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OWNERSHIP



SUMMER PASTURE
RENTAL RATES

NRD UPDATES

INNOVATION
AND CONSERVATION

New Owners of Fairbury Livestock Company

in it for "The Long Haul"

A mainstay of Southeast Nebraska's ag economy is under new ownership, ensuring area livestock sales for years to come.

It is an unfortunate trend in virtually every industry, but especially in ag, that independent businesses, the mom-and-pop shops, are closing because aging owners can't find anyone to fill their shoes.

The new owners of the Fairbury Livestock Company were determined that wouldn't happen here. So, when Larry Junker, auctioneer and owner of the Fairbury Livestock Company, was ready to step back, Colby Hynek and Andrew Wiedel stepped up.

Hynek said it just seemed like a natural thing to do, "Andrew actually came up and he goes, 'Well, do you know the sale barn's for sale?' I was like, 'No, I do not.' And he goes, 'Well, let's just buy it.' Well, I'm like, 'Sure, why not?'"

Neither man could bear the thought of the business that has served the community for decades just disappearing like so many others have. Hynek said, "I like history, and this barn's got a lot of it. So, we are just trying to keep all that alive. It's a legacy deal. I just don't want Larry's legacy to die."

Wiedel agreed, ***"This place is just too important to just disappear. We want to keep it going. We're in this for the long haul."***

Both Hynek and Wiedel have long been involved in the livestock business in one form or another. Hynek said, "I've always been involved in cattle in some way. I've been on big ranches, big feed yards. I worked for a cattle buyer, and so I always had love for the cattle side. And then I started a welding business, and that's what I was doing up until we bought this."

Hynek had been working at the Sale Barn for three years before buying the business, so his connection to the business was strong, ***"Me and my wife actually got married in this barn."***

Likewise, Wiedel has been in the livestock field for many years and farms in the Hebron area.

There is little doubt as to the need for the sale barn in the area, as options are few and far between.

"I feel we're getting more people from farther away. You look and there's not a whole lot of barns close to us. I mean, especially when you get up north, and there's a big hole up there. The same down south, you know, you're either going to Marysville or Manhattan. So, there's a little pocket there. It's basically 60 miles to each sale barn."

While he has sold the business, Junker will continue to be a part of it for the foreseeable future, as will his son, Jake, and granddaughter, Josie. Hopefully, this will



create a smooth transition.

Hynek and Wiedel were anxious that Junker still play a part.

"Larry still auctions off calves, who brought in another auctioneer, a younger kid, that he'll sell the kill cows," Hynek said, "Because I know his voice is part of it."

While the new owners are updating operations and looking to expand, they do not plan on buying or starting any new sale barns in other locations.

There has been a lot of hand-wringing recently over the state of the cattle industry of late. In spite of the doomsayers, both men remain optimistic about the future. Hynek said, "Far as the cattle numbers in the country going down, you know, we just went through a bad drought and everything else, trying to get guys to rebuild herds. But at the same time, there's a lot of people coming back and buying pair and buying bred cows. So, with the numbers we lost, I feel we're going to gain back. It's just going to take a little bit."

"I feel we're in such a good, diverse area,

you know?" said Hynek. "We got enough numbers to keep it going. So, we're fortunate on that."

The auction is a vital part of the livestock economy. While it is true that some livestock producers will sell directly, Hynek said, "An auction is always the best place to sell your cattle."

That is due to the competition. Hynek likes to quote Junker on this subject, "If I'm coming to your farm and I'm buying your cattle off your farm, I'm winning. The best honest place to sell your cattle for anything is an auction, because you got two people arguing for them."

Central and Western Nebraska has been devastated recently by wildfires that have burned more than 820,000 acres to date, displacing more than 35,000 cows with nowhere to graze and destroying miles and miles of fencing. To support Nebraska's important livestock producers, the Fairbury Livestock Company has partnered with the Thayer County Feeders as a drop spot to gather hay and fencing supplies for fire relief.

Precision and Progress: How One KS Farmer is Conserving Water

On the western edge of Republic County near Courtland, Kan., third-generation farmer Richard Lindberg is proving that innovation and conservation can go hand in hand.

Richard and his wife Melanie own and operate Lindberg Family Farms. For many years, they've discussed and adapted the farm's irrigation strategies to meet the realities of limited water resources. The farm's geography presented additional challenges, split almost in half by railroad tracks. With help from Reinke in the past year, Lindberg met that challenge and even earned the Republic County Conservation District's Key Banker Award for water conservation.

The honor recognizes Kansas farmers who demonstrate exceptional stewardship of agricultural and natural resources. Lindberg's operation stood out for its adoption of advanced irrigation technology designed to maximize water efficiency in an area with water use restrictions.

Improving Irrigation

Lindberg Family Farms has been irrigat-

ing crops for several decades as the farm was purchased 80 years ago. Like many operations in the region, irrigation began with siphon tubes and eventually evolved into graded irrigation pipe systems. While effective for their time, those methods typically deliver only about 50-60% irrigation efficiency. As water supplies have tightened over the years, Lindberg realized a more efficient solution was needed.

The farm moved to center pivot irrigation, installing one pivots in 2009. But the most significant change came recently. In 2024, Richard installed another and retrofitted the original system with variable rate irrigation (VRI) capabilities.

