

Commentary

An Amazing Life Journey

BY RITA BRHEL

P&D Correspondent

Marquette, Nebraska, is this little bitty town with a population of about 200. There really isn't much around there except for a few rundown houses typical of such small towns and the stubborn people who continue to call it home despite the fact that they could live in a slightly larger town with some amenities like a gas station and grocery store literally just 2 miles down the road.

I get it. I live in a town of 400. And I love it. But for a lot of people, towns this size leave much to be desired.

But I digress. So Marquette isn't much of a town. It isn't going to be drawing a lot of people in anytime soon. But it does have a gem tucked in there called Grain Place Foods.

Its founder, 94-year-old Don Vetter, died on March 11.

Grain Place Foods started out as just any other conventional grain farm. Then in 1953, Vetter began questioning the status quo of the agricultural practices of the day and decided to grow organic instead. He was joined by his son in 1975 after David came home with his bachelor's degree in agronomy and Master of Divinity. For David, organic farming was the perfect combination of his biological and theological interests.

The Vetter farm was eventually certified organic in 1978, among the first in the Midwest, and renamed The Grain Place in 1979 when the Vettters added grain-cleaning and storage facilities to serve small-scale, organic farmers and specialty organic food



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distributors and processors in the region.

In 1987, The Grain Place transitioned again, being renamed Grain Place Foods with the addition of value-added manufacturing services.

Today, Grain Place Foods —www.grain-placefoods.com — employs 24 people, several of whom have been with the company for more than 15 years.

Grain Place Foods products include organic, specialty grains from barley, flaxseed and millet to quinoa, rye and triticale. There are even some non-grain items like free-dried blueberries, cane sugar and cold-pressed vanilla extract.

I think Grain Place Foods has an amazing story, and I am continually impressed by the creativity and innovation shown by people who are brave enough to question the status quo and determined enough to step out on their own, often in the face of immense criticism or even ridicule.

Reading back into his obituary at www.highbymortuary.com, at first glance, Don Vetter didn't seem to have an extraordinary youth or another reason that would predispose him to change his life's course at age 33. He was active in 4-H as a teenager, showing cattle and doing livestock judging. Of course, a lot of it could have something to do with his innate temperament and the childhood environment

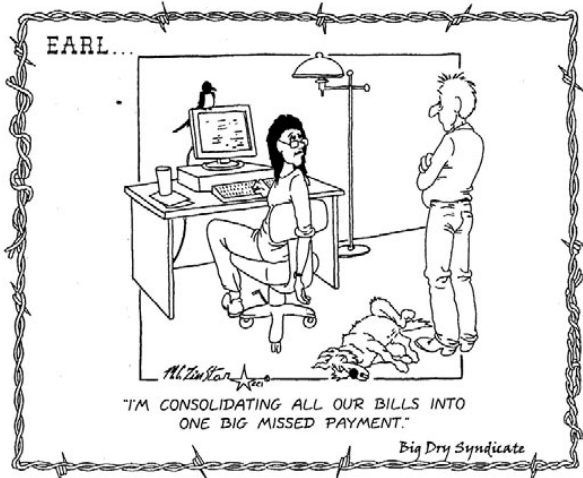
that his parents gave him.

But there is something that stands out to me in his early adult life. After attending the ROTC at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln for two years, he graduated from the Lincoln Aeronautical Institute in 1941. He enrolled in the Army Air Corps in 1942 and served in the South Pacific in the 5th Photographic Technician Squadron during World War II until his honorable discharge in 1945.

He was then married in 1946 and worked for many years to support his wife and four children as a traveling salesman before moving to Marquette to farm. In addition to farming, he managed the local grain elevator. Then, he spent some tumultuous years moving to Iowa in 1965 to manage a hybrid sales company until his wife's death in 1970, after which he returned to Marquette to work at a factory for eight years until his son, David, was able to get the farm certified organic and to establish The Grain Place.

