

REGIONAL FOOD HUBS // PRODUCER PROFILES // KUCHEN // FAVORITE SPOTS // LOCAL BEEF // FARMERS MARKETS

Dakotafire

SPARKING RURAL REVIVAL
ONE STORY AT A TIME.

Plus:
LIVING
LIKE
FAMILY IN
LANGFORD
Page 35

GOING LOCAL

Beyond tasting great,
locally grown food
can supercharge
rural economies.

Page 6

The pleasure
of good eating

Page 18



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Dakotafire is sparking a revival in rural communities of the Dakotas and beyond by encouraging conversations that help rural residents rethink what's happening and what's possible.

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- 2 From the Editor**
- 4** FiredUp membership information
- 5** Contributor page
- 6 Feature:** The community-building potential of local food
- 14** County highlights from the 2012 Census of Agriculture
- 16** Restaurant focuses on local flavor
- 18 Column:** The pleasure of good eating
- 20** Dakota Local Food Directory
- 21** Dakota Local Food Challenge
- 22** Power in numbers: Regional food hubs
- 24** Kuchen: A Dakota favorite
- 27** Rural places and rising grocery prices
- 30 Seeds of Wisdom:** The Perman prescription



6

- 35 Community Spotlight:** Living like family in Langford
- 42 Dakotafire Café follow-up:** Lots to say about water
- 44 Travel:** Our favorite stops
- 46** Back issues for sale
- 48 Postcard:** Lake Tewaukon was the place to go



24



30



35

NEXT ISSUE: Education / Rural in Politics & Policy

ON THE COVER: Diners enjoy a special harvest dinner outdoors last September at The Field restaurant in Adrian, N.D. *Photo by Heidi Marttila-Losure*



“I sometimes have to remind her to take a step back, take a breath and see how she has changed her entire life in just a few months.”

A Coaching Spirit

Reaching goals with the help of an RN Health Coach

With her blood pressure rising and her diabetes worsening, 62-year-old Joyce Gage received a suggestion from her doctor that turned her life around.

“He suggested that I start seeing a health coach,” remembers Joyce. “He was the one who connected me with Brady.”

Brady Carda is a registered nurse at Sanford Aberdeen and Joyce’s RN health coach. All Sanford Aberdeen patients in need of the service, have access to health coaches free of charge.

Brady and Joyce started meeting in October of 2013 and have been working toward a healthier life for Joyce ever since. At their monthly meetings, the pair discusses how to keep Joyce on track to achieve her health goals.

“We work through any issues she might be having,” says Brady. “Joyce lost 30 pounds in our first four months working together but recently she has hit a bit of a plateau with her weight loss, so we talk about how she can push through that. I give her tips or advice on how we can overcome that.”

All Sanford health coaches, like Brady, are RNs. This allows them to deliver not only expert advice on healthy living, but it also allows them to help patients have a better understanding of medical processes.

“Sometimes when we throw out all of this medical information, patients can get overwhelmed and not really comprehend it all,” remarks Brady. “Joyce and I can sit down and go through the details in depth. I can explain to her what these numbers mean.”

And with less than eight months of health coaching under her belt, Joyce is already seeing results.

“I always keep records of my blood sugar,” says Joyce. “I was looking back the other day and my numbers used to be around 160. Now they are way down to 108.” Joyce has also seen improvements in her weight, which she credits to some good advice from Brady. “I had such a problem with portion control. I cook for my husband and he is a meat and potatoes guy. So I ate what he ate. But Brady told me to watch my portion size and not to skip any meals.”

Joyce’s results are not only inspiring to her but to her coach as well.

“She has just been awesome,” says Brady. “I think she was a little skeptical at the beginning if this could really work for her, but after seeing the improvements, she learned what we could accomplish as a team. She just wants to keep going, and I sometimes have to remind her to take a step back, take a breath and see how she has changed her entire life in just a few months. It’s really encouraging. It keeps me motivated.”

If you would like to learn more about how to connect with a RN health coach, talk to your Sanford Aberdeen primary care provider by calling (605) 725-1700.

SANFORD

Aberdeen

More than food



by HEIDI MARTTILA-LOSURE

Editor Heidi Marttila-Losure can be reached at heidi@dakotafire.net.

For much of the rest of this issue, you're going to read about some significant opportunities that a stronger local food economy can bring for farmers, consumers and local communities. There is the potential for some really wonderful things to happen in the Dakotas around food.

But there is a catch: We're going to have to cook it.

One of the great benefits of buying local food is the fact that it reminds us what real food is and where it comes from. Fred Kirschenmann (whose column appears on p. 18) tells a story during some of his presentations about a group of elementary school children who took a tour of a farm, which included a stop at the garden. Someone pulled a carrot out of the ground, and one of the children exclaimed, "Ew! Who put it in there? Now it's dirty and we can't eat it!"

It's a funny story, but there's a little too much truth to it. I'm sure we've all heard about children who think food comes from the grocery store. Those stories may even include some of the kids and grown-ups in farm country.

So going to the farmers market, or to pick up eggs from a neighbor, or ordering a half a pig or a quarter of a beef can prove educational all

around. Potatoes are often purchased with some earth still on them; eggs are not always the same size or color, often reflecting the variations in the chickens they came from; and meat sometimes comes with parts we'd forgotten those animals had.

It's a far cry from a microwavable dinner requiring the push of a few buttons and a turn half-way through.

Adopting a local food way of living faces two big challenges.

The first is lack of time. Our lives are packed with so many things, driving here and there, that we have come to depend on a grab-and-go food lifestyle. There are a limited number of locally purchasable foods that can be easily eaten in the car.

The second is the lack of knowledge. Many of us are in the second or third generation of packaged-food living and have little idea of the cooking skills our grandmothers

or great-grandmothers mastered through trial and error over many years.

Neither one is quite as big an obstacle as it seems at first. As far as the art of cooking goes, recipes for almost anything you can imagine are easily Googleable. Some will be hits, some will be misses. But we learn as we go, just as our grandmothers did. (Probably faster, since they didn't have Google.)

And the lack-of-time issue is also not as big as we make it out to be. Who would have thought 15 years ago we'd have time to fit 45 minutes a day of Facebook and Twitter into our lives? And yet somehow many of us did. We make time for the things that interest us and benefit us.

Take a look at the story of kuchen-making on p. 24. That dessert is about much more than the sweet calories—it's about keeping alive a mother's memory, having something ready to serve guests whenever they might arrive, and bringing together a community.

Local food preparation can be like that for us. Some of my best memories of life on the farm are the days when we all gathered to process apples (with my dad joining the women to run one of the apple corers) or sweet corn (when my Aunt Lillian joined us into her 80s, bringing her own knives because ours were never quite good enough).

Last year I took part in my first chicken butchering day. To be honest, I was not very excited about taking part in all the steps between a chicken on the run and chicken chilled in plastic. But when we arrived at our neighbor's, she had all the equipment set up outside in the shade of a big tree in her yard. There was no loud machinery and no overwhelming smell—just a pleasant early summer breeze.

The process kept us busy, but while our hands

**This is the good stuff
that life's really all about.**



were moving we could talk. Our discussion included family stories, as well as a recent wedding and what it takes to have a good marriage—the kind of good conversation that happens when you’re working with friends. And at the end of the day, we had food that we absolutely knew where it came from. For me, that knowledge and the connections that happened around that food enhanced its taste.

This is the good stuff that life’s really all about.

The blessing of our modern lives is that we have choices. We don’t have to go hungry if we’re running from work or school to a ball game, and frozen pizzas can be a lifesaver.

But it would be a shame to be in such a hurry that we run past the good stuff.

I encourage you to add a little more local food to your menu.

Maybe kuchen.

But even if that local food is not a dessert, I’ll bet that it will make your life a little sweeter. *

What’s ahead for Dakotafire?

Many of you loyal readers know that Dakotafire started as a Knight Community Information Challenge project, with the first three years of funding provided by the Knight Foundation, the South Dakota Community Foundation, and corporate and individual sponsors.

We are so very grateful for the opportunity that initial funding provided for getting Dakotafire started. In the terminology of business, it’s given us a chance to establish “proof of concept”—we’ve figured out how this kind of collaboration with newspapers can work.

That initial funding is now at an end, and Dakotafire will have to stand on its own if it’s to succeed.

We have a plan for making it a self-sufficient enterprise, which includes a change in paper and more advertising than we’ve had up to now. But we aren’t planning to rely on advertising to cover the whole cost of getting

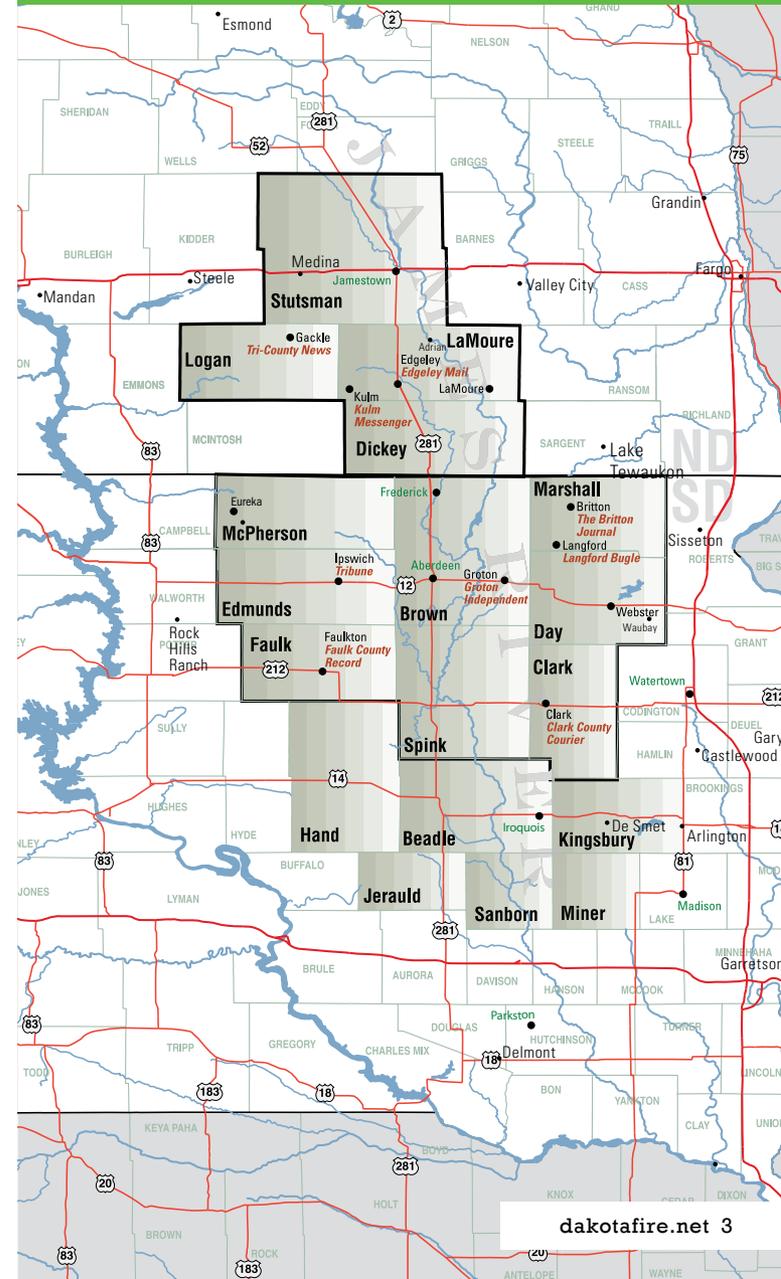
Dakotafire to you. That’s because our primary distribution method—insertion in our partnering newspapers—puts some limits the amount of advertising we can include and how big the magazine can get. We also don’t want to sacrifice the content that helps us live up to our goal of “sparking rural revival, one story at a time.”

So that means we are seeking support from the people who value that content, including readers (see the next page), corporate sponsors or local economic development groups.

We’re also asking newspapers to cover expenses that grant funding has covered up to this point. This may mean that some newspapers will no longer choose to participate. In that case, readers who still wish to get Dakotafire can subscribe.

I am happy to answer questions if you have them; e-mail heidi@dakotafire.net. Thanks for reading!

Dakotafire coverage area and some points of interest from this issue.



THANK YOU TO OUR NEW FIRED UP! MEMBERS!

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Don Glover	Roger & Shirley Schuller	James Hendrickson	



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Dakotafire's work is done by Dakotafire Media, a social-minded limited liability corporation. Our ultimate goal is making and influencing change in our region. The revenue we receive supports our goal of rural revival and helps us do reporting and convening to make that happen. We invite you to become a bigger part of this effort.

Your annual membership ensures *Dakotafire* will continue its mission of sparking rural revival, one story at a time.

Consider a gift to the mission of *Dakotafire Media*. You can become involved in three ways:

SUBSCRIPTION MEMBER

Subscription membership includes a one-year subscription (six issues) to *Dakotafire* for \$25. Makes a great gift!



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Want to become a member? Use the form at left, or go online:

www.dakotafire.net/getfiredup

Don't forget to follow us on our website, on Twitter and on Facebook. Please share our stories and help us spread the spark of rural revival to your community!

This issue's contributor question:

HOW DOES YOUR GARDEN GROW?



→ **Pete Carrels**

"Unfortunately, this summer it is growing mostly in my absence."



→ **Sarah Gackle**

"My garden grows with lots of help and for lots of people!"



→ **Mary Ann Gadberry**

"My father could grow anything and had 14 acres of beautiful trees, flowers and vegetable gardens. I assumed I would inherit his talent, but that was not the case. My last attempt at gardening was several years ago and let's just say we had to plow it under and pretend it never happened. All my gardening is now done at farmers markets."