In 2025, Roehr's Machinery in Beatrice, Neb., helped Lindberg by installing two new Reinke Electrogator II pivots. They also added Reinke's award winning electronic swing arm corner (ESAC) technology to walk the pivot past their barn, adding valuable acres under pivot. The Reinke dealer installed RPM Touch Screen control panels and the RC10 monitoring system, helping



Lindberg family – Richard & Melanie Lindberg, Weston Lindberg, Wylder Lindberg, Carlyle Lindberg, fiancé Ashley Schwiger, & Renea Creech. Not pictured: Renea's family – Ryan, Ryker, Gunner & Hunter; Breonna Reding and family – Peter, Leonidas, Gideon.

Lindberg with remote management to save valuable resources while still putting down

see LINDBERG, next page



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LINDBERG, from previous page

the water his crops needed.

"The dealer helped us plan the whole thing," Lindberg said. "We put up the new Electrogator pivots and got soil sensors out in the fields. Now I can control the whole thing with my phone instead of driving around to check and make sure the pivots were getting water to the crops."

Water savings a "major turnaround"

The time savings was a big bonus, but the best part came later in the season when he could see how much less water they'd used.

"For the first time ever, we didn't run out of water during the growing season," he said. "Historically, we'd always had to shut off the water well before we wanted. This was a major turnaround for us."

That milestone marked a major turnaround for the farm. In previous years, water allocations often ran dry before crops finished their growth cycle. With the new

pivots and precision controls, the farm managed its entire season without exhausting its water supply.

Lindberg credits Reinke's irrigation equipment and technology along with the support from the Republic County Conservation District, grant funding and assistance from the local Farm Service Agency to help make the upgrades possible.

"We couldn't have made these improvements ourselves," he said. "This has all really been a blessing for us."

Reinke irrigation solutions make all the difference

The technology allowing Lindberg to irrigate fields with precision water application is integrated to work with CropX sensor to monitor soil moisture, crop behavior and soil health. The sensor collects the data and feeds back watering recommendations to the Electrogator II pivot.

"Richard can easily access the information he needs on his smart phone without hav-

ing to drive out to the field and check the pivots manually," said Eric Bathel at Roehr's Machinery. "The field layout was challenging, but with the addition of a swing arm we were able to get nearly 90% coverage of his total acres and made a dramatic difference in their irrigation water usage. From one year to the next, they could certainly see the difference in how much they saved."

For Lindberg, investing in modern irrigation isn't just about efficiency – it's about conserving resources and protecting the future of farming that his family has done for generations.

For more information on grants to help purchase precision irrigation equipment, find your state's Natural Resources Conservation Service office by visiting NRCS. USDA.gov. To find out more about Reinke's complete line of irrigation solutions or to find a dealer near you, go to Reinke.com.

EPA Approves Summer E15 Sales

Recently, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) Administrator Lee Zeldin, in consultation with U.S. Department of Energy (DOE) and in accordance with the Clean Air Act (CAA), issued a temporary emergency fuel waiver to allow nationwide sales of E15, gasoline blended with 15 percent ethanol, and to remove all federal impediments to selling E10, gasoline blended with 10 percent ethanol, across the country.

E15 is higher in octane, usually 88 octane, while E10 has an octane rating of 87. Originally, government regulations authorized the sale of E15 from September 15 to May 31 only. Summer sales of E15 were prohibited. Portions of the Clean Air Act (CAA) ban the sale of certain fuels during the summer months to curb smog.

The purpose of the waiver is to fortify the domestic gasoline supply chain and provide Americans relief at the pumps ahead of the summer driving season.

Beginning on May 1, 2026, EPA's waivers will work to prevent disruption in America's fuel supply by keeping E15 on the market and giving Americans more fuel options. EPA is issuing the waiver notice today to allow fuel industry stakeholders adequate time to transition the fuel distribution system. As required by the CAA, EPA and DOE evaluated the current situation and determined that granting the waiver was in the public interest.

"EPA is working with our federal partners to reduce unnecessary costs and uncertainty and ensure that gas prices remain affordable for all Americans through the summer. This emergency action will provide American families with relief by increasing fuel supply and consumer choice,"

said EPA Administrator Zeldin. "President Trump has prioritized ensuring American families have an affordable domestic energy supply. The Trump Administration has made great strides on this during the first year and will continue to do so."

"President Trump is unleashing American Energy Dominance, and today's action will directly lower prices at the pump and give a clear demand signal to our domestic biofuels producers. Allowing the summer sale of E-15 will provide drivers more options at the pump, and deliver a bigger domestic market for American farmers," said U.S. Secretary of Agriculture Brooke L. Rollins. "While today's announcement is great news for farmers, year-round E-15 is essential for the farm economy, and Congress needs to find a common sense solution that provides much needed certainty to consumers and farmers. Once again, Administrator Zeldin and President Trump's cabinet is delivering for our great American farmers. Our energy security is truly a national security priority, and our nations corn farmers are a key part of the solution."

U.S. Senator Pete Ricketts has been pushing for permanent, year-round sales of E15 since he was governor of Nebraska. He issued a statement in response to the announcement, "This is good news for Nebraskans and all Americans. E10 and E15 saves consumers money at the pump, supports Nebraska agriculture, cleans our environment, and promotes energy independence. The next step is a permanent fix. Congress should make year-round, nationwide E10 and E15 permanent."

