

## AGNOTES

## National RC&amp;D Week To Be Celebrated In Lake Andes

LAKE ANDES — The Randall Resource Conservation and Development Council (RC&D) will join its members and friends nation-wide to commemorate National RC&D Week. This year RC&D Week, held annually to celebrate the continued success of the RC&D Program, runs from Sept. 19-25.

The public is invited to help the Council celebrate RC&D Week at its monthly meeting on Sept. 23 at the Rainbow Room in Pickstown. The meeting starts at 10 a.m. followed by a catered meal at 11:45 a.m. Following lunch there will be a short program starting at 12:30 p.m.

The program will include a 10-15 minute presentation from the Corps of Engineers on the Missouri River Authorized Purposes Study. This will be immediately followed by a 10-15 minute presentation on the Council's new five-year strategic plan and some of Randall RC&D's current and recently completed projects. Guests for lunch are asked to RSVP to 605-487-7077 ext. 4 by Sept. 20. For lunch guests there will be a small charge to help cover some of the expenses.

## SDWP TO Hold Investor Interest Meeting On Sept. 20

South Dakota Wind Partners, LLC (SDWP) will host an informational meeting at Minerva's in Yankton at 7 p.m. Sept. 20.

The group is holding these investment meetings "so that anyone who is considering involvement in SDWP can learn about this great opportunity for South Dakotans," said Jim Burg, SDWP board president.

East River Electric Power Cooperative, the South Dakota Farm Bureau Federation, South Dakota Farmers Union and the South Dakota Corn Utilization Council joined together to form SDWP as a way to create a local wind ownership initiative.

Interested parties can get more information at [info@sdwindpartners.com](mailto:info@sdwindpartners.com) or visit the SDWP website [www.sdwindpartners.com](http://www.sdwindpartners.com).

## Photographs By 50 4-H'ers Picked For 2011 SD Calendar

BROOKINGS — A panel of judges at the South Dakota State Fair picked 50 photographs that will make up the 2011 South Dakota 4-H calendar.

Volunteer 4-H photography judges reviewed more than 2,200 photography exhibits at the fair and named 25 as "judge's choice." An additional 25 photos were selected for honorable mention, and all 50 photos will be included in the calendar.

The \$5 calendars are for sale at your county Extension office. Staff will take orders through Sept. 30. Helen Geppert, Extension 4-H/Youth Development Educator from Aurora County, said the sales of the calendars support 4-H programs in the state.

Photographers that were among the 25 "judge's choice" include James Baer and Megan Christiansen, Turner County; Grace Boone, Union County; Sami Carlson, Faulk County; Haley Clark, Miner County; Sophie Cole, Codington County; Meghan Corr, Custer County; Cagney Eifling, Hyde County; Adam Eichacker and Allison Huff, McCook County; Ashley Feickert, McPherson County; Kayleen Gupman, Faulk County; Lindsay Johnson, Bennett County; Rachel Lovejoy, Tripp County; Katie McCoy and Wyatt McCoy, Butte County; Brandy Odegaard, Kingsbury County; Evan Ohlrogge, Sanborn County; Shelby Price, Marshall County; Michael Rohde, Tripp County; Brendan Roth, Spink County; Alex Rund, Lincoln County; Megan Simon, Potter County; and Emily Wehde, Moody County.

## LOVE

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Potential members can sign up and talk through the site without giving out any vital information. Several e-mails can be sent back and forth before a meeting is

When you were born, you cried and the world rejoiced. Live your life so that when you die, the world cries and you rejoice.

- CHEROKEE SAYING

## Locavores, Conventional Food Fans Battle Over Benefits

BY MONICA ENG  
McClatchy News Service

CHICAGO — Thomas Stern is an unabashed locavore, buying everything from beets and basil to lamb and legumes from nearby producers.

"Things like salt and oils are a little harder to source," the 23-year-old Evanston, Ill., resident said at a farmers market recently. "But I'd say that about 80 percent of my food is local."

Stern, who cooks at Evanston's Fraiche, says he chooses local foods largely for taste, higher nutrient values, environmentalism and a connection with person who grew them.

That philosophy is fueling "eat local" initiatives across the country, including Green City Market's annual "Locavore Challenge," when hundreds of Chicago-area residents were expected to follow a mostly local diet Sept. 8-22.

While such efforts might seem innocuous, a growing chorus of writers, politicians and bloggers is challenging the locavore movement, painting it as naive and elitist at best and dangerous to the livelihood of conventional commodity farmers at worst.

Last spring, Republican Sens. John McCain of Arizona, Saxby Chambliss of Georgia and Pat Roberts of Kansas wrote a letter questioning the Department of Agriculture's \$65 million Know Your Farmer Know Your Food program, which they said was using public funds to "prop up urban locavore markets."

