farmer uses, all choices may have basis and tax consequences.

Selling assets to the next generation can create tax issues for the seller and large one-time sales can also be difficult to finance. However, other possible options would be to set up installment payments to spread the cost over the duration of the sale and piecemeal sales, Drewitz said.

Another avenue would be to gift assets as it can assist the entering generation in getting started in farming. By potentially transferring income to the lower tax bracket, the taxable estate can be reduced.

There are several ways a farmer can gift assets. One inheritance mechanism is by having a will in place. A trust or another form of ownership designation can also serve well.

Another legal tool that is available to farmers who plan to transfer the farm and estate is to have life insurance.

“The purpose of life insurance is to provide funds for surviving family members in the event of premature death. Farms have used life insurance as a tool to provide funds to support the continuation of the farm business or to provide compensation to non-farm heirs,” she said.

With all the different legal tools that are available, Drewitz said she and the other Extension educators encourage and recommend people to discuss the different options with their attorneys and financial consultants.

Preparing to transfer the farm business to the next generation is often a long process that occurs over several years. There is a lot that goes into it. The generation who is entering has to be able to establish a firm financial foundation as well as learn how to manage the business.

Full Article: https://bit.ly/3dhJB7h
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Lavender farm near Klamath Falls could help agritourism bloom

OREGON - It’s hard to tell by looking at it this time of year, but at the height of summer, Cliff and Diana Warrick’s yard flushes with purple. As hundreds of lavender shrubs bloom, an unmistakable sweet, floral scent wafts down the dry hillside.

With more than 650 lavender plants spanning approximately an acre, the Warrick’s farm is likely the largest lavender-growing operation in the Upper Klamath Basin. Perched on a south-facing ridge just north of Klamath Falls proper, they can see Mt. Shasta while strolling past rows of violet-tipped bushes on a clear day.

“We thought this would be a beautiful place to grow lavender,” said Diana Warrick, a former event planner who harvests the buds and flowers to extract essential oil and produce lavender soaps, lotions and other personal care products. She’s been selling those items under the label “K-Falls Essentials” at local businesses and farmers markets for the past three years.

The Warricks bought their seven-acre property five years ago and got to work on the difficult task of making its rocky soil suitable for growing. The Klamath Basin’s Mediterranean climate — with its hot, dry summers and wet, cool winters — is ideal for the herb. The first lavender crop the couple planted is expected to reach maturity this summer, and they hope to quadruple the number of plants on their land over the next two years.

As Diana got to know the community through selling her lavender soaps and potpourri, people kept wanting to experience the farm for themselves.

“The common question that we’ve been hearing for years is, ‘When can we come see it?’” she said.

They weren’t sure whether they wanted to open up their property to visitors, but given Southern Oregon’s lack of lavender farms east of the Cascades, the Warricks saw an opportunity. The nearest such farm to Klamath Falls, at Mt. Shasta, closed four years ago.

Few can find something to dislike about lavender, and the vibrant, pleasant-smelling crop is a tourism driver in Eastern Oregon and the Willamette Valley.

Full Article: https://bit.ly/2OJKTOm
NOKOMIS, Ill. — Farm income is rising, and while some farmers are upgrading equipment, others are taking care of business.

Record high government payment and 7-year high market prices have left farmers in an unexpected financial position. Nokomis banker Ed Chausse says farmers are taking advantage to pay down debt...

“We had large paydowns in October which was a result of the fall bean price being high, and you know in August we had around $7-$9 beans, and whenever they was running the combine in the fall and harvesting, prices were a lot better, so they went ahead and collected, and we see our lines of credit paying down earlier than usual this year,” Chausse says.

He adds farmers this spring are seeking different terms on spring operating loans.

“Well, they are not raising them like they usually do, say if they pick up an additional farm, they are not increasing the line as they would in the past,” Chausse says. “We are seeing working capital improve, which is great, we like to see; it’s the first thing I look at when I am looking at a balance sheet. Seeing that working capital increase.”

Federal Reserve economists are reporting reductions in farm loan delinquencies.