According to the EPA announcement, "The emergency fuel waiver will temporarily waive the summer low volatility requirements and blending limitations for gasoline to provide additional flexibility to the fuel marketplace. This will increase fuel supply and provide a variety of gasoline fuel blends to choose from without changing environmental protections already in place. E15 is currently offered at over 3,000 gas stations nationwide, where it serves as a more affordable choice for Americans. Without this action, E15 gasoline cannot be used by roughly half of the country this summer. Additionally, EPA is also waiving federal enforcement of all state

"boutique" fuel requirements for gasoline, allowing the production and distribution of gasoline with 9 to 15 percent ethanol content at a single common Reid Vapor Pressure (RVP) standard of 10 psi across the nation. EPA's actions will go into effect on May 1, 2026, for most states, and will initially remain in place through May 20, 2026. This 20-day window is the maximum number of days allowed under the CAA."

EPA will continue to monitor the fuel supply with industry and federal partners and had indicated the agency will be prepared to extend the emergency fuel waivers as long as the fuel supply circumstances warrant such action.



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NRD Rules and Regulations Take Effect, Stay Partially Lifted

The Lower Big Blue Natural Resources District (LBBNRD) approved revisions to its Groundwater Quantity Rules and Regulations with an effective date of December 22, 2025. Subsequently, NRD Directors took action to lift the moratorium on the expansion of irrigated acres and the drilling of new high-capacity wells in Groundwater Management Sub-Areas One (1), Four (4), and Five (5), effective January 1, 2026. The moratorium remains in place in all other areas of the district. Exceptions to the stay include test holes, dewatering wells with an intended use of one year or less, monitoring wells, EPA remediation wells, water wells for range livestock, replacement wells and water wells of public water suppliers (Nebraska Revised Statute 46-714 (3)). Please visit www.lbbnrd.net for a map and additional information.

Under the authority of Nebraska Revised Statute §46-707 (2) and in accordance with LBBNRD Board action taken at the monthly meeting on December 8, 2022, at 8:30 a.m., the District was placed under a temporary stay, or moratorium, in regards to drilling any new water wells or any increase in the number of acres

historically irrigated. Under the statute, a public hearing was held on May 18, 2023, and Board action was taken to extend the stay indefinitely on June 4, 2023. After revisions to the District's Groundwater Quantity Rules and Regulations were made and public hearings held on November 6, 2024, and October 30, 2025, in accordance with Nebraska Revised Statute §46-743, the Board took action on November 13, 2025, to approve the final revisions and establish an effective date after which they will remain in full force and effect until revised, repealed, amended, or superseded. Subsequently, on December 11, 2025, the Board took action to approve the certified groundwater use acres on file with the District, and also to lift the moratorium on the expansion of irrigated acres and the drilling of new high-capacity wells in Groundwater Management Sub-Areas One (1), Four (4), and Five (5), effective January 1, 2026. The moratorium remains in place in all other areas of the district. Exceptions to the stay include test holes, dewatering wells

with an intended use of one year or less, monitoring wells, EPA

remediation wells, water wells for range livestock, replacement wells and water wells of public water suppliers (Nebraska Revised Statute 46-714 (3)).

Upon the designation of a Phase 2 Groundwater Quantity Management Sub-Area, an immediate moratorium on the construction of new high-capacity wells used for the purposes of irrigation and the expansion of irrigated acres shall be imposed, and the installation of flow meters and restrictions on water use shall be required. The revisions also include new well permitting provisions and reporting requirements for large volume water users.



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Summer Pasture Rental Rates

Pasture rental rates in Nebraska continue to be at a premium compared to the rest of the country. This author is unaware of anywhere else that has a higher price per pair per month, when compared to Nebraska's summer grazing rates.

This means that summer grass in some parts of Nebraska is actually more expensive on a per ton basis than current hay prices (Spring 2026). This article shows how to compare apples (summer grazing) to oranges (baled hay), by converting both into air-dried forage per ton.

Nebraska pasture rental rates continue to be higher in the eastern Sandhills area compared to other parts of Nebraska. The University of Nebraska-Lincoln conducts yearly surveys of cash rental rates across Nebraska. The report for 2025 pasture rental rates can be viewed at <https://cap.unl.edu/realestate/>.

ESTIMATING COW/CALF CONSUMPTION

When grass is readily available, of excellent quality, and the rate of passage is rapid, consumption of grass will be higher as a percentage of a cow's body weight than later in the grazing season when quality declines. Grass consumption by calves generally increases throughout the grazing season as calf size and rumen capacity increase. This occurs simultaneously while cow milk production decreases.

Estimating the amount of forage consumed by the cow is just that, an estimate. Recent research from Oklahoma State University of cows eating medium quality grass hay has shown tremendous variation in forage consumption within a herd, even when cows are of similar size and weight.

SUMMER GRASS VERSUS PRICE OF HAY

Estimating the value of the grazed forage on a per-ton basis allows a person to compare grazed grass directly to what it would cost to buy hay. In this calculation, no labor, waste or machinery cost is accounted for when moving, storing, or feeding the hay.