→ **Heidi Marttila-Losure**

"One way I measure wealth (along with books and time to read) is berries in the freezer. My kids (and husband) gave me a strawberry patch last year, and this year they gave me an even better gift: Their time in weeding it!"



→ **Wendy Royston**

"With a little experimentation and a whole lot of weeds. This is our second-ever garden, and with our busy family, we find ourselves rarely having time to check the status of our produce, but excited to see what 'crops up' as we go!"



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Diners relaxed and talked after a meal prepared from local food last September at The Field restaurant in Adrian, N.D. The harvest meal was sponsored by the Northern Plains Sustainable Agriculture Society.
Photo by Heidi Marttila-Losure



community-building potential of LOCAL FOOD

by HEIDI
MARTTILA-LOSURE

The 2012 Census of Agriculture paints a rosy picture for the economics of agriculture in the Dakotafire region.

Actually, the picture is beyond rosy. You could call it golden.

Sales of farm products increased by a staggering 93 percent from 2007 to 2012, to \$3.6 billion in crops and livestock sold in 2012.

Plug these numbers into the long-term trend of farmers' income, and farmers in the Dakotafire region are making 130 percent more than they were in 1969, even adjusted for inflation.

In 2012, area farmers rolled the dice in terms of seed choices, weather and global market conditions (as they do every year) and came up with all sixes: While other parts of the country and the world dealt with persistent drought, which had a role in increasing crop prices to record levels, area farmers brought in stunning yields. For many farmers, it was the year they'd dreamed of: Everything went right.

So, readers: Did you feel it?

You'd think if our dominant industry of agriculture

was doing so well, the region in general would be doing pretty well also.

How is your bank account? Did you see a big bump from 2007 to 2012?

How about our communities—are they doing significantly better over those five years? Would you say they are better off and more vibrant?

And your health and diet: Since area agriculture was booming in 2012, were you eating more healthful food, and getting it at better prices, than you were in 2007?

Some of you probably saw better finances, healthier eating and more vibrant communities. But the data suggests that many of you answered “no” to all of them.

The data also suggests that it's possible to do agriculture in a way that ensures more people answer “yes” to those questions. It starts with two words.

Local food.

What motivates you to be a local food producer?



Prairie Diamond Ranch, Steele, N.D.

Grow forage feeds for dairy and beef cattle. Sell range-fed Aubroc/Angus beef and A1 and A2 dairy herdshares. Soon will be offering grass-fed milk.

"I ranch, dairy and farm because cattle have always been a comfort to me. I love watching them grow and experimenting with different genetics. To me, the farm is similar to a giant canvas. Each year, a little more is accomplished to mold it into what I'd like to leave the next generations. I direct market the herdshares and beef because I believe people should have the privilege of making the choice of products they wish to consume." —Carrie Knutson

Looking at the numbers

To understand the potential that local food purchases have for the region, Dakotafire Media contracted with Crossroads Resource Center, a nonprofit based in Minneapolis and run by food systems analyst Ken Meter, to do an analysis of data about the 12-county region that Dakotafire currently covers. Much of that data came from the Bureau of Economic Analysis and the recently released 2012 Census of Agriculture.

Over the years 1989-2012, on average, farmers in the Dakotafire region sold \$1.7 billion of food commodities per year. They also spent \$1.5 billion per year to produce those commodities.

Lots of the money that farmers are spending is leaving the area—farmers spend \$900 million buying inputs sourced from outside of the area.

But hey, you have to spend money to make money, right? And local farmers are still making money.

From the years 1989 to 2012, Dakotafire farmers made an average of \$186 million a year—which averages out to \$26,000 per farm.

Most of that income, however, came in the last few years. Consider just the stellar year of 2012, when farm receipts totaled a whopping \$3.6 billion, and farmers spent \$2.4 billion to produce those commodities. That means farmers in the Dakotafire region cleared a profit of more than \$1 billion *in just one year*.

(Cue the "We're in the Money" song.)

So the picture captured by the 2012 Census of Agriculture is pretty phenomenal for our region. But it also fits the description of a boom time. Boom times are great, but history suggests they have a significant downside: They don't last.

Look at the average from 1978 to 2008, and the net income for those years was—almost nothing. Some years were profitable, some weren't, but over 20 years, farmers' net income was "essentially flat," according to Ken Meter of the Crossroads Resource Center.

Look at the 80-year trend, and there are a couple of high spots: Good years during and right after World War II, and in 1973 and '74 when the U.S. was trading grain for oil.

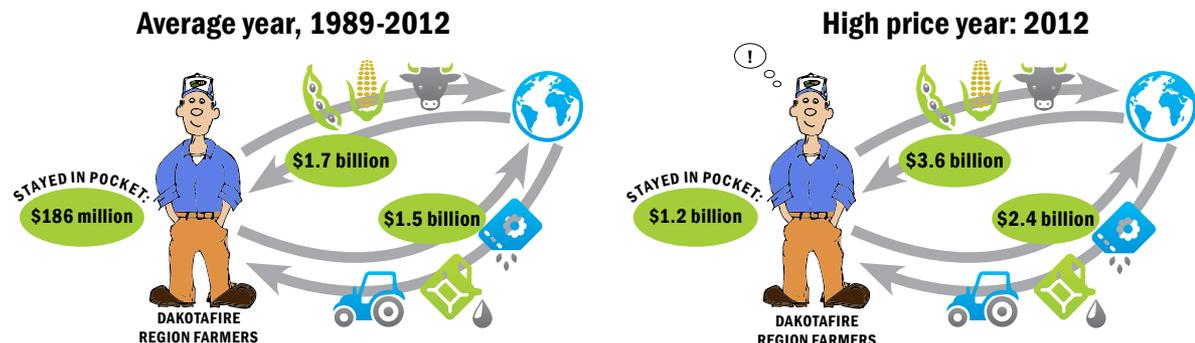
Counties in the Dakotafire region:

Stutsman, N.D.	Edmunds, S.D.
LaMoure, N.D.	Marshall, S.D.
Dickey, N.D.	Day, S.D.
Logan, N.D.	Spink, S.D.
Brown, S.D.	Clark, S.D.
McPherson, S.D.	Faulk, S.D.

See the full report

The "Dakotafire Region Local Farm and Food Economy" report put together by the Crossroads Research Center is available online: www.dakotafire.net/local-food-report

"Really those are the only two times when farmers made a whole lot of money. Both of those would be stronger nationally than they were in the Dakotafire region," Meter said. "(Local farmers) certainly don't remember as good a year (as 2012) since 1974, and that's true. But the good years we've had are unusual things. They didn't last that long."



And indeed, the high prices that gave local farmers such a good return in 2012 are already down significantly from those highs (for example, from \$7-a-bushel corn in 2012 to about \$4.40 in mid-June 2014).

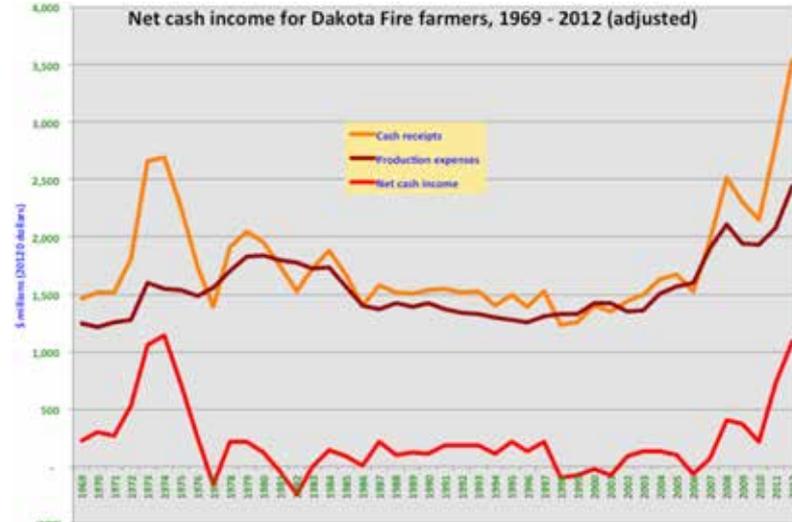
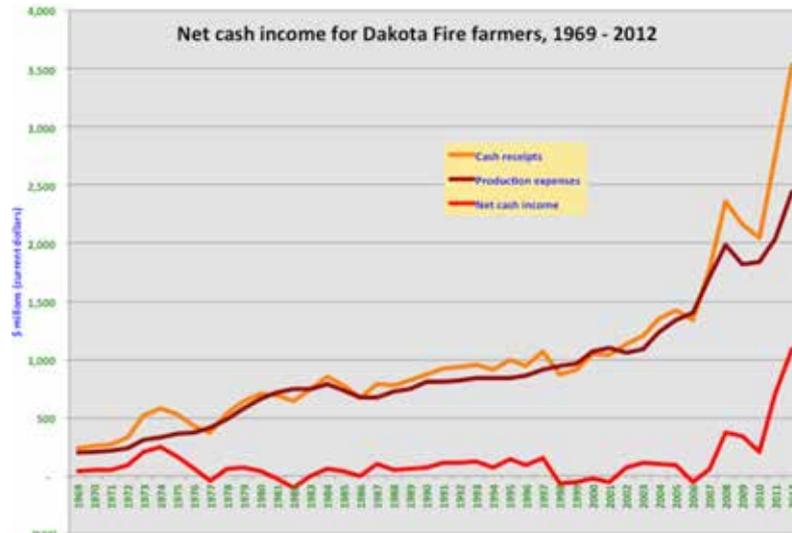
“You have this situation where farmers are making money in a sense, but they are also shipping a lot of money away from the region in the course of doing well, and when corn prices winnow down, as they will, then that (profit) margin will also disappear,” Meter said.

Fewer farmers, less benefit for communities

And even when good money is coming in, there’s another statistic to consider: The number of farms in the region. Some counties in the region have done better than others—some have lost quite a few farms, while others have gained some. This statistic is a little hard to interpret, as it may be that some very small enterprises now qualify to be called farms (farms have to have \$1,000 in income) when they didn’t in the last ag census. But Meter says the average is probably close to accurate: The region has 18 fewer farms than it did in 2007.

There’s a small comfort in the fact that the number did not drop significantly. But that number is still about half the number of farms that existed in 1945. Far fewer people are involved in agriculture than there used to be, which means that the benefits that come with good crop prices are not spread to as many people in the

Continued on page 10



Data source: Bureau of Economic Analysis. Charts by Ken Meter, 2014
The two charts above show the same information; the top chart shows actual dollars, while the bottom chart has been adjusted for inflation. The line that matters in the end is the red one for net cash income. Notice that in several years the average net income was negative. The spike of 2012 is roughly the same, adjusted for inflation, as the peak in 1973-74.

What motivates you to be a local food producer?



Dan, Theresa, David and Ginger Podoll

Prairie Road Organic Farm and Seed, south of LaMoure, N.D.

Raise a variety of vegetable seeds that are well adapted to production in the Northern Plains region

“Our food security depends upon farmers’ ability to obtain and grow a diversity of seeds that are ecologically adapted and well-suited to their farming systems and markets. Gary Nahban’s book *Where Our Food Comes From* states, ‘[I]t is the social, economic and political access to seed diversity at critical moments that can make or break a community’s means of achieving food security.’ We are committed to doing our part to provide access to seed that is locally adapted and resilient.” — Theresa Podoll

Tracy Brumfield pours some local wine for another diner at the harvest dinner held at The Field in Adrian, N.D.
Photo by Heidi Marttila-Losure



Continued from page 9

community as they did in years past. Your neighbor the farmer may have had a great year, for example, but you as a local grocery store owner probably didn't notice much difference—or at least, not enough of a difference to counteract the fact that you have fewer customers overall, in part due to farm consolidations.

And it's probably fair to say that the consolidating is not done. High land prices (driven by high crop prices) mean that for the most part, only those who already own land can afford to buy land. The typical farmland purchaser at an auction is a farmer getting bigger.

The need for better food

Just as farmers spend a significant part of their dollars on inputs from outside of the area, consumers also spend a big part of their food dollars on food from outside the area.

Consumers in the Dakotafire region spend \$247 million on food, and \$225 million of that goes out of the region. "Only \$665,000 of food products (0.04 percent of farm cash receipts, and 0.27 percent of the region's consumer market) are sold by farmers directly to consumers," according to the Crossroads Research Center's report.

Now, this data on local buying is not the most reliable and almost certainly underestimates some local food purchases. Meter said that it's taken from a sampling of producers, and if that sample didn't happen to hit the right producers, the final figure will be off. Moreover, some larger farmers say they just don't keep track of their direct sales, as they are a relatively small part of what they do.

Meter also said that this data doesn't take into account the value of what a farm family keeps for its own use.

In the 1950s, that value nationally was about \$20 billion, and today, it's officially near zero. That's not to

say that people stopped growing their own food altogether—but they stopped reporting the value of what they did grow to the government.

So take this statistic with a grain of salt.

Whatever the actual percentage, compared to similar national data, the Dakotafire region purchases significantly fewer products from local producers than consumers in other parts of the country. Nationwide, a paltry 0.3 percent of food is sold direct to the consumer, while in the Dakotafire region, that total is a downright minuscule 0.04 percent.