The effort, they wrote, "doesn't appear geared toward conventional farmers who produce the vast majority of our nation's food supply, but is instead aimed at small, hobbyist and organic producers whose customers generally consist of affluent patrons at urban farmers markets."

In a hotly debated New York Times Op-Ed last month, historian Stephen Boudiansky attacked "locavore math," questioning the movement's assumptions about the energy used to grow and transport produce.

And economist Hiroko Shimizu and University of Toronto geographer Pierre Desrochers are finishing a 2011 book, tentatively called "In Praise of the 10,000 Mile Diet," that argues locavorem is a

misleading marketing fad that, among other problems, ignores the threat it poses to the current affordability of food and to the economic health of developing countries.

Food security can suffer if "you put all your eggs in one local basket and something goes wrong," Desrochers said from his Toronto office. "I also have a problem when local food activists want to promote food that is either not economical or cannot compete with foreign food in that area."

Locavores respond to the claims of elitism by citing the thousands of people across the country who use food stamps at farmers markets — the Daley Plaza market recently took in \$890 of food stamps in a day. They also say the \$65 million USDA program is dwarfed by the \$12 billion in subsidies awarded to big conventional commodity farmers last year and that energy usage is only one factor in their decision to consume local products.

With each side brandishing favorite statistics, it's difficult to know what the data mean for the average conscious eater.

But University of Chicago professor Pamela Martin is seeking to change that by fielding three years of data from farms that serve the Chicago area.

A geophysicist, Martin and grad student Esther Bowen have recorded energy inputs and outputs along with productivity levels per acre for eight local farms (both urban and rural). They are still preparing a paper based on their first year of data, but by the time her team is done with the three-year study, Martin hopes to present solid figures that can provide the basis for fact-based conversations and policies.

Martin stresses that eating local is no guarantee of reducing one's environmental footprint. But her early data is already challenging some assertions by Boudiansky, such as: "Whether it is grown in California or Maine, or whether it's organic or conventional, about 5,000 calories of energy go into one pound of lettuce."

"That is absolutely not true according to our data," she said. "If that lettuce had been grown locally in a passive greenhouse and you take into account all ener-

gy inputs, the local lettuce wins out." Passive greenhouses retain solar heat through reusable plastic covers and ground cloths; active greenhouses pump in heat.

Her team is still calculating the farms' energy use — including man hours, fertilizers, water and pesticides — but Martin said preliminary data suggest the organic urban farms in her study were at least as productive as conventional farms. Rural sustainable farms (those using organic or similar practices) yielded about half to 85 percent of the produce as conventional farms in the first year of data, she said, "but they might also use half the energy. We just don't know yet."

In the future Martin hopes to investigate other effects of local food, such as whether farmers market purchases result in less food waste than purchases of grocery store produce.

But for many, the benefits of local produce extend well beyond measurable issues of efficiency.

A recent white paper from the Center for Health and the Global Environment at Harvard Medical School reported that healthier crop varieties, richer sustainable soil, riper harvesting, shorter vine to fork times and less handling can give local sustainable produce "distinct advantages" in nutrition over conventionally grown produce shipped long distances.

Other local-food fans point to huge food recalls — most recently a half a billion eggs from Iowa factory farms — as a reason to choose small-scale, locally produced food.

Still, for Stern and many Chicago chefs, the biggest attraction is that "local almost always tastes better," he said. "Taste is highly subjective, but local farmers often do have the luxury of choosing crop varieties and growing methods that maximize flavor as opposed to shelf life and crop yields."

They also value the relationships and sense of community that come from knowing the farmers.

"It's phenomenal to make these connections and know who grew every component on that plate; it's almost a spiritual experience," said Dana Cox, a personal chef and teacher who plans to buy all her food directly from producers, most of

them local, for one year starting Tuesday. Her blog, at [chicagonow.com/blogs/honest-meal-project](http://chicagonow.com/blogs/honest-meal-project), is part of ChicagoNow.com, a network of local blogs owned by Chicago Tribune Media Group.

This sense of community also can benefit farmers. In June, Vicki Westerhoff said, Genesis Growers lost nearly 95 percent of its crop to a tornado, hailstorms and 19.5 inches of rain in a week.

"But now that we have produced again people have gone out of their way to buy from us," said Westerhoff, whose farm is about 70 miles south of Chicago.

"It's kind of a resurrection of the old farming communities," said Westerhoff. "If someone's barn burned down, everyone came together to rebuild it. That's the same support we've felt as we've come into the city with our produce."

Critics argue this sense of community is glued together by high prices, and even most locavores agree that local sustainable food can cost more than conventional produce.

The reasons include less developed distribution methods, fewer economies of scale, almost no government subsidies, the increased labor needs of small sustainable farms and, frankly, the more open wallets of farmers market shoppers.