Let's use an example to value the grazed air-dried forage going into the cow on a per ton basis. For our example, the following assumptions are used.

One Animal Unit Month is an estimate

of how much a 1,000 pound bovine would eat in a month, and the estimated consumption is 780 lbs. of air-dried forage per month.

A cow-calf pair is made up of a 1350 lb. cow and 400 lb. calf. These weights convert to 1.75 Animal Unit Month (AUM), averaged over the 5-month summer grazing period.

To figure the pounds of air-dried forage consumed in one month of summer grazing, take 1.75 Animal Unit Month (AUM) multiplied by 780 lbs. of forage to get 1365 lbs. of air-dried forage per pair. ($1.75 \times 780 = 1365$)

The price of summer grazing per pair and what the estimated hay price would be per ton. (Remember our pair is a 1350 lb. cow and 400 lb. calf).

Converting Summer Grazing Rates to Equivalent Hay Price

Summer Grazing Rate Per Pair (1.75 AUM)/Estimated Equivalent Price for Hay (per ton)

\$50 per pair/month/ \$73 per ton

\$60 per pair/month/ \$88 per ton

\$70 per pair/month/ \$103 per ton

\$80 per pair/month/ \$117 per ton

\$90 per pair/month/ \$131 per ton

\$100 per pair/month/ \$147 per ton

CONSIDERATIONS

Currently hay can be bought in Nebraska for a cost per ton equivalent, that in many cases is equal to or less than the cost per ton for grazed forage rates paid for cow-calf pairs.

The quality of grazed grass early in the grazing season will likely be equal to or better than good quality hay that can be purchased. In the later summer and



fall, the quality of the hay based on energy and protein basis may be better than grazed forage.

If hay is to be fed versus grazing pastures, most medium quality hays will not meet the nutrition requirements of a milking cow with a calf. Another feed resource that would enhance the quality of a roughage diet, and readily available in Nebraska, are ethanol coproducts. Currently, dried distillers grains can be purchased at approximately \$160 ton at the plant. Distillers grains supplemented with medium quality hay could meet a milking cow's nutritional requirements.



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FROM MY SIDE OF THE FENCE

By Dennis Kenning

Where, Oh Where has my Black Bull Gone!

Many of you remember that American Classic Nursery Rhyme. You know the one, "Where, Oh where has my little dog gone". I have a different version of that rhyme and you're lucky that it's only in print, because I can't carry a tune in a bucket. It goes like this;

"Where, Oh where has by black bull gone. Oh where, oh where can that bull be?"

"With his one bad eye, and his sickle hocked knee. Oh where, Oh where can that black bull be?"

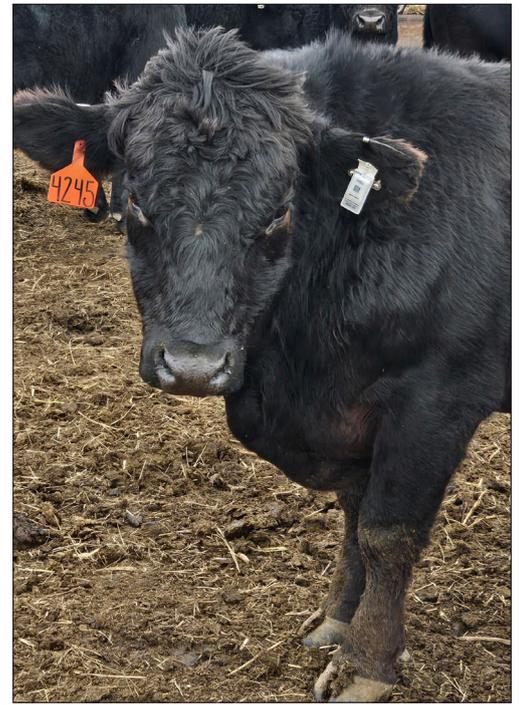
I will spare you the other four versus for now.

Every Cow/Calf producer has experienced the problem of a lost cow, calf, or bull. A lot of times it's a bull visiting the neighbor's cycling open heifers or fighting with another bull across the fence. It's unbelievable that two bulls can go at it, and destroy a five wire barb fence and not have a scratch on them. If you're not on top of that situation cows mix together and now you got a big problem. A few years ago, I could not find my black bull. Several nights I went after work to find this bull, with no luck. Finally I found him along a creek in tall grass with a lame back leg. When it was said and done, I spent a total of seven hours gathering that critter. Today with the price of cattle and especially breeding stock, you don't want to lose one.

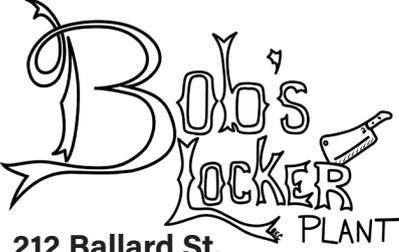
I have been looking for some type of GPS tracking system for our cattle. I'm not going to review all the different kinds of cattle tracking systems on the market. The thing you need to keep in mind is that these systems work differently and it depends on what you are trying to accomplish in your operation. For example, one of the systems on the market is designed as a virtual fence to keep your cattle in. That sounds great but you still need physical fences to keep your neighbor cattle out of your property. Another system is a collar that allows the operator to move cattle by sending electrical impulse on either side of the neck. I know one producer that uses this system to drive cattle to a new paddock in their rotational grazing program. One of the downfalls of these two systems is the use of a collar. Some of our pastures are wild and woolly, meaning lots of trees, and brush. That would allow the collar to catch on trees, feeders, or wire fences. I would also acknowledge that ear tags can also catch on a

fence and can rip out of the ear.