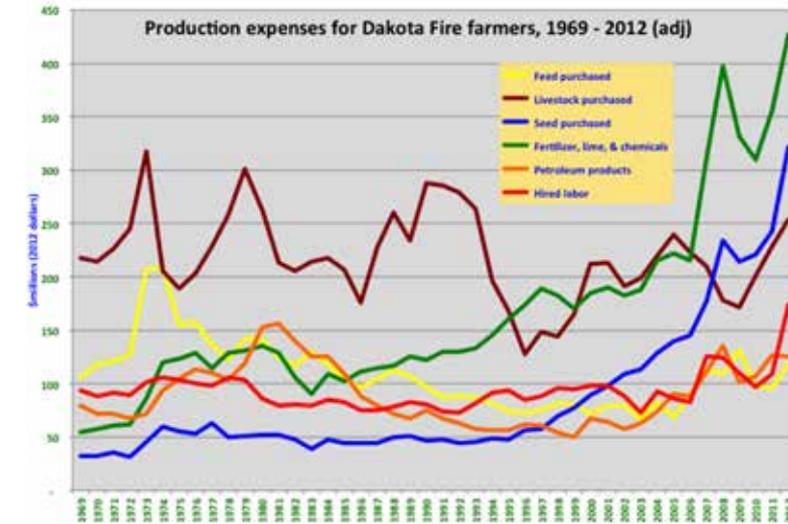
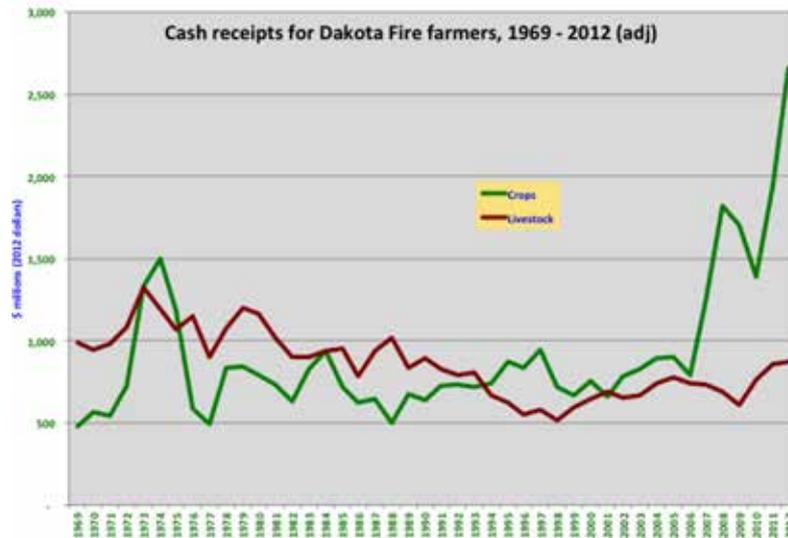
For most of us, the food we do buy doesn't include the recommended five or more servings of fruits or vegetables a day. Just 23 percent of North Dakota residents and 16 percent of South Dakotans say they eat that amount.

"This is a key indicator of health, since proper fruit and vegetable consumption has been linked to better health outcomes," according to the CRC report.

What we are spending on is health-related issues. Sixty-five percent of North and South Dakota residents are either overweight or obese; in the two states, medical costs for treating obesity, diabetes and related conditions is about \$710 million per year, according to the American Diabetes Association.

"A farm region is basically eating bad food that's imported while it ships very productive grain somewhere else," Meter said. "That's a real dilemma that all farm areas in the country face."

Continued on page 12



Data source: Bureau of Economic Analysis. Charts by Ken Meter, 2014

The top chart points out a significant reason for the shift from livestock to crops: for the past five years, crops have brought in significantly more income than livestock. The bottom chart shows how the cost of production expenses has varied since 1969. The biggest increase has been in the cost of fertilizer, lime and chemicals (the green line).

What motivates you to be a local food producer?



Heart and Soil Farm, Grandin, N.D.

Grows vegetables and some fruits using sustainable, organic methods.

"What motivates us? First and foremost is the focus on community, land stewardship and ecological diversity. We get to help feed our neighbors, take care of the soil, grow a variety of foods and help keep all those wonderful seed varieties around. Our great love of food is another motivator. Food is such an important part of the human experience—it is the centerpiece of our celebrations as well as the focal point of our everyday lives. It was important to us to try and reconnect ourselves with what we eat and along the way we thought, 'Hey, why not connect ourselves and our food with those around us as well,' and thus began Heart and Soil Farm." —Ross & Amber Lockhart

What motivates you to be a local food producer?



Llama Trax Gardens, in the beautiful rolling hills south of Valley City, N.D.

Raise a wide variety of vegetables and deliver them fresh to members of their community-supported agriculture endeavor.

"We love growing and having fresh vegetables on our table as many days out of the year as we can. Our own children are grown and raising families themselves so we like to make sure our kids and grandchildren are getting the best for their tables as well. Extending that out to members who support us helps us stay and maintain a family farm that has been in the Hansen family for generations." —Scott & Sandy Hansen

Continued from page 11

In the Dakotafire region, more than a quarter of households are at poverty level, getting free or reduced-price lunch at school. There is also a lot of need for food stamps in the middle of farm country.

"If farmers were growing food for neighbors, they would make sure that more of their neighbors had better food to eat — better food for schools, or a place where everyone could get fresh produce from local farmers," Meter said.

The money we send elsewhere

Take the money that consumers spend on food from elsewhere, and the amount that farmers spend on inputs from elsewhere, and the result is a substantial loss for the region as a whole.

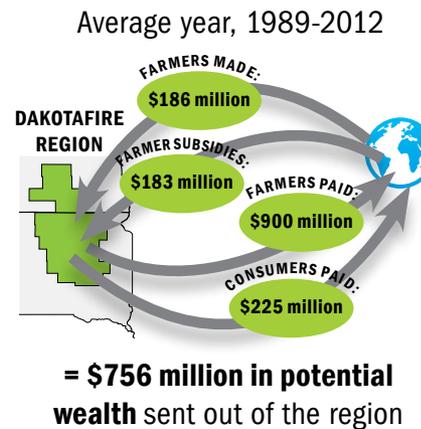
Yes, farmers made an average of \$186 million in the years from 1989-2012. They also received an average of \$183 million in subsidies over those years. But they spent \$900 million on inputs sourced from outside of the region—which means the net loss to the region is \$531 million.

Add in the \$225 million that consumers spend on food purchases from elsewhere, and that's \$756 million in potential wealth that we send out of the region *each year*.

Creating a new local economy

How can we keep more of that money in our communities, where it can recirculate and do some good?

Both the ways that farmers shop



and the ways that consumers shop contribute to the loss of potential wealth. In the Dakotafire region, it probably makes more sense to address the question of how farmers shop first, according to Meter.

"\$900 million in inputs sourced outside the region every year," Meter said. **"What could you do to grow as a region to grow new fertility—bringing animals back to the land, doing more crop rotation, planting in ways that could be sustained with inputs you can actually generate from the region?"**

Meter gave an example of a farmer who is turning cattle manure into commercial-scale compost. That's one way to create an input in the region.

Unfortunately, right now there's no financial incentive for farmers to take

such steps—"especially when corn prices are high," Meter said. "The system is there. They can buy inputs at local shops, can use the seeds and technology available to them to plant bumper crops. The competitive pressure is all about doing that."

Competitive pressure doesn't consider what's best for communities, however.

"If you really wanted to look seriously at strengthening the local economy you might look at ways to bring those inputs more into local production," Meter said.

Just because there's more opportunity in addressing farmers' purchasing first doesn't mean that there's no role for consumers in building a strong local economy, or for producers in growing or raising food for their local communities. But those efforts are still far behind other regions in the country.

What the region needs to do at this point is start small, Meter said. In some farm families, for example, a local food endeavor has allowed a spouse or son or daughter to make additional income.

In one ranch family in North Dakota with three sons, the father told each son that he was welcome to come back to the family operation after he finished his education, but he had to bring some sort of enterprise with him. Now, in addition to the cattle business, the family welcomes hunters in the fall and does ag tourism at other times of year.

The Jones family in Britton, S.D., established a community-supported agriculture business at first as a summer job for their children. It grew into a service for the community—a way for local people to get fresh fruits and

vegetables.

"(Those) are the future for local foods right now," Meter said. "Those very small initiatives are critical for establishing a food system that feeds itself."

Farmers markets also play a key role in getting a local food economy established.

One example of this is in Kulm, N.D., where Sarah and Jordan Gackle founded Coteau Hills Farmers' Market in 2011.

"When we moved here in 2009, it seemed so ironic to me that I was surrounded by agriculture and couldn't get a fresh tomato in the grocery store," Sarah Gackle said. "But that's the traditional food system—rural areas don't have the purchasing options available in urban areas."



“What can I do?”

Consider supporting those local food producers already in your community.

If you need help finding those producers or local farmers markets, comprehensive directories for both Dakotas are available online:

- <http://sdlocalfood.org/find.php>
- <http://www.nd.gov/ndda/files/resource/2014LFDDirectoryWeb.pdf>

So the Gackles decided to start the Kulm farmers market in order to offer their community the freshest possible produce. The response has been more than they imagined, and, according to Gackle, bringing people together is what makes all the work worth it.

"I love having neighbors and friends hanging around and chatting outside during our few months of beautiful weather. It's a lot of work, but a lot of fun too," she said.

After a network of small producers is established, the region can start to think about other ways of local food promotion, like providing food for schools or hospitals, or creating a food hub. (Some organizations are already laying the groundwork for these bigger initiatives; see p. 22.)

Locally produced meal prepared at The Field in Adrian, N.D.

You can also request printed copies; call 605.697.5204 for a South Dakota directory or 701-328-2659 for a North Dakota directory.

If you already purchase local foods or grow some of your own, maybe you're ready to **try the Dakota Local Food Challenge!** See how lo(cal) you can go, and get a fun T-shirt for participating. See p. 21 for details.

Changing direction

One interesting aspect of the data in the report by Crossroads Resource Center is that no new dollars are required. The dollars are already being spent, by both farmers and consumers.

The possibility lies in redirecting those dollars toward purchases that are more beneficial—for the farmers that grow the food, for the consumers that eat more healthy food, and for the communities that benefit with more connections and handshakes. *

Hear from Ken Meter in a presentation about the Dakotafire region's farm and food economy in Clark, S.D., at the next Dakotafire Café! Watch for details at www.dakotafirecafe.com.

What motivates you to be a local food producer?



Prairie Moon Herbs, rural Vermillion, S.D.

Specializes in early spring greens and peas, and fall crops. Raises herbs for retail and wholesale. Keeps bees and sells honey and herb-infused beeswax and honey products.

"I have been growing organic produce since I was 16 years old and have been involved with organic farming and marketing practices since the early 1980s. This type of farming makes sense to me, and the hard work is just part of this path. The rewards come with eating the freshest produce with the most flavor and then sharing it with others who have the same reaction: 'YUM!' I have studied herbs since about the same age, 16 years old, and love sharing the knowledge of the edible wild plants along with the cultivated medicinal herbs." —Grace Freeman

What motivates you to be a local food producer?



Coteau Sunrise Farm, Britton, S.D.

Started a community supported agriculture business in Britton four years ago. Grow a variety of different vegetables along with strawberries and raspberries both outdoors and in a high tunnel.

"Our initial reason for beginning this project was for a summer job. As my brothers and I saw the demand in our community it became more about helping our neighbors eat healthier and showing people how important locally grown produce is for the health of a community and meeting a chemical-free fruit and vegetable demand. Whatever we choose to do in the future, my brothers and I will never think that food simply comes from the supermarket!" —Tom, Blaze, and Trey Jones

County highlights from the 2012 Census of Agriculture

STATE OF NORTH DAKOTA

- Farmers sold **\$11 billion** of products in 2012.

Dickey County

- Farmers sold **\$267 million** of products in 2012.
- Dickey County ranks 3rd in North Dakota for inventory of turkeys.*

LaMoure County

- Farmers sold **\$292 million** of products in 2012.
- LaMoure County ranks 2nd in North Dakota for inventory of turkeys.*

Logan County

- Farmers sold **\$172 million** of products in 2012.
- Logan County ranks 1st in North Dakota for sales of livestock, poultry, and their products, with \$86 million.

Stutsman County

- Farmers sold **\$465 million** of products in 2012.
- Stutsman County ranks 2nd in the country, and 2nd in North Dakota for acreage of soybeans, with 422,000.

STATE OF SOUTH DAKOTA

- Farmers sold **\$10.2 billion** of products in 2012.

Brown County

- Farmers sold **\$520.6 million** of products in 2012.
- Brown County ranks 2nd

in the country and 1st in South Dakota for acreage of corn for grain, with 351,000 acres.

Clark County

- Farmers sold **\$249.4 million** of products in 2012.
- Clark County ranks 2nd in the state for inventory of hogs and pigs, with 75,000. The county ranks 3rd in the state for sales of hogs and pigs, with \$24 million.

Day County

- Farmers sold **\$189.7 million** of products in 2012.
- Day County ranks 2nd in South Dakota for aquaculture sales.*

Edmunds County

- Farmers sold **\$271 million** of products in 2012.
- Edmunds County ranks 2nd in the state for inventory of pheasants.*

Faulk County

- Farmers sold **\$216 million** of products in 2012.
- Faulk County ranks 2nd in South Dakota for inventory of broilers.*

Marshall County

- Farmers sold **\$307 million** of products in 2012.
- Marshall County ranks 1st in the state for sales

of livestock, poultry, and their products, with \$161 million.

McPherson County

- Farmers sold **\$159 million** of products in 2012.
- McPherson County ranks 3rd in the state for sales of poultry and eggs, with \$15 million.

Spink County

- Farmers sold **\$448 million** of products in 2012.
- Spink County ranks 9th in the country, and 2nd in the state for acreage of soybeans, with 273,000.