“Our institution doesn’t have a lot of delinquency problems,” says Chausse. “We try to work with our customers, and it may be more of a restructuring, but I don’t anticipate restructuring like we have in the past.”

Many farmers have already booked new crop sales that Chausse says make any banker happy.

Interview with Robby Rutledge of Rutledge Corn Maze

By: Suzi Spahr

OLYMPIA, Washington - The Rutledge family originally began homesteading in 1850 in Little Rock, Washington (about 10 miles from the current farm location). Relatives of the family have farmed that property ever since with a house built in 1862 and a cedar peg barn built in 1864 which is still in perfect standing condition and on the Historic Register. While the original farm began with 350 acres, much of it has been sold over the years, but some of the property is still within the ownership of Robby’s extended family.

In 1959, Robby’s Grandfather began working at Olympia Brewery. On the side, he raised beef cows and grew sweet corn. His beef grew better when they were corn fed, and he realized growing corn was quite a bit easier than raising beef (and more profitable too)! He transitioned out of the beef market and began selling sweet corn at the Olympia Farmers Market in the late 1970s, resulting in “corn wars” with other market vendors. At the height of success, Robby’s Grandfather would sell 28 bins of sweet corn a week (600 ears in a bin)! To get ahead with customers, he had two simple rules - Be the first to market and have a higher quality product – lessons which still ring true for the Rutledge family today. In 2000, they decided to put in corn maze after attending a convention and connecting with Maze Play, who designed their first maze. They had a lot of fun with the project, but it brought all the usual challenges. With the huge success that first year, they have maintained and grown the agritourism business in the years which have followed.

Growth has included a gazebo with fire pit and a haunted corn maze separate from the regular corn maze – which was a request by customers! Robby attended NAFDMA’s Agritourism Learning Retreat in 2014 at Anderson Farms and was enthralled by their Zombie Paintball operation. After returning home, he convinced the crew, and had a Zombie Paintball course created.
within 30 days! There were, of course, many snags that first year, but Rutledge Corn Maze had a great operation developed in 2015.

Robby is now the head of the operation and continues to see the history of his family operation as an inspiration. He looks forward to continued growth with new key people, and is excited to see what the upcoming years have to provide for growth in retail and new experiences for customers.

**What is one of the biggest challenges you have faced?**

While I love the history of our family operation, trying to get the family to understand that while we pay a lot of money for the corn maze, we also need to have additional attractions with it as well. Customers want a full experience and farm destination. In 2012, the family began to see that they needed to add to the business but they didn't see the same overall vision that I saw. I have, however, started to see the family trust me.

**Name something you are most proud of developing or cultivating in your operation?**

The growth of the business. As a general rule, every time you add something, anything, you can have more customers. We are now to a point where we can add to the overall customer experience in ways we could not before.

With each jarred item, new attraction, or produce grown, it adds to the time spent on the farm by the customer. I love being able to be trusted to add this in the operation. We just added a drive-thru cherry festival in partnership with a local bakery and connecting with a friend of mine who is a cherry grower. We can sell our kettle corn and other farm items, and the partnership brings new customers for all of us.

**What does NAFDMA mean to you?**

It is a huge family. There are so many members who have taken me under their wing and helped teach me things I didn’t realize I needed to know! They give me encouragement to keep doing what I want to do, while also giving me advice to try something new.

**What is one issue you have faced where the NAFDMA organization or another NAFDMA member was able to help?**

NAFDMA members have helped me guide my business. For example, I have talked to Bob Ricci about donuts and he was giving advice on all my next steps. I can always turn to the Facebook group and have so many questions answered. The roundtables give answers to questions I didn’t even know I was asking!

**What piece of advice would you give to yourself when you were just starting out?**

Go to NAFDMA conventions much earlier than I did. There is so much connectivity and learning available there! Attend the roundtables as a way to learn what you don’t know – even if it is a subject you don’t think will be connected to your operation. Just make connections – either locally or across the country to dive in deep and learn from others.
Biden bets the farm on climate

President Joe Biden has made no secret of his grand plans to tackle climate change. Before he even took office, he’d assembled a team of experienced climate experts to serve in his cabinet and spoke openly of a net-zero emissions future. Within hours of his swearing in, he’d formalized plans to re-enter the Paris climate accords. And within days, he’d made climate-related pronouncements covering everything from new federal oil leases (now on pause) to the government’s fleet of cars and trucks (soon to be all-electric).