I'm just speculating, but it seems like Don probably had parents who encouraged him to think outside of the box and that his pursuance of a college education gave him additional foundation in that area. He definitely had a sense of honor to his country in his military service and also a sense of responsibility in supporting his family. And he just seemed like someone who was inclined to be active in a lot of different creative ventures, someone with an entrepreneurial spirit, if you will.

I like seeing where people's life journeys take them. I find it fascinating. And Don Vetter's life story is definitely worth reading about.



Organic Producer Surveys Due April 3

BROOKINGS — National Agriculture Statistics Service (NASS) mailed its 2014 Organic Producer Survey to organic producers nationwide. Participation is mandatory.

"I urge all South Dakota organic producers to fill out the survey as the data collected is crucial to developing agriculture-related programs that directly affect the life and communities of growers," said Alvaro Garcia, SDSU Extension Agriculture and Natural Resources Program Director and SDSU Professor.

Online responses are by April 3, 2015. The online survey can be found at http://www.agcensus.usda.gov/Publications/Organic_Survey/.

USDA Rural Dev. Has New Website

WASHINGTON — USDA Rural Development has launched a new website to enhance program accessibility and customer service.

The new website (www.rd.usda.gov) features quicker and more intuitive access to programs, simplified site navigation and information about services and staff contacts in every state office. The site also provides easily accessible resources for loan and grant applications, eligibility information and program descriptions.

"We invite the public, local governments, businesses, rural residents, non-profit organizations and anyone interested in the future of rural communities to visit the website," USDA Under Secretary Lisa Mensah said. "The site can now be easily accessed on Smartphones and tablets, making Rural Development program information and applications for funding more accessible than ever."

Other website features include:

- A listing of all programs (<http://www.rd.usda.gov/programs-services/all-programs>)
- Access to program Regulations and Guidelines (<http://www.rd.usda.gov/publications/regulations-guidelines>)
- Prominent housing lender notices on state websites
- A Directory of State Offices (<http://www.rd.usda.gov/browse-state>)

Future enhancements to the site will include Spanish language descriptions of programs.

USDA Rural Development administers and manages housing, business and community infrastructure programs through a national network of state and local offices. These programs are designed to improve the economic stability of rural communities, businesses, residents, farmers and ranchers and improve the quality of life in rural America.

SD Century Farms, Ranches Sought

HURON — Farm and ranch families who have enjoyed ownership of their South Dakota farm or ranch for 100 or 125 years have the opportunity to be honored on Thursday, Sept. 3, during the South Dakota State Fair in Huron.

Agriculture has long been the foundation of South Dakota history. The South Dakota Farm Bureau (SDFB) and the South Dakota Department of Agriculture (SDDA) would like to recognize and honor these longstanding South Dakota families.

To qualify as a South Dakota Century Farm or Ranch, a family must have retained continuous ownership of at least 80 acres of original farmland for 100 years or more. If the family ownership of land has reached 125 years, they may apply to be recognized as a Quasiquincentennial Farm or Ranch.

Documentation of the original date of purchase must be included with the application. Application forms are available online at www.sdfbf.org by clicking "All About Ag" and then "Century-Quasiquincentennial Farm & Ranch Program" or call the SDFB at (605) 353-8052. The deadline to apply is Thursday, Aug. 13, 2015.

The South Dakota Farm & Ranch Recognition program was initiated in 1984 by the SDFB. Since then, the SDDA has joined the program. There have been 2,770 century farms and ranches and 250 quasiquincentennial farms and ranches recognized thus far.

SDSU

Molecular Biologist Uncovering Path To Drought-Tolerant Soybeans

BROOKINGS — Hot, dry conditions can wreak havoc on a field of soybeans. According to the National Center for Soybean Technology, "drought is the greatest threat to profitability."

Work underway at South Dakota State University may change that. Assistant professor Jai Rohila of the biology and microbiology department is uncovering the molecular mechanisms that lead to drought and heat tolerance. This will help breeders develop soybean varieties that can survive heat and drought.

"Ultimately our goal is to help the farmers in the field," Rohila said.