CHANGE IN NUMBER OF FARMS	Number of farms	Change since 2007
State of North Dakota	30,961	3% less
State of South Dakota	31,989	3% more
Spink County, S.D.	675	8% more
Day County, S.D.	693	3% more
Clark County, S.D.	597	3% more
Brown County, S.D.	1,056	2% more
McPherson County, S.D.	398	no change
Dickey County, N.D.	543	2 fewer
Edmunds County, S.D.	422	3 fewer
Marshall County, S.D.	518	5 fewer
Stutsman County, N.D.	1,028	15 fewer
Faulk County, S.D.	280	5% less
LaMoure County, N.D.	642	6% less
Logan County, N.D.	379	11% less

DIRECT SALES	Number of farms selling direct	Value of food sold directly	Change in number of farms selling direct since 2007	Change in value of product sold direct since 2007	Direct sales as a percent of total farm product sales
State of North Dakota	433	\$1.9 mil	11 fewer	20% less	0.02%
State of South Dakota	791	\$4.35 mil	5% more	29% less	0.04%
Clark County, S.D.	20	\$212,000	5 more	149% more	0.1%
Stutsman County, N.D.	15	\$41,000	3 fewer	41% less	0.1%
McPherson Co., S.D.	12	\$126,000	6 more	320% more	0.03%
Faulk County, S.D.	7	\$68,000	3 more	N/A	0.03%
Edmunds County, S.D.	7	\$54,000	4 more	260% more	0.02%
Day County, S.D.	7	\$31,000	4 more	417% more	0.02%
LaMoure County, N.D.	4	\$15,000	7 fewer	84% less	0.01%
Brown County, S.D.	18	\$39,000	6 fewer	85% less	0.01%
Logan County, N.D.	3	\$12,000	15 fewer	37% less	0.01%
Spink County, S.D.	4	\$14,000	12 fewer	80% less	0.003%
Marshall County, S.D.	7	\$9,000	2 fewer	N/A	0.002%
Dickey County, N.D.	6	\$44,000	no change	159% more	0.0001%

Nationally, 0.3% of total farm product sales are direct sales.

*Inventory figures were suppressed by the USDA in an effort to protect confidentiality.

What motivates you to be a local food producer?



Wild Idea Buffalo Co. LLC,
Rapid City, S.D.

Raise grass-fed, grass-finished, humanely harvested, antibiotic- and hormone-free bison.

"Our greater mission is for environmental stability. To achieve this we have a holistic approach to our ranching, and participate wholly in grassland conservation and restoration. Bison are the native herbivore to the Great Plains. They evolved with all the other species not to just survive, but to thrive. They are the natural grazing management tool for our grassland range. The buffalo meat is simply a byproduct of the grass, water and sunshine they take in. This natural diet makes their meat not only delicious and healthy, but also sustainable, providing environmentally conscious consumers an alternative to questionable red meats." —Jill O'Brien



The Root Sellers,
Mandan, N.D.

Grow Safe Seed and Prairie Road Organics bedding plants for vegetable gardens.

"My motivation for growing plants for people is simply to give them an opportunity to try new varieties like many of my favorite heirloom tomatoes. By growing Prairie Road Organic transplants, I am supporting another local business from Fullerton, N.D. Selling a six-pack of six different varieties means everyone can experiment with plants that cannot be found at the local chain store greenhouse. I have been growing food, canning, creating and sharing local food my entire life. Now, I have the distinct opportunity to share that with my granddaughters in hopes they have a healthier, more food-secure life." —Sue Balcom



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What motivates you to be a local food producer?



Gardendwellers Farm, Esmond, N.D.

Grow culinary herbs to sell to restaurants, grocery stores and more.

"The desire to be my own boss, the desire to have a company where I can provide a product that is good for people and the environment, uses talents that I have and is good for me as well." —Holly and Barry Mawby



Dave and Sue Greenlee, Garretson, S.D.

Grow several varieties of wine grapes, some table grapes, as well as other fruits. Are a licensed and bonded winery, and sell wine to our customers.

"We love South Dakota life, and enjoy the hard work and challenge that it takes to make a go of it. I may put a sign up that says "Food miles – Cranberry wine: 300 (Wisconsin Rapids, WI), everything else: zero!" —Dave Greenlee

Restaurant focuses on local flavor

by SUZY GIOVONNETTONE COPE

Meet Grant Greenlund, head chef of The Field Restaurant and Lounge in the LaMoure County, N.D., town of Adrian, population 110. The Field prides itself on serving dishes made primarily with fresh local ingredients that correspond with the seasons.

"You can do a lot of different things with fresh produce and herbs," Greenlund said.

The menu is not extravagant by any means — mainly burgers, pizzas, steaks and appetizers. But you will find something unique to enjoy every week.

You won't find anything frozen at The Field. All cooking is done from scratch — including the bread, pizza crusts and sauces.

"We pride ourselves in not using normal, store-bought food," said Grant.

Where does the food come from?

All hamburger, bacon and rib-eye come from the LaMoure Locker in LaMoure, N.D. Steak is purchased from local producers in Jamestown. Hydroponically grown lettuce is brought in fresh each week by a local farmer. Occasionally, seafood is acquired from suppliers in Jamestown as well.

Grant adds that they like to rotate their business around the area. The menu revolves around availability and what is in season. Grant and his wife, Courtney, maintain a garden behind the restaurant, which plays a major part in determining what is on the menu each week.

Nearby growers bring in a variety of vegetables ranging from sweet corn to kale. The grain elevator across the road provides some produce as well.

Any large- or small-scale farmer is welcome to market his or her produce to The Field. Greenlund is open to supporting as many local farmers as possible and welcomes the opportunity to be creative with the ingredients he purchases.

"A lot of our produce is purchased from farmers who just stop by," Greenlund said.



In addition to cooking from scratch, Grant and Courtney Greenlund grow much of the produce served at The Field. Photo by Suzy Giovonnettone Cope

Rich with history

Dave Heinrich, the board president of The Field, has roots in Adrian. He grew up in the small town, and his dad attended the school. The entrance to The Field displays the original bell, which is a memorial to the old schoolhouse that previously stood on the same property.

"It was important to us to incorporate history into the building," Heinrich said.

Today you'll find the town's history and school memorabilia displayed on the walls as you dine in.

The Field, named for the adjacent baseball field, was initially designed in 2009 by the townspeople. About 15 investors pooled money together to get the eating establishment started.

Invested in the community

The establishment was set up as a cooperative so everyone could participate in the overall management. Shares are purchased at \$10 each. In order to vote in the cooperative,

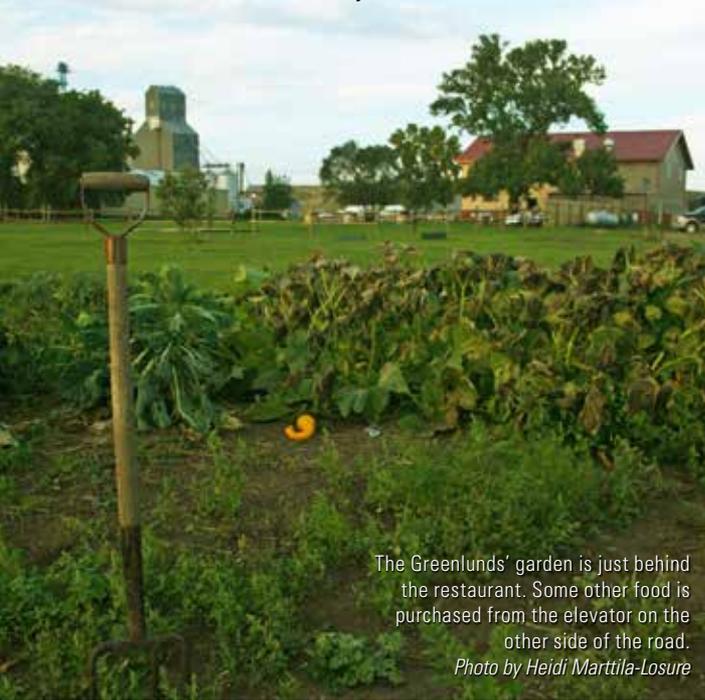
members must purchase at least 100 shares or contribute through volunteer labor.

The cooperative members and other local contractors constructed the building, and the doors opened for business in June 2012. A board of 35 voting members manages the facility.

It was critical to the board members that they find employees who are connected to the community. That is what will make the cooperative work in the long run, according to Heinrich. Grant and Courtney were living in Jamestown, but moved to Adrian when they were invited to join the team in December 2013.

"I felt it was a great opportunity to work with fresh foods. Using fresh foods gives me space to explore and get creative. I enjoy trying different things and thinking outside the box," Greenlund said.

Using local food supports the investment to the community. "It adds value to our products," Heinrich said, "and to the local economy as well." *



The Greenlunds' garden is just behind the restaurant. Some other food is purchased from the elevator on the other side of the road.

Photo by Heidi Marttila-Losure

What motivates you to be a local food producer?



Son Max, now 24 and still helping sometimes in a pinch.

Cider Hill Farm, Arlington, S.D.

Sell bread and other baked goods and Bella Luna mobile wood-fired pizza. Host HarvesTable farm-to-table events at various locations from June-October.

"The ability to work from home as my kids were growing up was a prime factor in my decision to start. All five of our kids have helped in some way at different points, from actually helping with gardening (we started with that and moved on to the products we now sell) to baking, milking, selling at market, making pizzas, waiting tables. It's been good experience for them, enabling them to make some money and accumulate a wide range of skills. They've all learned to pitch in and help." —Joan Williams

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What motivates you to be a local food producer?



Cliff Millsapps, Gary, S.D.

Produces grassfed beef.

“For the past 12 years I’ve lived out my passion for thoughtful, organic, full time farming that had been brooding in me for 35 years prior. During the 35 years I stayed with a full-time job, while watching people my age that I knew go under trying to farm. The past 12 years the increasing customer shift away from cheaper is better, and toward food that they have confidence in has been the necessary market that I needed to make the plunge into modest-scale farming and succeed.

“I get to work for myself, work outdoors, see nature, and solve the daily challenges that keep the work interesting. I feel like I’m doing something productive and noble. More and more people are moving toward meat that they feel is raised in a more natural way, and the future looks good for young people to succeed in this kind of business. At 63, I’m looking to retire and let the next generation of farmer take over. For the right person I have the right turnkey operation.”

➔ COLUMN

The pleasure of good eating

by FREDERICK KIRSCHENMANN

Distinguished Fellow of the Leopold Center for Sustainable Agriculture

Editor’s note: This essay is adapted from a keynote address Kirschenmann presented at the 2006 annual Food Alliance Dinner in Portland, Ore.

For most of us the pleasure of good eating probably consists of chowing down a gusty steak, a delicious pork chop, fresh vegetables with taste-bud-exploding flavors, or a savory tree-ripened peach that melts in your mouth.

In truth, the pleasure of good eating consists of much more than tasty treats.

When I was growing up on our farm in North Dakota, almost everything we ate was produced on the farm. We had a garden where we produced all of the vegetables, condiments and most of the fruit that we ate in season or canned for the winter months. Wild plums and choke cherries provided additional fruits from which we made jam and wine. All of our meat came from the farm (beef, pork, lamb, chicken, turkey, goose and duck) and we milked cows for our own milk and cream, and we made our own butter and cheese. Once a year we would buy 400 pounds of flour from which we baked all of our own bread.

There was only one rule at our table: We were expected to never be “schnagich.” *Schnagich* was a Russian-German word for which there is probably no exact transla-

tion. But even if you didn’t understand its exact meaning, the sound of the word was so harsh that you knew it was something you never wanted to be. To be *schnagich* was to be finicky, but it was much more than that. It was about being disrespectful. At our table we were expected to show appreciation for the food that was provided, for the labor of those who produced and prepared it, for the animals and plants that gave their lives for it, and for the land that was the gift that made it all possible.

Of course, there was a lesson in all this: The pleasure of good eating was about more than the taste of the food. It was about a deep appreciation for — and connection with — everything on our plates.

I suspect that most of us had this appreciation, since we were intimately con-

nected with the food we ate. But much has changed with the industrialization of our food system. For many, food now seems like any other commodity. Somewhere along the way we came to expect our food to be fast, convenient and cheap. “Factory food” is no longer a strange concept.

Factory food has taken us down some peculiar paths. Fruit farmers routinely are told the only thing that matters is color and shelf life. Some food scientists suggest that one day we may manufacture food “pills” containing all of the nutrients we need so that plants and animals will not be needed for food.

One future “food factory” scenario was published in a December 1987 article in *BioScience* magazine. Martin Rogoff and Stephen Rawlins envisioned a food system driven by technology that would not require farms or farmers at all. Their proposal, in summary, would have us discontinue the inefficient method of producing our food from food crops and animals, and instead produce biomass that could be reduced to a syrup, piped to urban centers where, with transgenic technologies, it could be manufactured into any food the market desired.

While no one has yet tried to operationalize such futuristic scenarios, we have industrialized our food system in ways that are almost as bizarre. We have turned food-citizen-customers into “consumers” expected to be passive recipients of whatever

the industry decides to produce, even when much of the food has virtually no nutrient value, let alone any kind of a story that consumers might want to support. As my friend Bill Hefferenan puts it, if the industrial food system were to choose an appropriate motto for itself, it would be “just eat it.”

The pleasure of good eating is much more complex – and interesting – than the industrial food system would have us believe. The pleasure of good eating is derived from all of the interconnections that ordinary families experience in the process of putting desirable food on their tables.

Rick Schnieders, former president and CEO of the SYSCO Corp., has summed it up nicely. **The pleasure of good eating, he says, is not about fast, convenient and cheap, but about memory, romance, and trust.** He reminds us that if we want to be successful in today’s food market, we need to have a product so good that when customers eat it they say “Wow! Where did that come from? I want that again” (memory). We also need to provide customers with a genuine story so they can feel good about eating a food, such as who produced it, the type of environmental stewardship practiced in growing, processing and transporting it, how animals were treated, and so on (romance). Customers also want to be active participants in the food chain – to access information and have a relationship that reaches back to the farmer who produced the food (trust).