The system we use is 701X and this is not an endorsement for their product. I thought this system is the best for our operation and I like the features of this product. This past summer 701X experienced some problems with breaking tags, and the company is working to warranty all of the tags. The company says their tags should have a three year life expectancy. The tag includes the GPS receiver attached to a solar panel to supply power for the entire season. The price of these tags is \$175 per tag and after the initial year, you can renew the tags for \$75 per year. The software now comes with the tag purchase and has space for 500 animals. Now that sounds like a lot if you do every animal, but we used them on just the bulls for tracking and breeding records. So we track our bulls and also keep records on the cows with this software. The company also sells a button tag that could be placed in a cow's ears and works off of the GPS solar tag. The button tag has to be within Bluetooth range so the GPS solar tag can read it. You will also need to purchase the tagger because these



see MY SIDE OF THE FENCE next page



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MY SIDE OF THE FENCE, from previous page

tags require a double rivet for installation. Like any of the systems you will be required to setup your pasture boundaries and fields.

To test the system I attached one of the tags to our UTV and sure enough it worked. It also gave me information that animal was moving at a high rate of speed and when it was parked it would tell me that the animal may have a health problem because of the lack of movement. The system works on your computer, tablet, or smart phone. It worked great for our guys in the pasture checking cows. It provided a location of the cattle because most of the time they stay grouped together and also provided information of the ID numbers of the cows grazing in that pasture. Each morning I used the computer at the kitchen table to check to see if bulls were within the fence. Notifications would come in through any smart phone if the bull was outside the boundaries or if there was a lack of movement. The system also tells you how many times a bull is mounting cows. Movement with the tag is designed to determine if a bull is mounting a cow. With two bulls in one pasture we found that one of the bulls was doing all of the work.

For tracking a bull's movement I thought the system worked very well. For example, we physically checked one pasture with a bull in it. Late in afternoon, we received a notification that the same bull was out. So we returned to the pasture to find that the bull was in fact out of the fence. Because of this notification we were able to fix the physical fence before cows became commingled. Another bull decided he liked the pasture two neighbors away. We were able to track his movement and found his exact location. On the map arrows display the bull's movement. The tracking part

of this is also dated, so we know when he left our pasture and traveled into a third pasture. What has been really helpful, we know where he crossed the physical fence. So now I don't have to walk or ride the entire fence and I can go to that location to make the repair. The program allows you to change the dates so can see what happen at a certain point in time.

This GPS technology system has been a good addition to our cattle operation. It is somewhat affordable and I like the benefits it provides. One of the most important parts to any cow/calf operation is getting your cows bred. You don't settle cows when your bull is out or if you have a bull not doing his job. I like the 701X system because it's a time-saver, tells us if a bull working, and helps us keep records on our herd. As I said earlier this is a system that works for our operation. As a cattle producer you're going to have to use the system that best fits your needs. We don't think about technology helping the livestock industry, but it can be a useful tool in your cattle operation.

That brings us to the second versus of my nursery song and it sounds like this:

Where, Oh where has by black bull gone. Oh where, oh where can that bull be?

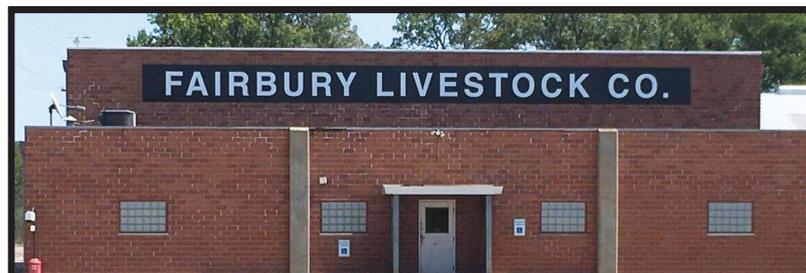
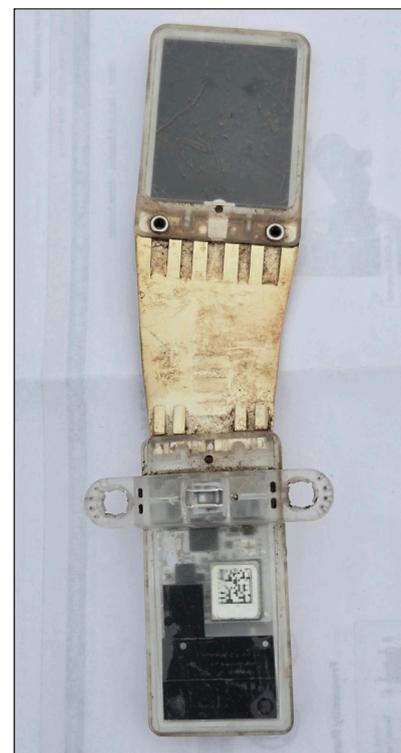
I'll follow the map, and see where he's at. So now I know where my black bull will be.