To do this, he is working with University of Minnesota soybean breeder Jim Orf, who provided Rohila with two varieties of soybeans, one that has greater tolerance to hot, dry conditions, and another that is susceptible. The project, which began in 2010, is supported by the South Dakota Soybean Research and Promotion Council.

"Drought and heat are very complicated," Rohila said, because multiple genes affect the plant's physiological and biochemical response to environmental stressors. "I am going to build a bridge between the physiology and the gene discovery."

By comparing the two soybean varieties, Rohila and graduate student Aayudh Das hope to identify the key genes that lead to increased tolerance. Genes regulate the expression of proteins and chemical signaling pathways that determine the



COURTESY PHOTO
Graduate student Aayudh Das checks the soil moisture in soybeans that are subjected to heat and drought stress, as part of South Dakota State University research to increase the plants' ability to withstand these environmental conditions. The project is supported by the South Dakota Soybean Research and Promotion Council.

plant's response to heat and lack of water.

"We study not one gene at a time, but many," said Rohila. "With a global approach, we can nail down many molecular players at a single time."

Das has found 90 proteins that are differentially expressed during drought and heat conditions in the tolerant variety. These proteins then interact with enzymes that affect the plant's metabolism including its ability to produce carbohy-

drates, lipids and various metabolites including amino acids.

A drought-stressed soybean plant, for instance, closes its pores or stomata to prevent water from escaping; however, this action has a cost — it limits the plant's ability to take in carbon dioxide and ultimately to make the carbohydrates it needs, Das explained.

In comparing enzyme levels in the two soybean varieties, he identified two enzymes which

are up regulated significantly in the variety that performs better under heat stress.

"Up regulation of these enzymes also protects other enzymes," he said, which then helps the plant tolerate heat. "This was an unexpected discovery."

Though the researchers have more work to do, Das explained that the next step will be to see if overexpressing these enzymes can further protect the soybean plant.

USDA Reminds Farmers Of Farm Bill Conservation Compliance Changes

WASHINGTON — Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack reminds producers that changes mandated through the 2014 Farm Bill require them to have on file a Highly Erodible Land Conservation and Wetland Conservation Certification (AD-1026).

The Farm Bill relinked highly erodible land conservation and wetland conservation compliance with eligibility for premium support paid under the federal crop insurance program.

"It's important that farmers and ranchers taking the right steps to conserve valuable farm and natural resources have completed AD-1026 forms on file at their local Farm Service Agency (FSA) office," said Vilsack. "This will ensure they remain eligible for crop insurance support."

For farmers to be eligible for premium support on their federal crop insurance, a completed and signed AD-1026 form must be on file with the FSA. Since many FSA and Natural Resource Conservation (NRCS) programs have this requirement, most producers should already have an AD-1026 on file.

If producers have not filed, they must do so by June 1, 2015. When a farmer completes the AD-1026, FSA and NRCS staff will outline any additional actions that may be required for compliance with the provisions.

The Risk Management Agency, through the Federal Crop Insurance Corporation (FCIC), manages the federal crop insurance program that provides the modern farm safety net for American farmers and ranchers. Since enactment of the 1985 Farm Bill, eligibility for most commodity, disaster and conservation programs has been linked to compliance with the highly

erodible land conservation and wetland conservation provisions.

The 2014 Farm Bill continues the requirement that producers adhere to conservation compliance guidelines to be eligible for most programs administered by FSA and NRCS. This includes the new price and revenue protection programs, the Conservation Reserve Program, the Livestock

Disaster Assistance programs and Marketing Assistance Loans implemented by FSA. It also includes the Environmental Quality Incentives Program, the Conservation Stewardship Program and other conservation programs. FSA recently released a revised form AD-1026, which is available at USDA Service Centers and online at: www.fsa.usda.gov/. USDA will publish a rule later this year

that will provide details outlining the connection of conservation compliance with crop insurance premium support. Producers can also contact their local USDA Service Center

for information. A listing of service center locations is available at www.nrcs.usda.gov/wps/portal/nrcs/main/national/contact/local/.



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