Is this for real? Yes. Dan Barber, one

of the nation’s leading chefs, told me that he spends more time with his servers, acquainting them with the story behind every item on the menu, than he does preparing food. Why? The food story entices his customers to return to his two restaurants.

Does this mean that to enjoy the pleasure of good eating we have to return to the food system I grew up with and become intimately connected to everything we eat? No. But it does mean we need to retrieve those values and make them part of our modern food system.

I would add two more requirements for success in today’s food market: intimacy and affordability.

Simply having information about where the food comes from (important as that is) will not substitute for “being there.” In the long run, our food and agriculture systems need to be more decentralized.

As to affordability, we simply must begin to address the gross inequity deeply entrenched in our global society, especially as it relates to food. Almost half of the world’s citizens live on less than \$2 a day, so social unrest is inevitable and peace is unlikely. Capitalism must shift its strategy from wealth concentration to wealth expansion. As long as one-sixth of the world’s population is malnourished, there is little chance that any of us can enjoy the pleasure of good eating.

If we are to sustain the pleasure of good eating, our food systems must consist of a new kind of value chain that connects the farm to the table. Such a value chain would make those connections by:

- Fostering a food system that honors the labor of all involved throughout the global village by compensating everyone fairly for their part in putting food on our tables;
- Nurturing a land ethic that respects the gift of good land, including soil, water, plants and animals;
- Creating opportunities for intimacy, not only among eaters but among all participants in the food chain;
- Producing, processing and distributing food with life-giving stories; and, yes,
- Providing wonderful, good-tasting, healthful, nutritious food that is so good the flavors explode in our mouths.

I suspect this is the modern version of not being *schnagich* at our food tables worldwide today. *



Dessert for a harvest meal prepared at The Field in Adrian, N.D.

What motivates you to be a local food producer?



WildMoon Salsa, Fargo, N.D.

Produces fresh and processed salsas.

“WildMoon Salsa customers are the best! We want to share authentic family recipes with others, so they can enjoy great-tasting salsas with chips, in their cooking, and having fun with family and friends!” —Pernell Knutson



Skyline Ranch Produce, Hensler, N.D.

Grows a very large variety of produce.

“The love of working hard. The smiles on customers faces when they see the fresh produce I take to market, not to mention the number of people that line up to buy local produce at every market I go to. I feel the Lord has blessed me with abundant energy and the love of growing an abundance of produce. I could say more but the garden is calling me.” —Dwight J. Duke

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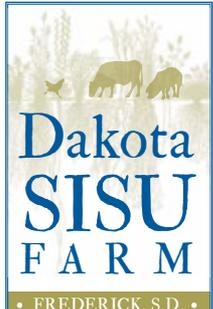
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Ask for the good stuff!



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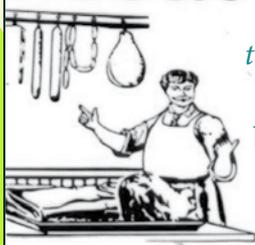
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What is the Dakota Local Food Challenge?

The Dakota Local Food Challenge is a way for people in the Dakotas to get better connected to the land and the people who produce our food by eating food produced locally for two weeks in September. Participants will (briefly) chart their local foodiness each day on a calendar, downloadable at www.dakotafire.net/golocal, and then either e-mail or mail that calendar back to us the week following the challenge.

What will I get if I take part?

Everyone who completes a calendar will get a fun "I WENT LOCAL" T-shirt, and their names will also be put in a drawing to win other prizes. Moreover, you'll likely also get a greater appreciation of your place in the world of agriculture and a warm fuzzy feeling inside. Some others who have taken part in local food challenges report other benefits such as feeling healthier, losing weight, and making friends—though we're only guaranteeing the T-shirt.

So does every bite of food for those 14 days need to come from a local source?

Not exactly. We've set up two levels of participation: **LOCAL BASIC:** Eating all of your fruits and vegetables from local sources for 14 days; and **LOCAL HARD-CORE:** Eating all local food for 14 days, with the exception of seven items that are not.

What do you mean by local? Details, details!

You can find the answer to this and lots more information on how to take part, including recipes and where to find locally produced food, on our website.

Learn more & sign up online: www.dakotafire.net/golocal



Sarah Cooper stands in front of SPROUT MN's newly converted 1997 Ford F350 bio-diesel truck at a farmers market held in an area hospital parking lot.

Photos by Jessie Borkenhagen

Power in numbers

Regional food hubs give farmers access to bigger customers

by MARY ANN GADBERRY

Think local food and you may picture picking up salad fixings at the farmers market for your family's supper: a few tomatoes, a bag of greens, a bunch of carrots.

But what happens when your job is buying food for, say, 400 instead of four? Is buying local still possible?

It is if local farmers pool their efforts. And that's where food hubs can make a difference.

The U.S. Department of Agriculture defines a food hub as "a centrally located facility with a business management structure facilitating the aggregation, storage, processing, distribution, and/or marketing of locally/regionally produced food products." The target markets for these services are typically wholesale customers—hospitals, schools, restaurants and grocery stores—that have a harder time buying local product in the desired volumes.

Several groups are working to bring regional food hubs to the Dakotas.

Kari O'Neill, community development field specialist with SDSU Extension, said several regions in South Dakota are currently discussing how a food hub might work in their area.

"Starting small is a good beginning," O'Neill said, "and meeting the needs of both the producers and the consumers is a priority. There are local food producers already marketing products in South Dakota, and a food hub would just be the next step for many of them in being able to put foods together such as produce, meat, eggs, milk and cheese."

Educating people on this relatively new concept has become O'Neill's mission. Setting up educational programs and holding video conferences around the state are just a small part of her quest to promote local agriculture and provide consumers with healthier food options.

Sue Balcom, executive director of FARRMS, based in Medina, N.D., takes the lead when it comes to spearheading the North Dakota food hub movement. A strong advocate of eating locally grown food products, Balcom believes the state's younger growers will lead the charge toward regional food hubs. Whether they are moving into or returning to the state, North Dakota's younger population may not be able to buy a commodity-size farm but they might be able to grow a few acres of vegetables. That fact, along with the desire to eat healthier, may be the driving force behind the launch of North Dakota food hubs.

"Currently, schools and institutions can't buy directly from farmers because of government regulations," Balcom said, "but a food hub would fill the infrastructure gaps and create more opportunities

for everyone involved.”

The Dakotas may still be testing the water when it comes to food hubs, but a regional food hub in Brainerd, Minn., is a thriving addition to the region. SPROUT MN, LLC is a central Minnesota-based food hub that works with local and regional producers to strengthen their ability to satisfy wholesale, retail and institutional demand.

Arlene Jones and the SPROUT team have built a consortium of more than 40 growers and distribute locally grown commodities to three school districts, Central Lakes College, hospitals and many local restaurants.

Jones started SPROUT MN five years ago when she began supplying locally grown produce to restaurants in the Brainerd Lakes Area and Brainerd School District’s Farm to School program. As owner and operator of The Farm on St. Mathias along with her husband, Bob, Jones is no stranger to sustainable farming. When their farm could no longer keep up with the needs of the region, she knew she needed to gather the talents of other local growers.

“It takes an entire community,” Jones said. “No one can do it alone. There are champions who care about the social, economic and environmental benefits for your area and you need to find them.”

The biggest struggle in establishing a food hub is dealing with infrastructure, Jones said.

“Obtaining and maintaining buildings, vehicles, equipment, personnel and supplies can be very overwhelming. You need people beside you who care about the work you are doing and support the overall goals of the operation.”

SPROUT MN is going the extra mile when it

“It takes an entire community. No one can do it alone.”

comes to promoting sustainable agriculture. A newly converted 1997 Ford F350 with a refrigerated box is used to collect raw produce from farmers and deliver it to various processing locations. Then processed food is picked up and delivered to institutions for consumption. The truck runs on biodiesel made from locally grown canola oil—the same kind of canola oil used for cooking.

Central Lakes College’s Agricultural and Energy Center grows the canola, harvests it, extracts the oil from the seeds and then converts it to biodiesel using its own portable biodiesel plant. Through a collaboration between the University of Minnesota Extension’s Regional Sustainable Development Partnership (RSDP), Central Lakes College in Staples and SPROUT MN, this truck provides a service to local farmers and also serves as a reminder of the importance and versatility of local agriculture.

Want to start a regional food hub?

The Northwest Area Foundation and the Bush Foundation have made grants available for the daily operating expenses of regional food hubs such as SPROUT MN. For more information on regional farm hubs in your area, visit your local Extension office or go to their website. *

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Elle Waldoch and Lucy Bartholomew are working on starting their own childhood memories of kuchen. The two girls are granddaughters of Sue Balcom of Mandan, N.D.

Kuchen

Dakotans' celebration tables wouldn't be complete without this sweet treat *by* WENDY ROYSTON

Whether pronounced "koo-kin," "koo-hchin," "kyui-hchin," "koo-gin" or any combination thereof, one thing's certain: Dakotans love their kuchen!

In South Dakota, kuchen was named the official state dessert in 2000, but residents on both sides of the Dakota-dividing line have been enjoying the delicacy since Germans first moved into the area just before the turn of the 20th century.

In German the word simply means "cake." For many Dakotans, however, it means the custard-filled dessert that carries with it thoughts of caring and home. The "best" kuchen always comes from one's own childhood kitchen.

"Nobody made kuchen like my mom," said Kayla Zirpel-Proctor, a Parkston, S.D., native now living in St. Paul. "Hers was unique from all of the other ones that I ever tried. I'm not quite sure what it was—if it was the custard or what, but it was just different ... Mom made kuchen at least twice a month, even in the heat of the summer, with no air conditioning. ... Everyone knew my mom's kuchen."

Elaine Zirpel died in January 2013, leaving a hole at family gatherings that perhaps wasn't at first realized. For both Easters since their mother's death, Zirpel-Proctor and her brother, David Zirpel, of Sioux City, Iowa, have worked side by side, trying to create kuchen that would have met their mother's approval.

The siblings spent hours in the kitchen, poured warm milk over sugar and yeast, mixed and raised the sticky, sweet dough, then rolled it flat, put it into pie tins, and topped it with fruit and a bubbly, rich, homemade custard.

While the confection wasn't quite what the family was used to, Zirpel-Proctor said family members have thanked her for keeping a bit of their matriarch in each holiday celebration.

"It tasted similar, but it didn't hold the '50 years of experience' within it," Zirpel-Proctor said.

But the experience was one of nostalgia.

"The way that recipe is written, I could just hear her saying it as I read it," Zirpel-Proctor said. "I just felt like she was there, because she was always a big part of every single holiday. Now, the holidays are just very different, but because we had that kuchen there, she was still part of it."

A kuchen queen (and princess)

Just a few miles southwest from the Zirpel home-stead, kuchen is king in Delmont, S.D., and this year, for the first time ever, the queen and princess will be crowned. The 18th Annual Delmont Kuchen Festival is planned for Sept. 13-14, and is held in conjunction with the Twin Rivers Harvest Festival, which showcases farming practices of yesteryear.

Since its inception in 1996, when 35-40 kuchen

were prepared, the Kuchen Festival has sold out every available pastry annually.

"The first year, then-Sen. Tom Daschle came. We made 35 or 40 of them, and we had to save one back, so he could have some!" Grosz said.

They are now well past a few dozen kuchen.

"We sell whatever we make. (In the past, we have made) anywhere from 1,000 to 1,300, and we don't want to run out. Planning for 1,500 this year, we'll probably reach our maximum. ... People are very nostalgic about kuchen, because their grandmothers or their mothers made it when they were children," Grosz said, adding that people often stop to request the flavor their mother made most.

The first kuchen queen and princess pageant is scheduled for August, in conjunction with the community's second-annual Neighborhood Watch Association's National Night Out event.

The 'go-to dessert'

About eight miles north of Delmont, in rural Hutchinson County, Carine (Oster) Sperlich, too, is known for her kuchen. Raised in Eureka, S.D., she has not attended a kuchen festival.

"People are very nostalgic about their kuchen."



"We have always talked about going, but we have never gotten there," she said. "I would like to see the different varieties of kuchen that they make, and see how it compares to the ones that I make."

Sperlich said her passion for kuchen began as a young girl, watching her mother fill the family freezer with the delectable dessert.

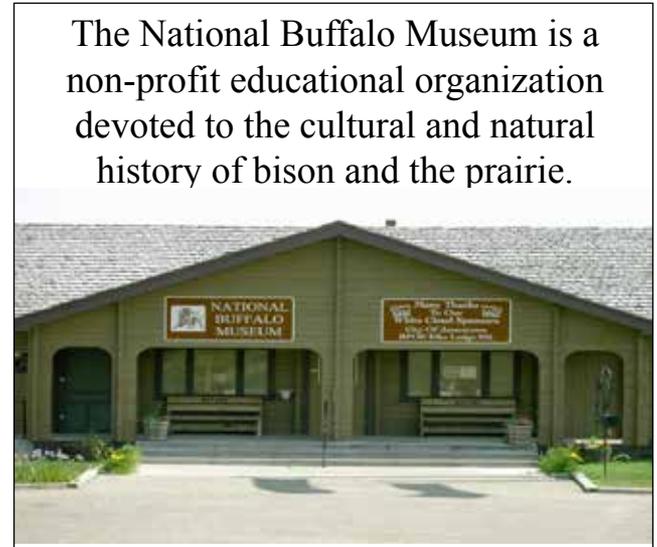
"That was her go-to dessert. She would make kuchen, and when company would come—people would drop in, or on Sunday night, people would drop in and play cards and have lunch—and Mom would have kuchen in the freezer," Sperlich said.