Many activists and agencies are working on the issue, including backers of legislation that would help more Illinois farmers markets take LINK cards and market themselves more efficiently; the Wholesome Wave Foundation, which doubles food stamp value at farmers markets, and the USDA's "Know Your Farmer" program, aimed at creating efficient local food systems.

Stern has his own methods for making local more affordable.

"If you visit enough markets you know where to find the good deals," he said. "And even if eggs may seem expensive they're still a very cheap animal protein. Last week Green Acres farm was practically giving away tomatoes with split ends" — a common farmers market practice with imperfect produce. "But the other thing is you just don't waste as much at home when you have this kind of quality and connection with your food."

## Food Safety Scientists Say They Face Political, Corporate Interference

BY KIM GEIGER  
McClatchy News Service

WASHINGTON — Scientists and inspectors at the federal agencies responsible for food safety say they face political and corporate interference with their work, according to a survey released Monday by the Union of Concerned Scientists, a non-partisan advocate for unbiased science in government.

The survey suggests a continuation of problems that government scientists had complained about during the George W. Bush administration, despite Obama administration pledges not to let politics intrude on scientific conclusions. And it comes more than a year after the administration promised to issue new rules to protect scientific integrity.

More than 1,700 scientists and inspectors at the Food and Drug Administration and the U.S. Department of Agriculture responded to the survey, which was conducted by the Center for Survey Statistics and Methodology at Iowa State University and was aimed at employees whose duties were science-specific.

The survey found only a slight improvement in perception of the agencies' approach to science under the Obama administration.

"What we found is that action is needed to curtail interference in science, both political and that driven by the private sector," said Francesca Grifo, director of the Scientific Integrity Program at the Union of Concerned Scientists. "We have two very different agencies giving very identical responses,

and this suggests the need for broad reform."

The Agriculture Department, while not commenting on the survey's findings, acknowledged a need for improvement in its food safety program.

"We can and must do a better job of ensuring the safety of meat and poultry products regulated by USDA as there is no more fundamental function of government than protecting consumers from harm," the USDA said in a statement.

"Food safety is the sole function of our Food Safety Inspection Service and no other considerations should detract from carrying out their mission," it said.

The Agriculture Department said it had spent 18 months working to improve the system, and that it is eager to see the effort "supplemented by passage of a robust food safety bill in Congress."

Almost half of those surveyed said that in the past year, they had experienced, "situations where corporate interests have forced the withdrawal or significant modification of (an agency) policy or action designed to protect consumers or public health."

And 45 percent said they had experienced similar interference by members of Congress.

Fifty-four percent said the agencies give political interests too much weight in their decision-making.

"Typically, once a member of Congress gets involved, the agency does whatever it can to make the situation go away rather than address food safety issues," one USDA employee wrote in an anonymous essay

that accompanied the survey questionnaire.

The report said "interference in science can range from the explicit (but rare) rewriting of scientific conclusions to subtler but more common abuses such as the selective use of data or the editing of agency documents so as to weaken them."

Dean Wyatt, a supervisory public health veterinarian who has worked for nearly 20 years at the USDA's Food Safety and Inspection Service, said his agency goes out of its way to protect businesses from costly shutdowns for failing to comply with food safety standards.

Under the Bush administration, Wyatt was reprimanded, demoted and eventually transferred when he documented inhumane treatment of hogs at a slaughtering plant in Oklahoma. Wyatt was transferred to a calf slaughterhouse in Vermont, where he has worked throughout the Obama administration.

Wyatt cited examples of food safety violations that were suppressed or ignored. He said he suspended plant operations on three separate occasions. Each time, his supervisors intervened to allow the plant to reopen.

It wasn't until an undercover investigation by the Humane Society produced video evidence of more serious violations that Wyatt's superiors became responsive to his complaints.

Seventy percent of survey respondents said they believe that strong whistleblower protections for food regulators would improve food safety.



## YOUR VIEWS

## Farmers Have Defense And Need To Respond

As fall quickly approaches, there is only one thing on a farmer's mind, harvest. So when hundreds of farmers in South Dakota, and thousands across the nation received a letter from East Coast lawyers requesting to "settle things" by repaying 80 percent of the money received in return for selling grain to VeraSun Energy two years ago, you can understand their frustration.

This is not right, and it will not stand. Thousands of producers did nothing wrong and its sad to see Park Avenue lawyers hiding behind fancy stationary attempting to take money away from the people producing food, feed, fuel and fiber for our country and the world. The majority

of our nations farmers involved in this mess have valid defenses and will not lay down.

While farmers have good defense, it is critical that you respond. This is not intended to be legal advice, but all producers should contact an attorney for advice on your specific situation.

As president of the South Dakota Corn Growers Association, our group is working hard to share what information we have with all of our state's producers. To stay up to date please visit our website at [SDCORN.org](http://SDCORN.org) and for instant updates, follow South Dakota Corn on Facebook and Twitter (@SDCORN).

— Gary Duffy

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