Along the way, he and his team have made it abundantly clear that American farms will be fundamental to their efforts. Biden’s advisors quickly identified the US Department of Agriculture as a “lynchpin” of any climate strategy. The president predicted that the United States would be the “first in the world” to achieve net-zero emissions from its ag sector, which currently accounts for an estimated tenth of total US emissions. And former and future Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack declared agriculture “the first and best place to begin getting some wins” on climate.

But where, exactly, does the new administration believe those victories will come from? The available evidence points to one place in particular, a new “carbon bank” that would pay farmers, foresters and ranchers to store carbon in their soil through regenerative agriculture and other climate-friendly techniques. The plan aims to turn vast swaths of America into massive carbon sinks, helping to partially offset the nearly 7,000 megatons of greenhouse gases the US emits each year.

Success, though, is anything but guaranteed. Among the most pressing concerns: The science behind the bank remains unsettled. Its creation is already facing challenges from Congress and could potentially see more in court. And all the while, the program itself would be exceedingly complex and difficult to administer—and likely only grow more so if it lasts long enough to scale up. The list doesn’t end there, either.

For Biden, though, any potential pitfalls may pale in comparison to the possible payoff. In addition to pushing US agriculture toward zero emissions, the bank could also open the door, however narrowly, to the type of sweeping climate action that his old boss was never able to achieve, namely an economy-wide cap-and-trade system.

Full Article: https://bit.ly/3s5s32B
What should you do if someone breaks into your farm?

IF you notice something is not right on the farm or you see evidence of a break-in, it’s time to activate your plan to protect your farm.

“We’ve seen instances where activists have broken into farms and stolen livestock, but not come forward until months later. Any sign of trespassing or anything being out-of-place on your farm should put you on high alert, even if you aren’t sure it is related to activism,” said Hannah Thompson-Weeman, vice president, strategic engagement at the Animal Agriculture Alliance during a presentation at the Iowa Pork Congress last month.

SO, HOW SHOULD YOU RESPOND TO A BREAK-IN?

1. Stay calm.
2. Contact your supervisor.
3. Check for cameras.
   “If you do find a camera or other recording device, it’s really important that you do not attempt to remove it yourself. Call law enforcement first so they can come out and observe its location and check for fingerprints,” she said.
   “Be on the lookout for cameras in any areas where animal handling occurs, especially sensitive procedures like euthanasia.”
   Keep in mind that today’s cameras are very small. Activists are getting better at mounting the camera along with hotspots so they can stream footage to a cloud storage system.

RV travel has never gone out of style, but it’s certainly experiencing a boost this year. And where there’s a trend, there’s always a way to one-up it.

Enter Harvest Hosts, a membership-based network that allows users to stray away from the usual RV parks, and instead stay for free at over 1,200 wineries, breweries, farms, and other attractions across North America, Matador Network reports.

Each host site has its appeal, but some of the more unique options include an aviation museum, a wildlife rescue facility, a moonshine distillery, an alligator ranch, and a maple sugar farm.

Access to all of these sites is affordable, too. An annual membership costs $79, which is equivalent to the average price of two to three nights at a budget-friendly RV park, according to RV rental firm Cruise America. For an additional $40 per year, RV travelers can also add 350 golf courses and country clubs to their membership, according to Matador Network.

With limited international travel options pushing Americans toward more domestic vacations, Harvest Hosts not only offers out-of-the-ordinary RV stays, but it also helps members avoid parking issues in a now more crowded landscape.

"Many state parks and campgrounds are either closed or have limited their parking spots. Also, RV sales are at record highs, so there are more people competing for the parking spots that are available," Harvest Hosts member services manager Lisa Manning told Business Insider, adding that the company has seen a surge in memberships this year.

Full Article: https://bit.ly/2NC8ekf
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