These days, Sperlich makes a large batch of the pastry at Christmas and Easter time, and fills her own freezer with the leftovers, but "it's not a

Continued on page 26



Marion Houn and Sue Balcom create kuchen for Houn's daughter's wedding.



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Continued from page 25

staple like it was when I grew up," when her mother, Ella Oster, was "always making it."

Although the Oster family recipe has been passed down for at least three generations, Sperlich said her own four daughters have yet to make it on their own.

"I grew up with all of the good German dishes. All my aunts were really good cooks, so they all made kuchen and all of the German foods. It was kind of like it was a competition, to see who could make the best. ... Everyone tried to see if they could make the best one, but they were all good cooks," she said.

Many of Sperlich's childhood memories revolve around kuchen.

"Everybody makes kuchen in Eureka. ... Everybody's recipe kind of varies, as far as how much pudding they put on it, or how much fruit they put in, depending on what they grew up with," she said.

Although Sperlich said "German food" varies based on whether a person is "high German" or "low German"—which denoted the level of precision put into one's German dialect, but also seemed to reflect one's wealth—kuchen was a staple for all of German descent.

"Everybody had flour and eggs, so you did a lot of things with the dough—dumplings and noodles," she said. "We had a lot of homemade noodles, because if you had eggs and flour, you could make noodles, where maybe the high Germans had more meat. ... (Kuchen-making) is a pretty labor-intensive process. You get up in the morning, and it's probably four hours to get it all done. ... You plan at least part of a day to get it all done."

But, as any good German woman knows, "Alles ist seinen Preis wert."

Everything is worth its price. *

Want to try Elaine Zirpel's kuchen recipe, or share your own? Have a kuchen memory to share? Go to forum.dakotafire.net and click on the kuchen topic!

Rural places see both upside and downside of higher grocery prices

Farmers are adapting while shoppers are paying more

by TOM LAWRENCE

Food prices are spiking dramatically, with the Bureau of Labor Statistics reporting March's 0.4 percent increase the sharpest rise since September 2011.

Joyce Poppen of rural Castlewood doesn't need to read a government report. She sees the rising prices in grocery store aisles.

"Groceries have been going up rapidly for the last five years for sure," Poppen said. "What used to cost me \$150 I now spend closer to \$300 for. We buy all our meat and we went from very little beef to chicken breasts and to big packages of pork loin. We bring it home, about 20 pounds, and cut it into slices just for the two of us and repackage and freeze."

Poppen said she's watched beef roast prices rise from \$3 a pound to \$5.98 a pound, and ribeye steak go up to \$9.99 for 12 ounces.

John Hartman, manager of the Dakota Butcher in Clark, said people are still buying sides of beef, just not as many.

"It's kind of comparable to gasoline," Hartman said. "When gas prices climb really high, people still drive around, just not as much. That's what I'm seeing in our industry. People are still eating beef. Just not as much."

Hartman said customers now are buying more sale items.

"Beef sales have slowed down with the high prices and that causes us to run more sales, and we also are trying to give more variety options to the customer, such as value-added products, and that seems to work pretty well when beef prices are high," said Hartman.

Normally, the butcher shop would fall back to more pork sales, "but that's high, too, right now," he said.

Bacon and beef, two staples of the American menu, are the two fastest-rising items. Bacon's cost has increased a sizzling 53 percent in four years, according to the BLS. The average cost in March was \$5.55 per pound.

Porcine epidemic diarrhea, a virus that greatly reduced the number of baby pigs, is being blamed in

Continued on page 28



Continued from page 27

part for that. The National Pork Producers Council estimates the nation's hog supply may shrink by 10 percent this year.

Beef, especially lean and extra-lean ground beef, has jumped 35 percent in four years. As the price for live cattle, which are ready for slaughter, reaches an all-time high, ground beef sells for well over \$4 a pound, and tops \$5 a pound for lean beef.

These rising grocery costs are linked to drought, less land set aside for pasture and grazing land as farmers rush to plant profitable crops, and other factors. But for most people, all it means is more money for less food.

More land plowed up

Poppen has witnessed changes in farming techniques as well. The high price of corn has persuaded farmers to change how they use their land.

Poppen, 62, said her husband Lyle rents out his land but plowed up pasture land last year to benefit his renter and to make the land more attractive to potential buyers.

"A lot of farmers over the East River area plowed up pasture to try to sell their land, as all tillable land brings more dollars per acre," she said.

Poppen said she is aware of seeming disconnect of a concern over food prices while they plow up more land.

She said their new renter did not have cattle and



Photo by Bill Krikac/Clark County Courier
John Hartman of the Dakota Butcher in Clark, S.D., said people are still buying beef, just less of it, in the wake of high prices.

had no need for pasture. Sorghum was planted, cut and baled up for cattle feed, "so we actually assisted in feeding cattle over the winter months," she said.

But Poppen admitted financial realities matter.

"Another factor is that pasture rent is at \$60 an acre for hay land while crop land is \$150 an acre,"

"A lot of farmers over the East River area plowed up pasture to try to sell their land, as all tillable land brings more dollars per acre."

she said. "Most years our land is low and won't be able to be planted, but by doing what we did last year we improved the quality of the grass in the pasture."

She said larger operations, as more and more small farms disappear, swallowed up, are digging up a lot more ground.

"The thing that concerns me much more than the price of beef is the continuing removal of trees from big farmers buying old acreages and ripping out all the shelter belts to work up the land to only gain 2 more acres of land for crop land," Poppen said. "We will one day be short of cropland and great numbers of cattle, for we can already see the upcoming of the days when this land was farmed and poor tillage and no trees, the ever horrendous Dust Bowl days.

"We see big fields blow now like we have not before in our lifetime," she said.

Average age of a South Dakota farmer: **54.3**
Average age of a North Dakota farmer: **55.3**

54.3 **55.3**

Source: 2012 Ag Census

766,000
beef producers in 2007

729,000
beef producers in 2012

Source: SD Beef Council

More than **7.2 million**

Acres of grassland converted to cropland in South Dakota, North Dakota, Iowa, and Minnesota for the years 2008-2012

Source: Farm Bureau

\$6.15 billion

Value of U.S. beef exports in 2013, a new record (up 12 percent). Volume was up 3 percent.

Source: U.S. Meat Export Federation

Colin Duffy of Platte sees the changes from a pair of angles, as the manager of the Fort Randall Federal Credit Union and a farmhand at Mike Ringling Farms.

He said the financial realities are at the core of the issue.

"I spoke to a local rancher and friend and he said that his cows are worth anywhere between \$2,000 and \$3,000 and that he bought them for between \$900 to \$1,100 back in 2011," Duffy said.

"The other thing to note is that greed plays a huge role in this entire problem. Farmers are going to plant the crop that makes them money. When corn was going for \$8 and more a bushel, they kept ripping and tearing up valuable range ground. This in turn spiked up prices not only for land in East River South Dakota, but the stuff out in West River has even gotten insane. I've heard stuff that appraises for \$500 to \$700 West River is going for \$2,000. How the hell does anybody make that work?"

Drought, rising costs

Julie Walker, an SDSU associate professor and Extension beef specialist, said the decrease in cattle numbers has several factors. "One of these would be the recent drought," she said.

More land being converted to crop production, and the high costs of farming in general, are also major factors, she said. The October blizzard that killed thousands of head of cattle added to the pain.

Ron Frederick of the South Dakota Beef Council said that storm was a killer.

"In South Dakota, the Atlas blizzard in fall of 2013 certainly had an impact on the decline in South Dakota's cowherd, which is down over 200,000 head (Jan. 1, 2014 vs. Jan. 1, 2013)," he said.

"I know the pasture/grazing land going into crop production has created a need for management changes," Walker said. "Some producers have decreased their cattle numbers, while other producers are looking into different options for maintaining cattle numbers, which would include dry-lotting and residue grazing as two examples."

Fewer farmers, and aging ones, too

Jodie Andersen, executive director of the South Dakota Cattlemen's Association, said there is another factor to consider: Farmers are aging and many are simply not being replaced.

"I would assert that the aging population of farmers and ranchers is also playing a role, especially in South Dakota," she said. "As the population rises, those with diversified operations are opting to sell their livestock if they are looking to slow down ... especially if the next generation isn't coming back to the operation. Even if the next generation does return, many are opting to farm rather than own livestock as risk management programs for the crop sector far exceed those available to livestock producers."

Lastly, while the American cattle herd shrinks, fewer of the animals are going to slaughter here. More and more are being shipped East, as

"(Some older farmers) are opting to sell their livestock ... especially if the next generation isn't coming back to the operation."



a rising Asian demand for beef has added to the competition for cattle. Just look at all the trade missions to Asian nations that South Dakota officials take on a regular basis.

"I don't think the average consumer realizes that beef being sent to Japan and South Korea affects their pricing," Duffy said.

U.S. exports of beef were up 4 percent through February, compared

with a year earlier, according to the USDA Economic Research Service—a result of increasing global demand that is in general a good thing for cattle producers.

But try telling Poppen and Reitzel that as they wait for the total from a cashier. *

Additional reporting by Bill Krikac of the Clark County Courier.



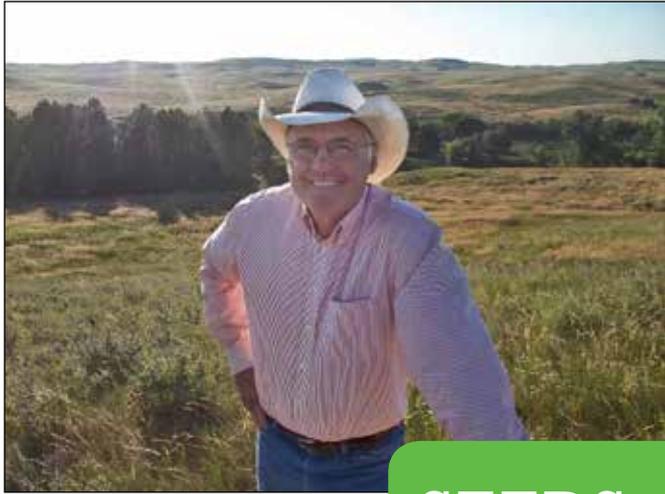
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Photos courtesy Rock Hills Ranch
Lyle Perman at Rock Hills Ranch. Below
are cattle on the ranch's landscape.

SEEDS *of* WISDOM

FARMERS AND RANCHERS ON FARMING AND RANCHING

by PETER CARRELS

The Perman prescription: Diversify agriculture for better communities and better land

For Lyle Perman, the work of farming is intimately connected to the place in which it's done.

"We've been raising cattle in the Swan Creek Valley for a long time," Perman said, stretching out the word "long" and saying "the Swan Creek Valley" as someone who has oriented his life along that landscape.

Perman's Rock Hills Ranch straddles Swan Creek in south central Walworth County, S.D., about 45 miles south of the North Dakota border. The Missouri River's artificial impoundment named Oahe is a dozen miles west, and through all that distance is a rolling, rangy landscape. East of the ranch the topography flattens out and opens up for 50 miles until it gets turbulent again, dropping like a gentle rapids built of bluffs and small hills before spilling into the James River lowlands. Some of Perman's ranchland sits at 2,000 feet above sea level. The floor of the James River valley is 1,290 or so.

As Perman nears 60 he ponders the progression of his relationship to the land.

"I wasn't raised with the idea of ecological considerations," he said. "My thinking started to evolve that way in the '80s. We drained wetlands in the '70s, and the government encouraged us to do that. Years later we restored wetlands, and the government encouraged us to do that,

too. I have learned that we need to understand that there's a lot happening on the land, and there are serious signals being sent. When bees, meadowlarks, and nighthawks are gone from the land—and in many places they are—we need to understand why they're gone."

It's a big operation he's built and learned from. These days, he confidently watches his son, Luke, at the reins of that 7,500 acre enterprise.

"We own 3,840 acres, and the rest we rent," Perman said. Of that total, he added, 5,000 acres are in grass, and the Permans—Lyle, Luke, and their families—run about 450 head of Angus-based cattle on that prairie and pasture.

The nongrassy landscape is mostly growing row-cropped annuals, though the Permans have slowly but steadily restored cropland to pasture. The conversion process started in 1976, and it is now picking up steam.

"In 2014 we're converting 240 more acres of tilled land to grass," Perman said.

The goal is to eventually manage about 6,500 acres as perennial grassland. That's a trend—converting grain-growing ground to grassland—that is rarely found in ag country.

Perman's unique approach to agriculture extends to how he farms. Neither he nor his son owns any modern farm equipment. The land they farm is crop-shared with a neighbor who does own big iron.

"This shows that you don't need lots of expensive equipment to farm more than 1,000 acres, like we do," Perman said. "If we didn't have excellent neighbors we'd not be able to conduct grain farming like we can."

Perman frequently uses the word "diversity" when describing the healthiest, most sustainable approach to managing agricultural land. "There's plenty of research and common-sense study that shows that when you replace plant diversity with monoculture there is a negative effect and unintended consequences on soil health, growing conditions and wildlife," he

"We need to understand that there's a lot happening on the land, and there are serious signals being sent. When bees, meadowlarks, and nighthawks are gone from the land ... we need to understand why they're gone."



said. "We like diversity in our operation. We're trying to add more and more of it to our land."

Grassland management has evolved with this understanding, Perman explained.

"When I grew up, ranchers practiced season-long grazing, and they treated one grass just like any other. Forbs weren't a concern. Neither were keystone species. We've learned to schedule grazing based on rainfall and plant growth, and we limit grazing on our grasslands to a single week or even less time. That means most of our grass rests for 51 weeks. Our grasslands have over 100 species of plants. The name of the game is good cover on the ground. That protects soils, helps the lands absorb moisture, and prevents erosion."

"Most people," Perman said, "wouldn't think of planting land back to grass like we're doing. And we're a no-till operation, too."