That's just how I see it, "From my side of the fence".

AROUND THE FARM

We sold our feeder cattle in January and they sold well. Thus far, we have had good weather for calving. Just when I say, I've seen everything with cows having calves; I had a cow lay down along some wheel ruts in the field. The calves head was out but she couldn't push the calf out because the calf's head and shoulder was pressing into a rut. I got her to stand up and

the calf flopped out. We had to stop watering cattle out of a pond, it's just too dirty. The water level has dropped and they are stomping around making the water even dirtier. We could certainly use some rainfall. I really feel for the cattle producers in Kansas and Oklahoma who lost animals due to the wild fires. The amount of cattle lost is staggering and several ranchers have lost complete herds and farmsteads, they have nothing left. The actual totals have not yet been released. It makes me nervous to do any burning and we are hoping conditions will be favorable so we can burn a couple of pastures. Our repair list for equipment to be fixed seems to be growing. So now things will get real crazy with the work load. Soon the planters will be running in the field. And so the process will once again start over, the cycle of producing food to feed the world. Until next time, *May God bless you and keep you.*



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If Cozad, Neb., cattlegirl Linda Benjamin has her way, her grandchildren or great-grandchildren won't ever have to worry about a cancer diagnosis.

"If everybody gets together and we work really hard on this, we're going to beat this," says Benjamin. She, her husband Howard and their family, along with neighbors Levi and Bobbie Jo Messersmith will host the 2026 Cattlemen's Ball of Nebraska, which unites people across the agriculture industry to raise money for cancer research.

The annual event, slated for June 5-6, will be held the Benjamin's pasture 10 miles north of Cozad. Tickets are on sale now for the full weekend, which promises a good time and good beef, all in a picturesque location.

"It's just the most beautiful site. You can see the entire valley from there," Benjamin says.

The pasture was selected for its accessibility, off a paved road and with plenty of space for all the weekend's activities.

Independent country music star Aaron Watson will headline the Saturday

evening concert, performing his top hit singles like "Freight Train" and "Outta Style."

The jam-packed schedule also includes a style show, golf outing, 5K run, gourmet beef meals, auctions, additional entertainment bringing together Nebraskans from across the state for fellowship, fundraising, and fun.

"I hope everybody walks away with some type of 'wow' moment, whether it's educational through the healthcare tent or beef. I just want people to come back and say, 'I can't believe you guys did this,'" Benjamin says.

The Cattlemen's Ball raises vital support for the Fred and Pamela Buffett Cancer Center, with 90 percent of proceeds directed to cancer research and 10 percent benefiting local health and wellness initiatives in the host community.

Messersmiths have set a big goal fundraising but are also anxious to show others what makes Cozad and the sur-



rounding area so special.

"It'll have that hometown feel," Bobbie Jo says. "I want to promote the area and just our good, solid family values."

Since its founding in 1998, the event has generated more than \$20 million to advance cancer detection, treatment and care across Nebraska.

"We're going to have a party in the pasture and we're going to raise money for a really good cause and you don't have to be a cattlegirl," Benjamin says. "All you have to do is buy a ticket...buy a ticket and you're going to be surprised."

Tickets and event details are available at www.CattlemensBall.com.



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Dan Gillespie Soil Health Fund Grant

Two recent grants from the Dan Gillespie Soil Health Fund (DGSHF) furthered its mission to support research focused on soil management practices through intentional grantmaking.

Barry Young, an organic farmer in Wilber, received \$2,000 to evaluate alternative approaches to establishing cereal rye in a corn year. Through a collaboration with John Nelson, PhD, a Water and Integrated Cropping Systems Educator with the University of Nebraska Extension, Young will evaluate the use of a Hagie highboy broadcast inter-row seeder in standing corn versus no-till drilling rye post-harvest. The key performance indicators will be stand biomass, weed suppression, overall soil health and following cash crop performance.

"Receiving this grant will ease the burden of daring to

be different," Young said. "Dedication to changing not only our soil but also the nutrient density of our food and the way our industry farms is not for the weak. Repairing our soil ecosystems requires patience, thought and financial support."

In a 50/50 partnership with Green Cover, DGSHF awarded \$700 to Jay Cecrle with the Central Nebraska Science and Engineering Fair to incentivize student research in science, agriculture and engineering across central and western Nebraska by awarding prizes to judge-selected projects and advancing the top projects to the Regeneron International Science and Engineering



Dan Gillespie Soil Health Fund Advisory Committee chair Randy Pryor (left) and member Gary Lesoing (right) present a \$2,000 grant to Barry Young of Wilber (center) to advance improved soil health practices for organic farming.

Fair.

The Central Nebraska Science and Engineering Fair addresses regional needs to improve soil health awareness and adoption of best management practices among youth. Projects examine no-till farming, soil biology, water conservation and regenerative agriculture in ways that address agricultural challenges in Nebraska.

"We aim to motivate more student research focused on soil health, provide meaningful monetary recognition for the best soil-related projects, increase agricultural youth engagement in soil conservation and stewardship and help

students connect research to practice through scientific presentation and fair judging," Cecrle said.