There's also diversity in Perman's income. Back in the mid-1980s, when the bottom fell out of farming and ranching, he realized he needed an alternative income if he hoped to

Continued on page 33



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Much of the work at Rock Hills Ranch has been handed over to Lyle Perman's son, Luke Perman, pictured at right. He's holding a member of the next generation, Isaac, who's getting a lesson from his grandfather Lyle.

Photo courtesy Rock Hills Ranch

“The way we treat the land and the way we farm ... also has a lot to do with how money is spread through our rural economies. As we lose diversity in our agricultural operations, we lose people from the countryside. It’s a full-time job to run 500 cattle. It’s a part-time job to farm 500 acres. Taking animals off the land takes people off the land.”

Continued from page 31

save his ranch. “I started selling insurance and crop insurance. That saved Rock Hills Ranch.”

Lyle also realizes that the government’s farm policy and the safety net provided by crop insurance influences land use by farmers. “Consider the renewable fuels standard and crop insurance, and how they drive land use decisions,” he said. “Also consider that we have nothing like either of those in the livestock industry. That puts ranchers at a disadvantage.”

Though beef prices are decent right now, livestock growers have watched cattle numbers shrink as corn farming exploded. In 1992, the cattle inventory in South Dakota stood at 3.777 million animals. Ten years later there’d been a dip to 3.695 million. By 2012 the drop was more severe —to 3.3 million cattle and calves.

The number of livestock sale barns across the state also declined. In 1997 there were 45 sale barns in South Dakota. Today that total is 31. Economic activity and jobs related to sale barns disappeared as sale barns closed. Some small communities

were especially harmed.

“The way we treat the land and the way we farm not only has a lot to do with the health of soil and water resources, it also has a lot to do with how money is spread through our rural economies,” Perman said. “As we lose diversity in our agricultural operations, we lose people from the countryside. It’s a full-time job to run 500 cattle. It’s a part-time job to farm 500 acres. Taking animals off the land takes people off the land. But right now cows can’t compete against corn.”

“The cattle industry is under attack not only from forces outside agriculture, but also from forces within agriculture,” Perman said.

Perman’s prescription for agriculture is steeped in stewardship and rural considerations.

“Agriculture needs a new compass, a new direction,” he said. “Corn and soybeans now dominate, and some instances, they’re all that’s being grown. This causes unintended consequences, such as plant disease issues, loss of wildlife habitat, and soil issues. This is not a healthy trend. It’s not healthy for the land, for rural communities, or for inhabitants of the land.” *

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Living like family in *Langford*

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Langford's Main Street.

What's it like to live in Langford, S.D.? Its residents provided some examples:

- Take a walk for exercise and four people will stop to ask you if you need a ride.
- If your children are missing on a summer Tuesday or Friday, the first call you make is to the library, where they are probably working with librarian Yvonne Olson on some projects.
- If one of the “regulars” from morning coffee isn’t at the C-Store at the usual time, Shari (the clerk) will call and see if he is OK.
- If your child skins her knee at the park, you may get a call from another mom: “Hey, your daughter fell and hurt her knee, so I took her in and put a Band-Aid on it. She’s good to go now.”
- You might be mad at your neighbor, but if she’s sick, you’ll bring her a casserole anyway.

“There’s just something about that small-town feeling,” said Paula Jensen, who grew up in Langford and still lives here. “You don’t get that anywhere else. You know people care.”

People in the region have most likely seen that Langford brand of caring during recent state basketball tournaments, as most of the community has come out to show their support for the winning team. The hospitality rooms at tournaments were always well-stocked, and

the town showed its spirit with a cheer squad of community members that traveled through the town.

In terms of support for its teams, “I’ve never seen a community like it,” said Tony Brown, Langford’s high school and middle school principal.

What outsiders might not realize is that Langford residents show that same spirit of caring to everyone. The school teams don’t have to be winning to get community support. People who graduated and moved away decades ago still benefit from local fundraisers if they get sick. And even the people on the fringes of the community—those who might in another situation be ignored or even shunned—“Langford even looks after them,” said Langford resident (and C-Store clerk,

and informal welcome wagon representative) Shari Schock.

“People care here,” said Scott Amundson, who moved back to Langford seven years ago after 27 years away. He’s now the director of Glacial Lakes Area Development.

Amundson said the city’s maintenance man, Blair Healy, is a good example of the community’s caring nature.

“He doesn’t have to do some of the things he does for his job, but he takes it upon himself to pick up someone’s trees if they are down in the yard and not wait to be asked,” Amundson said.

It’s a place where people look out for one another.

In a lot of cases this is literally true, but it feels true even if it’s not: In Langford, everyone is family.

“There’s just something about that small-town feeling. You don’t get that anywhere else. You know people care.”

Staying connected

Tony Brown sometimes brings his dog, Marley, to school with him. If he does, Marley spends the day in the second-grade classroom, where the children are thrilled to have a visitor who licks as an enthusiastic greeting.

Langford graduated 17 seniors this year. Brown said he’s noticed a trend over the past few years of more students going to vocational school than four-year colleges. Many of them are studying trades that are needed in the local community, such as diesel mechanics or construction. Brown hasn’t seen much indication that these students are planning to come back at this point, “but it would be nice if they did,” he said.

A few of the graduating seniors are planning on staying on their family farms—many of which have been in their families since the land was homesteaded.

Even those that leave Langford keep close ties with the community. A lot of this is done through the community’s Facebook page, which has more than 2,000 friends—an impressive number for a town of just over 300.

“People have come to rely on it” to stay informed about what’s going on in the community, Jensen said. Jensen does a lot of the posting on the Facebook page, and people have thanked her for helping them maintain a connection to

the community even if they are no longer living there.

Traditions

The town has a pull for those former residents, many of whom come back to visit for its annual events. The school carnival, for example, draws alumni back each year.

“I have sisters in Denver who fly here to come to the school carnival just because it’s a tradition that’s important to them,” Amundson said. “It’s a huge deal. Bigger than you can fathom.”

The school carnival has been going for 60 years in Langford. The event includes 30 booths of games, plus food and more.

It is a fundraiser for the school’s music program, but “it’s more about the connection, really,” Amundson said.

And that’s just one of the event traditions that Langford maintains. There’s also the men’s pancake supper in March, the turkey raffle, the high school play, and the new summer picnic.

These events require a lot of effort to put together, but “everybody comes together and pitches in and ... makes sure everything works,” said Chad Hardy, owner of Langford Lumber Company.

The events help the community maintain a sense of pride.

Continued on page 38



Tony Brown brings his dog, Marley, to his work at the school some days, where Marley is a hit with the second-graders.



Shari Schock appreciates the way the Langford community has welcomed her family.



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Because their mothers were best friends, Scott Amundson and Paula Jensen grew up together in Langford and established some of the small-town bonds so common in the community. "I love her like a sister," Amundson said.

Continued from page 37

"People like to see that their community is still alive," Jensen said.

Passing on the torch

Traditions are maintained not just through events, but also in family businesses.

Hardy's father bought the lumber yard in the 1970s; Hardy went away to college to study business, not necessarily intending to come home and run the family business, but that's how it worked out.

The lumber yard just expanded this year to a location in Eden. Hardy says the business is successful in part because a many people in the community realize that "if you don't support your small business it will be gone," he said. They

also take pride in offering customer service that larger stores might not.

The community has gained a lot by having him home, as he serves on the board of the local community foundation and as a trustee on the town board—a big job currently, as they are working on a major sewer project. Langford also completed a big street project recently, and renovated its tennis courts.

The town tries to do things that keep the whole community in mind, Hardy said. But nearly everything they do requires taxpayer money, which sometimes brings some pushback.

"But the bottom line is you gotta do it, or you're gonna lose it," Hardy said. "If you just let it go, it will go ... If you don't try something, you know what the result is going to be."

Support for youth

The community started the Langford Community Foundation just six years ago, and it already has met and exceeded several fundraising goals. The community really embraced the idea of investing in itself.

One innovative aspect of the foundation is that they include youth on the board. The board started with just one youth representative. In two years that number had grown to three, and last year the foundation had eight youth volunteer to be on the board.

The youth attend meetings and help out at events, Amundson said, all the while learning about the priorities of the community and things like Robert's Rules of Order.

"They are pretty excited and proud of their position," said Amundson, who is also the board chairman of the foundation.

The adults are proud of the youth as well. They will be featured in a video created by the South Dakota Community Foundation to show other community foundations how youth involvement can benefit the organizations.

This is just one example of the community's work in caring for its children.

Another is the community-run daycare. The city purchased a Governor's Home in the daycare layout and oversees its operation, hiring a day-care provider and maintaining the building. It's done not as a profit center but as a service to the community.

The city's public library is another child-oriented facility.

Yvonne Olson has been the librarian for a year, but she volunteered at the library for at least 10 years before that.

"We have fun at the library," Olson said. "It's a good place. I really enjoy working here."

The library sponsors a summer reading program for children and also hosts a Mother Goose program for preschool-age children that happens regularly year-round.

Olson said working with those children is a great deal of fun for her, and the gathering time has also become a valuable source of socialization for the mothers who bring their children.

"The moms have built a real bond together," she said.

Many of the older children in the community see the library as a welcoming place in the summer, especially when it gets hot—then they appreciate the books, the computers and the air conditioning.

Hardy says the community focuses on youth in large part because they are the future of the community.

"People are thinking, in the back of their mind, that they want their small town to be there for people in case they ever want to come home," Hardy said. "That's what a guy's got to be focused on is the future."

Growing

Langford bucked the trend of a lot of small communities in the latest U.S. Census figures: From 2000 to 2010, Langford actually gained about 20 residents.

One of those families included Shari Schock and her husband. They were looking for place to move to after the flood of 2007 did significant damage to their home in Aberdeen.

When they came to Langford to look



Yvonne Olson said the job of librarian is a perfect one for someone like her who loves books.

at a home, a football game was underway across town. The roar of the fans was impressive.

"My husband was like, 'I love it,'" Schock said. The small-town feeling was just like Aberdeen used to be when they were growing up there, she said.

They rented the home at first and ended up buying it.

Schock has really appreciated how the community embraced their family, though some aspects of small-town living took a little getting used to.

When she's working at the DaMar C-Store, the coffee guys will ask her about any visitors in town. (She does usually know: "I try to get to know everybody," she said.)

And, she said, nearly everybody is related to everybody. "You don't dare talk bad about anybody, because they



One of the library's regular patrons makes her way to the building on Main Street.

Continued on page 40

Continued from page 39

are probably a cousin somehow," she joked.

But she's come to appreciate that family atmosphere. She knows, for example, that parents are watching out for one another's children.

"Our kids are safe," she said.

Bigger things ahead

Langford is focused on sustaining its population, and perhaps even growing in the future, Jensen said.

"I think we're on the edge of growth," she said. "I think for a lot of years there was that attitude that 'We're just a dying community, and we're never going to be anything but a dying community.' That wasn't so very long ago."

But with new facilities like Wheatgrowers, a new building in the works for Main Street, and the school sustaining enrollment, the view of what's possible has changed.

"I think people are excited about

what the future can bring," Jensen said. "That (excitement) will continue to prompt growth."

Housing a concern

That growth might happen more quickly if the community could figure out a way around its housing shortage.

Kayla Suther is one of the people who'd like to move to Langford. Suther, who works with her father at Hewitt Insurance Agency, grew up in Langford and is currently living in Groton.

"We're trying to get moved over here," Suther said, adding that she and her husband want their children, now ages 3 and 5, to attend school in Langford. She appreciated the small-school atmosphere, and wants that for her own children.

"I liked having the opportunity to try a lot of different things," she said. Students weren't stuck with labels of "sports kid" or "music kid" or "drama kid" in a small school, since everybody could try everything.

The Suthers are working on finding a place to live in Langford, and it's not easy.

Langford faces problems common to many communities in the area: Much of the available housing is old, and sometimes in need of significant repair. And that's when there is something available—sometimes families don't want to let go of a property for sentimental or other reasons.



Kayla Suther works with her father, Craig Hewitt, at Hewitt Insurance Agency. Since they both grew up in Langford, they shared similar experiences—like participating in the high school play.

Building new is not an option if you want to get a return on the investment someday, as a newly completed home in a small town like Langford is worth significantly less than the amount it took to build it.

And even if you are OK with not recouping your investment, you'll first need to purchase a lot, and people aren't always eager to sell.

One way the community has worked to address the housing situation is through Governor's Homes. Jensen thinks that Langford may have the highest number of Governor's Homes per capita in the state.

The Suthers are still hopeful

something will work out. She's eager to get back home to where her roots are.

Connection to place

Many of the families in the community have been here for years—some even since the town was founded.

Jensen told the story of one Langford farm was recently purchased by a younger couple in the same family. That purchase was the first time that money had changed hands on that property since it was homesteaded. Otherwise it had simply been passed down the generations.

"Roots really run deep here," Amundson said. *



Chad Hardy, center, owns the Langford Lumber Company. Russell Crosby, left, works at the lumber yard, and Joe Keogh is a regular customer at the lumber yard through his work as assistant city manager.

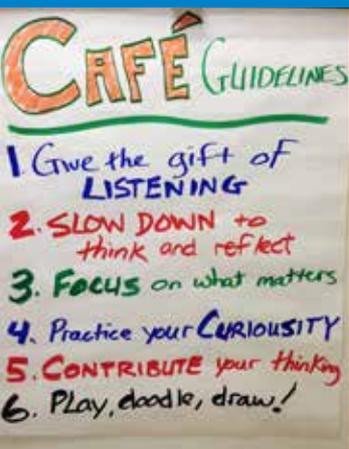


Lots to say about water

The importance of water to the Webster area could be seen at the end of the Dakotafire Café event on May 29: When time ended for the official event, the conversations kept going.

About two dozen participants attended the event, which was held at the American Legion in Webster. The event was intended to get people talking about the stories presented in the May/June issue of Dakotafire on the topic of water.

Many in Day County have a keen interest in water issues because of increasing lake levels that have put farmers, whose former fields are under water, at odds with sportsmen's interests.



Jeff Hemenway of the Natural Resources Conservation Service started by showing participants a rainfall simulation, which highlighted a clear difference in how land-use decisions affect how water moves on the landscape: On one end of the spectrum is a cool-season grass pasture, where almost all of the water infiltrates into the soil. On the other end of the spectrum is a tilled, black field, in which almost all of the rainfall runs off the surface, carrying many soil particles with it. The most dramatic moment of the simulation was when Hemenway turned the soil trays over. The tilled field was still dry dust 2 inches down, despite having the equivalent of 2 inches of rain put on it.



Laura Edwards of SDSU Extension in Aberdeen showed precipitation data for the James River Valley region, pointing out that the region has seen a wetting trend over many decades. Edwards shared the results of a National Climate Assessment issued this spring that suggested that this wetting trend is likely to continue in the Dakotas, even as other parts of the country face persistent drought.

“Increasing extremes in precipitation will continue to challenge agriculture,” Edwards said. “Folks should be managing, planning for, thinking about, not just agriculture but also communities for water supplies and water quality, because these extreme events are projected to become more likely.”

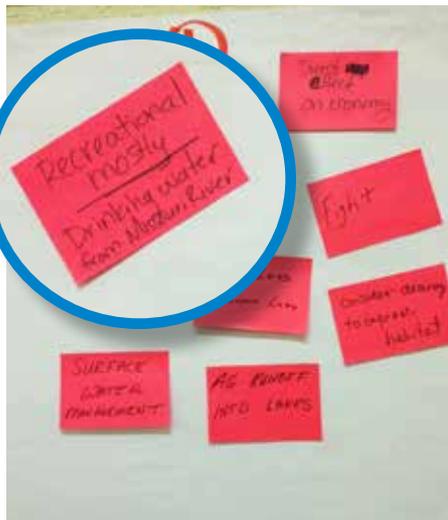


Photos by Amanda Fanger, Joe Bartmann and Zeke Richter

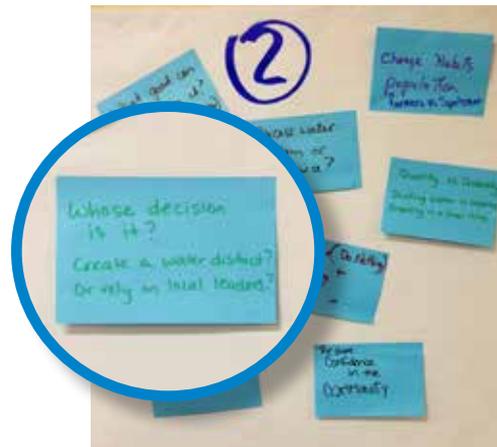


The conversations that followed these presentations focused on three questions intended to define the problem in a new way, challenge assumptions in how we're looking at it, and come up with bold solutions to address it in a way that results in a gain for everybody.

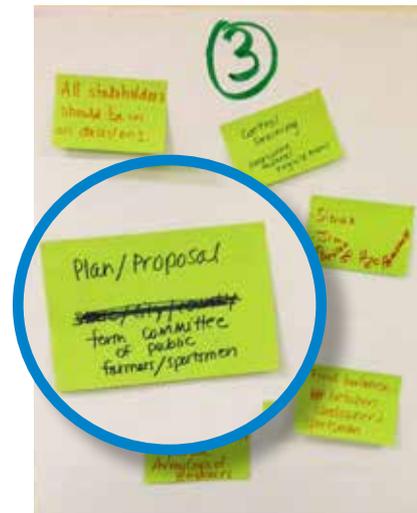
Here are some interesting points from the Dakotafire Café conversations:



Why do we use an abundant resource (water) mostly for recreation, while we bring in drinking water from the Missouri River?



Sometimes we speak in terms of "they"—as in, "They just won't do anything about it"—but we don't define who "they" is. Who are "they"? If we don't know, could it be that "they" is us?



Finding a solution to increasing lake levels will require making sure that all stakeholders are involved in the decisions.

Watch a video of highlights of the May Dakotafire Café:

www.dakotafire.net/water-cafe

Want to add your comments to the discussion? You can do so at Dakotafire's new forum site:

www.forum.dakotafire.net

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WEBSTER

SHOE HOUSE

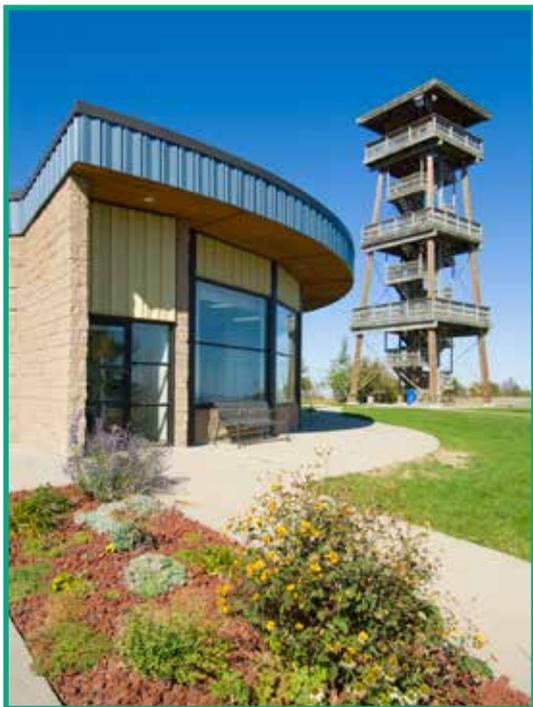
One highlight of the Museum of Wildlife, Science & Industry is the Shoe House, which holds more than 10,000 pairs of shoes that are the collection of Mildred O'Neil. Each pair tells a story. See 22 other buildings that highlight the region's history of military, agricultural, and pioneer life. www.sdmuseum.org. —Elaine Gilbertson



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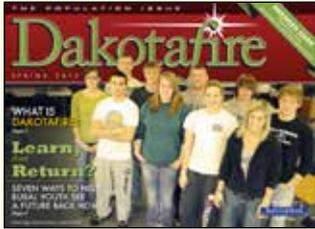
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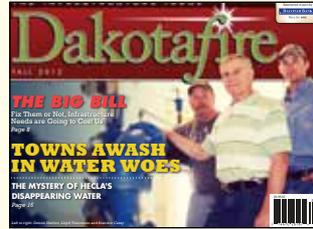
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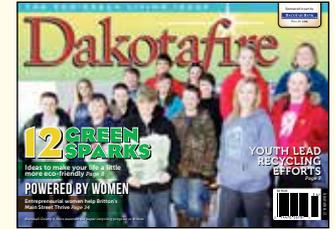
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“There was no waiting,” recalls Bobbi. “The doctor came in so quick, and it was great how he interacted with Bostian. He talked to him, answered his questions and told him exactly what he was going to do.”

Fast Action

How one experience changed this family’s view of the emergency room

Bostian Burdette did not want to go to the emergency room. A previous experience four years ago had left a bad taste in his mouth and painful memories in the 8-year-old’s mind. The prospect of going back was making him cry as much as the deep gash that was now on his chin.

“My husband and I were down in the basement of our warehouse and the kids were on the main level,” remembers Bostian’s mom Bobbi Burdette. “We heard our daughter screaming. We rushed upstairs and saw Bostian covered in blood.”

Bostian had been roller blading across the cement floor when he fell and split his chin open. The Burdette’s quickly scooped him up and headed to the Sanford Aberdeen Emergency Department.

“He had needed stitches once before,” says Bobbi.

“We had gone someplace else and it was such a terrible experience that he didn’t want to go back. But we had never been to Sanford. So we thought we might as well go there and give it a try.”

“There was no waiting,” recalls Bobbi. “The doctor came in so quick, and it was great how he interacted with Bostian. He talked to him, answered his questions and told him exactly what he was going to do.”

Bostian was given a piece of gauze that numbed his chin so it wouldn’t hurt so much when the real numbing agent was applied with a needle. While the family waited for it to take effect, Bostian was able to take his mind off his injury with a little help from the nurses.

“They brought me an iPad, and I could play games on it,” says Bostian.

“Everyone was so attentive,” recalls Bobbi. “They would come in, check on us and then tell us when they would be back. It was great not wondering where everyone was or what was going on. That was so comforting to me as a mother.”

“The doctor told me that it would be like a pinch,” says Bostian. “And he let my mom lay next to me, and she sang to me. Then I got stickers and candy.”

Five stitches later, the Burdettes were out the door with a new outlook on emergency rooms and a new go-to hospital.

“We had such a great experience that we are new Sanford Aberdeen patients,” says Bobbi. “And with four active kids, I’m sure there are some more emergency room trips in our future.”

For more information on the Sanford Aberdeen Emergency Department visit sanfordaberdeen.org.

Lake Tewaukon was the place to go by MARY ANN GADBERRY

Everyone in Sargent County knows where Lake Tewaukon is, and most of us have fished there at one time or another.

Lake Tewaukon was like a vacation destination for us when we were growing up, whether it was simply for a day of fishing, or for a Sunday picnic. My dad grew up in the area, so we always felt like we belonged there.

We would pack up the car with fishing gear, jackets, the minnow bucket, and a gunny sack to hold our catch of the day. The last thing my dad did to get ready was to attach the bamboo fishing poles to the passenger side of the car by tying twine around the poles and through the door handles. That meant we'd all have to get in through the driver's side, because no one could open the doors on the passenger's side. We used to argue over who had to sit next to the door that was tied shut, and it was one of the only times in my life I remember feeling claustrophobic.

Any anxiety disappeared when we arrived at the lake, and we all scrambled to get our fishing rods and to get the best spot for fishing.

My sister Rita and I were usually given the bamboo poles to use. Dad would make sure we were spaced out far enough so that when we lifted those long poles into the air, the hook wouldn't swing over and catch the person next to us. But as hard as he

tried to keep us safe from each other, there were usually one or more incidents when our hooks caught more than fish.

For the most part, I liked using a bamboo pole, but there was one thing I hated about it: When I raised it up from the water to check the hook or to bring in the line so that I could throw it out again, water ran down the pole and right into my armpit. The water was usually cold, and more than once I dropped my pole when the water tickled me as it ran down my arm.

I am not a patient person, and so I would check my hook regularly to make sure there was nothing on there. Yes, there was a bobber on the line, which let me know if I had a bite, but I never wanted to leave anything to chance. What if the fish was smart enough to nibble at the minnow and not make the bobber move?

My dad used to get so mad at me for constantly pulling my line out of the water. I couldn't cast the line out again without putting someone in danger, so he would come over and cast it for me. I'm surprised he got any fishing done at all.

Fud, my brother, required less maintenance. He could do his own casting and put on his own bait, and he even liked taking the fish off the hook when he caught them. The only time he caused work for Dad was when he would chase me with a fish, which prompted me to drop my pole and run. My fishing pole would end up in the water or some weeds and my dad would have to retrieve it, add new bait, and cast it out one more time.

Rita was a natural-born fisherwoman. She was not afraid to bait her own hook, and she would crawl out onto the rocks if she felt the fishing would be better there, and she wasn't afraid to take the fish off the

hook when she did catch one.

My older brothers and sisters talk about having picnics at Tewaukon during fishing trips. Often cousins or aunts and uncles would meet them at the lake.

Because my dad's family grew up around Lake Tewaukon, anytime they had a family get-together, the lake was the perfect place to have it. Many fishing stories and picnic memories have been passed along to the next generations.

There is one particular incident during a fishing trip to Lake Tewaukon that has stayed in my mind all these years: Once, when we were fishing, a car pulled up and the man yelled out his window that we needed to watch out because a rabid skunk was spotted heading our way. Dad told us all to get in the car, so we did. While we were in the car, a skunk came staggering through the grass. Of course, our faces were all plastered up against the car windows watching him as he wandered off.

I remember asking my dad why the skunk was staggering, and he told me that the skunk was sick. Then he told me that one way you can tell if a skunk has rabies is if they raise their tail to spray, but they can't spray, and they leave no odor. In other words, if you can smell a skunk, it doesn't have rabies. Now, I'm not sure if that is a scientific fact or an old wives' tale, but that idea has stuck with me my whole life. Hopefully, I will never run into a situation where I need to question whether my dad was telling the truth. *

→ *This story is from the first of three books in Mary Ann Gadberry's Home Again series published by Knuckledown Press and available on Amazon.com. Home Again for Spring and Summer, Home Again with Family in a Small Town, and Home Again for Autumn and Winter contain childhood memories of growing up during the 1950s-60s.*

SEND US YOUR POSTCARD

In each issue of *Dakotafire*, we feature a "Postcard"—a short, evocative story about an event, person or place, written as if you were telling the story to a friend. Some ideas: hunting stories, the highlight of a big basketball game, or a moment in history. Story must have a photo to accompany it. Digital images (a minimum of 1000 pixels wide) are preferred; you can also send a photo by mail.

E-mail submissions to heidi@dakotafire.net, or mail to **Dakotafire Media, Postcard Submission, PO Box 603, Frederick, SD 57441.**



Fishing at Lake Tewaukon was a family affair for the Grammond family. Eugene Beron, left, lived in Cayuga and was married to Esther (Grammond) Beron. To Eugene's right is Della (Grammond) Beglau, who along with her husband, Sam; daughter, Pat; and son, Curtis, enjoyed fishing at the lake whenever they visited from California.

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