Applications for the current grant cycle will be accepted until March 1. For more information and to support the work of the fund, visit www.nebcommfund.org/give/dan-gillespie-soil-health-fund. Grantmaking efforts prioritize projects supporting current and future growers (adults or youth) in adopting practices that address water quality and soil health, such as cover crops, reduced tillage, complex crop rotations and nutrient management to reduce soil erosion, nutrient run-off and greenhouse gas emissions.



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From The Desk of Joni Johnson

FSA/USDA--County Executive Director

Just in time for spring, our office has been busy responding to producer inquiries stemming from some recent FSA program announcements. Here is some key information which you should be aware of:

-FARMER BRIDGE ASSISTANCE PROGRAM: FSA is working to modernize and expand its digital services to allow our customers the opportunity to conduct more business online. An example of this online business option is the ability to access and submit a Farmer Bridge Assistance (FBA) program application.

The place to begin establishment of your Farmers.gov Account is farmers.gov/account. Information found on this webpage will take you through account setup step by step. If you already have a Farmers.gov Account, a section of this page explains how to log into your existing account.

A Farmers.gov Account allows you a number of online business options, such as access to your FSA farm records and farm/tract maps, FSA farm loan information for those who have FSA loans

(including the option to make a loan payment online), and access to some NRCS information. Learn more at this Farmers.gov Account information fact sheet.

While we will be here to provide you with excellent in-person customer service, a Farmers.gov Account gives you flexibility to conduct some business functions at your fingertips and on your personal timeline. The deadline to submit an FBA application is April 17, 2026.

-CONSERVATION RESERVE PROGRAM: On February 10, USDA announced signup information for Continuous CRP and General CRP. Offices are now accepting Continuous CRP offers. These offers will be considered on a first-come, first-served basis and will be reviewed in "batches" with the first batching period to end on March 20, 2026. The deadline to accept offers for Continuous

CRP enrollment is July 31, 2026 (although offers will continue to be submitted until the July deadline, there is no guarantee there will be a second batching period). FSA will begin accepting General CRP offers on Monday, March 9, through April 17, 2026.

-SUPPLEMENTAL DISASTER ASSISTANCE PROGRAM - SDRP (Stage 1 and Stage 2): We continue to work with customers on applications to the Supplemental Disaster Relief Program (SDRP) Stage 1 and Stage 2. This program offers disaster relief payments to producers who suffered revenue, quality or production losses to crops, trees, bushes, or vines due to qualifying disaster events in calendar years 2023 and 2024. Stage 1 is focused on producers with indemnified losses. Stage 2 is focused on producers with non-indemnified (including shallow losses), uncovered (uninsured), and quality losses. Call our office to learn more about this program and to set up an appointment to file an application. The deadline for Stage 1 and Stage 2 SDRP is April 30, 2026.

Livestock Extension--Barry Weber

Hello again from livestock extension!

We're halfway through winter but it often seems like the second half is the worst half. There were a lot of foggy days in November and December, so we'll see if the 90 day rule of thumb holds true.

Except for producers who have already started calving, most cows are out on cornstalks. For mature pregnant spring calving cows, grazing corn residue properly should meet their energy and protein needs without supplementation of anything other than minerals and vitamin A. Vitamin A is generally found in higher concentrations in greener feeds, so those brown cornstalks aren't providing enough to meet that cow's needs. Calves are deficient in vitamin A at birth and rely on the colostrum to provide what they need. When a cow is provided sufficient levels of vitamin A during late pregnancy, the dietary supplement along with how much she has stored in her liver are mobilized for use in the colostrum (Tibbets, 2024). It is recommended that mature pregnant cows grazing cornstalks receive 4 oz/day of a mineral containing at least 300,000 IU/lb vitamin A, as well as 4-5% phosphorus, 1500 to 2500 parts per million copper, and 3000-5000 parts per million zinc. (Saner and Drownoski, 2026).

As the cornstalk grazing season progresses, pay attention to how much and what kind residue is left. Cows will eat the corn first, the husk and leaf second, followed by the cob and the stalk. For every bushel of dry corn produced, the husk accounts for 3 lbs per bushel and the leaf makes up 14 lbs per bushel. Once the husk and leaf are gone, it is time to consider supplementing the cows or moving them. How much feed and how many days of grazing you have in a particular field can be calculated using the cornstalk grazing calculator at <https://cap.unl.edu/livestock/tools/>.

Bred heifers and first calf heifers will likely need supplemental energy and protein on cornstalks, since they are still growing and are using dietary energy for fetal growth. Targeting a BCS 6 for the heifers gives them a cushion during an energetically demanding time and provides an energy reserve during the critical postpartum interval. Keeping mature cows at a BCS 5 going into calving is ideal, since they've been through this before and are more flexible. If cows are short of the ideal BCS prior to calving, now is the time to make up ground through supplementation. Playing catch up after calving is more expensive and

is less effective, since 70 percent of that supplemental energy is directed toward lactation, leaving only 30 percent toward her own recovery needs (Mayo, 2002). During the last trimester, 3.5 lbs of dried distillers grains or 6-7 lbs of modified distillers grains per day should meet a heifer's needs on corn residue (Saner and Drownoski, 2026).

Cows entering calving season in the right condition are set themselves up for success not only this year, but in future breeding seasons as well. If you're interested in learning more about how cattle and forage interactions today affect your operation long term, consider signing up for the Midwest FEEDS Practicum, which examines a season long systems-based approach to cattle production in eastern Nebraska. Go to <https://beef.unl.edu/news/midwest-feeds-practicum-offers-hands-training-beef-producers-across-production-year/> or contact me, Barry Weber at s-bweber12@unl.edu or Connor Biehler at cbiehler2@unl.edu for more information.

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2026 Nebraska Nitrogen Use Efficiency (NUE) Program

Program Objective: With funding provided by the Nebraska Corn Board and in partnership with the Natural Resources Districts (NRDs), the Nebraska Department of Water, Energy and Environment (DWEE) is administering the Nebraska Nitrogen Use Efficiency (NUE) Program. The purpose of this program is to encourage Nebraska corn producers to improve NUE in their corn fields. Participants are incentivized to achieve a NUE of 1.0 or under, for the 2026 crop with a payment rate of \$15/acre. Improving NUE can deliver meaningful economic and environmental benefits without sacrificing productivity.

For the 2026 cropping season, applications are due May 15th, 2026.

Eligibility Requirements:

- Producers must be located within the boundaries of the Lower Big Blue NRD.
- Producers must be in good standing with NRD.
- Field must be planted to corn for the 2026 growing season.
- Data must be submitted for nitrogen applied (2025–2026), actual 2026 yield, and all credits used, per NRD guidance.
- Maximum 160 acres of corn per application (multiple applications allowed).
- Producers that have not been previously successful in the Nitrogen Reduction Incentive Act (NiRIA) program.

Required Data:

- o Soil Sample per District Guidance

Samples need to be taken prior to 2026 planting season to determine residual soil nitrate and organic matter

How to Apply:

Paper applications can be submitted to NRDs, or an online application can be submitted. Please contact the Lower Big Blue NRD with any questions regarding this program.

AKRS Equipment Opens New State-of-the-Art Facility in O'Neill

AKRS Equipment is opening a new O'Neill store just down the road from its previous location.

The location officially opens for business on January 12th at 49157 Douglas Ave, O'Neill, NE.

The upgraded facility enhances AKRS Equipment's ability to serve both employees and customers, featuring a 40,000-square-foot service shop that expands technician capabilities, improves service efficiency, and supports long-term growth for the business and the O'Neill community.



Nebraska Nitrogen Use Efficiency Program Launched for 2026 Growing Season \$1 Million Available for Producers who Demonstrate Nitrogen Efficiency

Agriculture producers have a new opportunity this growing season to earn extra income while cutting fertilizer costs.

The Nebraska Corn Board has committed \$1 million to a new Nitrogen Use Efficiency (NUE) Program, offering payments to farmers who have demonstrated nitrogen efficiency during the 2026 growing season.

"The Nebraska Nitrogen Use Efficiency Program was funded to encourage farmers to reduce nitrogen inputs and achieve greater efficiencies in their operations," said Brandon Hunnicutt, chairman of NCB and farmer from Giltner, Nebraska. "As we invest in initiatives that strengthen our role as responsible stewards of the land, we are also focused on improving profitability amid volatile market conditions. Every dollar and every acre counts, and this program equips farmers with practical opportunities to optimize their practices for better economic and environmental outcomes."

The program, administered by the Nebraska Department of Water, Energy and Environment (DWEE) in partnership with Nebraska's Natural Resources Districts (NRDs), will pay \$15 per acre for up to 160 acres per application, for producers who achieve a nitrogen use efficiency score of 1.0 or less.

NUE measures how effectively a crop converts available nitrogen (N) into harvest grain yield. It accounts for applied nitrogen (commercial fertilizer) and credited nitrogen, which includes nitrogen from soil, water, cover crops, and manure applications.

Using an NUE metric that incorporates credited nitrogen helps producers evaluate how efficiently they are using all of the nitrogen sources within the system. These insights help guide smarter nutrient management decisions that strengthen farm profitability while protecting water quality.

Participant Requirements

- Collect soil samples prior to 2026 planting season or the fall of 2025 to determine residual soil nitrate and organic matter.
- Collect a water sample during irrigation season to determine residual water

nitrate (if applicable).

- Collect a manure sample prior to planting to determine manure nitrogen (if applicable)

How to Apply

Producers can apply by contacting their local Natural Resources District (NRD) for more information and assistance with the application process. Find your NRD at www.nrdnet.org. The deadline to apply for the program is May 15, 2026.

The NUE Program follows the Corn Board's previous \$1 million investment in the Nitrogen Reduction Incentive Act (NiRIA) program in October 2025. NiRIA provides financial incentives for producers to cut commercial fertilizer applications by either 40 pounds/acre, or by 15% of their baseline rate. The NiRIA application period for the 2026 growing season closed Dec. 15, 2025.

Producers who successfully participated in the Nitrogen Reduction Incentive Act (NiRIA) program are ineligible for the NUE program.

The Nebraska Corn Board is funded through a producer checkoff investment of one-cent-per-bushel on all corn marketed in the state and is managed by nine farmer directors. The mission of the Nebraska Corn Board is to increase the value and sustainability of Nebraska corn through promotion, market development and research.



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