

Hanging onto hope in Lac qui Parle County



Dutch farmer finds support for efforts to stay in U.S.

By Carolyn Lange
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Rosen

Kor Mulder was on the phone talking to a TV news reporter from his homeland in the Netherlands when yet another reporter walked into the kitchen of his farm home.

Earlier in the day he had been talking to a reporter from New York who was going to make the trek to Mulder's 350-head dairy farm that's perched on the wide-open spaces of western Lac qui Parle County.

A Twin Cities TV station had already been there twice and Mulder was struggling to schedule all the

new requests for interviews between his milking chores.

The fleet of reporters, including from the West Central Tribune, were looking for a story on how this hard-working immigrant – who has been farming here with his family for 18 years – was getting ready to give up on his American dream and go back to his native country because of what he says is a broken, unfair system of getting a green card or becoming a U.S. citizen.

"It's just not right," Mulder said.

He said he's here as a legal immigrant but still can't obtain the permanent residency granted by a

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Photos by Carolyn Lange / Tribune

Above: Kor Mulder, right, and his son Kelsey stand near their cows on the family's Lac qui Parle County dairy farm. They are immigrants from the Netherlands and may be returning there this summer. Kelsey's visa allows him to remain in the U.S. only until he turns 21, and his father is making preparations to leave as well if their immigration issues cannot be resolved. Left: The Mulder Dairy Farm in west central Minnesota. Right: The dairy cows will be sold if the family must return to the Netherlands.

Willmar City Hall Task force considers aggressive timeline

By Shelby Lindrud
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WILLMAR – If the city of Willmar expects to move into a new city hall before the district heating system shuts down for good on July 1, 2020, a lot of pieces will need to fall into place quickly.

The Willmar City Hall Task Force, which has been narrowing down options for a possible site for a new city office building, on Monday looked at a draft timeline of the proposed project that didn't leave a lot of room for unexpected circumstances.

"There is not a lot of fluff time built in there," said Councilor

cilor Kathy Schwantes, chairwoman of the task force.

According to the draft timeline, which may change as the project moves forward, the design phase of the project would be completed July 1, with bids awarded to contractors at the end of August. Construction would begin in October, finish in March and staff would move in starting in April.

The timeline also includes multiple occasions for public input on the project.

The timeline is so tight that Sean Christensen, public works director, doesn't know if it's possible. In his opinion, both

the design and construction phase need almost double the time allotted.

"Aggressive is good, don't get me wrong," Christensen said. "We may be too aggressive."

The city's current office building is served by the steam heating system that Willmar Municipal Utilities will end next year. That is not the only reason the city has been pursuing a new city hall – the building itself is old and wasn't constructed as offices and the city has recently had water damage from pipe breaks – but it has put a hard deadline on the project if the city wants to avoid the costs of

upgrading a heating system in a building that will be abandoned.

The first step in the timeline for a new city hall is getting council approval of a site, which the task force hopes will come at the April 15 meeting of the City Council. The top site still seems to be city-owned property adjacent to the Willmar Fire Station. For the most part, task force members said they have received positive comments from citizens about the site, though there are concerns about parking and how the project would impact the Fire Department.

"Still feeling good," Councilor

Julie Asmus said.

City Administrator Ike Holland said he is glad there is finally a possible site.

"That has taken us a long time to get here, just for that," Holland said. "The sooner we can get the professionals in here, the better."

The task force is planning on meeting again April 9 to do a strength-weakness-opportunities-threats analysis on the site, to make sure it is the location members want to recommend to the council. It will then be up to the entire council to approve the site and move the project

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HOPE

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green card.
“It’s not as easy as people think to become a citizen,” he said. “We’re not doing anything wrong.”

Mulder has been fighting that system for many years, spending tens of thousands of dollars in attorney’s fees and writing letters to lawmakers pleading his case to keep his family here, without any luck.
“We tried everything. We tried the left door and the right door, do this, do that, and nothing helps,” he said. “So we figured it’s a hopeless case.”

There had been an occasional news story about the family’s struggle, including last year when Mulder’s oldest son, Garion, was forced to return to the Netherlands when he turned 21, but it didn’t sway U.S. immigration services.

His other son, Kelsey, turns 21 this summer and is also required under the current visa to return to the Netherlands.

With the prospect of being left alone to milk his cows – and with his own visa needing to be renewed, Mulder told his neighbors he was going to pack up his house, sell his cows and leave.

But that’s when the wheel really started to squeak.

Coming to America

Mulder had operated a small, 35-head dairy farm in the Netherlands. But regulations, cost and proximity to urban areas made it difficult to grow and make a living for his wife and young family.

Eager for a new chance at farming, Mulder said he was enticed by a South Dakota marketing campaign to move to the Midwest to start a dairy operation.

He said the campaign included plans for Europeans to use an E-2 investor visa to come here, buy a farm and find success.

He knew at the time there were limitations with this type of visa, which does not guarantee a green card or path to citizenship and allows minor children to stay only until they turn 21.

But since his sons were 3½ and 2½ years old then, Mulder said he was assured by ag company representatives at these marketing expos that there would be plenty of time to figure out the permanent residency issue once his family was here.

“In the back of your mind, you know that this land was built on immigrants,” he said. “I’m just a few generations later.”

So, in 2001, he decided to grab an opportunity to farm here in hopes the operation would grow big enough to support his sons and their future families.

He found a small farm he could afford just across the South Dakota border near the tiny town of Rosen, Minnesota, and he and his wife and sons settled in and started working.

The barns on the 11-acre farm were already set up for milking and Mulder started buying cows and feed, paid taxes and became part of the community. His kids grew up and went to school here. He’s on the Rosen softball team and has a beer with the guys afterward.

Farming wasn’t easy at first. Issues with stray voltage and salmonella resulted in livestock losses, but the farm now has 35 acres and 350 head of cattle, including a 175-head milking herd. A new home was built to replace the old farmhouse.

Every few years Mulder’s E-2 visa has to be renewed, which requires a trip back to the Netherlands and thousands of dollars. He also has to renew an I-94 form every couple years



Photos by Carolyn Lange / Tribune

Buildings on the Mulder Dairy Farm near Rosen in Lac qui Parle County.

and sign state papers every January that allow a foreign citizen to own farmland in Minnesota.

Over the years there were numerous meetings with immigration officials and attorneys – and again more money spent – to find a way for Mulder to get a green card and for his children to become citizens.

He said an E-2 investor visa could lead to a green card if he had 10 employees. But even though he’s invested about \$1.5 million in his farm, Mulder said he can’t afford to operate a big enough dairy to hire 10 people.

The other option is to marry a U.S. citizen. Mulder and his wife recently divorced and she moved back to the Netherlands. But Mulder said even if he, or his sons, married a U.S. citizen today, it could take years before citizenship would be granted.

Even after living and farming here for 18 years, “to the government I’m still a visitor,” he said.

So, with one son gone and another leaving shortly and his own visa set to expire, Mulder said he gave up hope and threw in the towel.

“We all gave up,” he said. “It’s over and out. That’s what we decided in January after a long discussion with an immigration lawyer.”

He started packing up his house in preparation to leave. The walls are bare and there’s a stack of cardboard boxes in the corner of the living room. If the winter hadn’t been so cold, he said half of his young stock would have already been sold.

New hope

An editorial a few weeks ago in the Western Guard newspaper about the eminent demise of Mulder Dairy Farm suddenly got the attention of lawmakers, candidates and reporters eager to hear Mulder’s story.

Some lawmakers are using it as an example of problems with the current immigration system that seemingly penalizes people who are here working hard and investing in their communities.

A neighbor started an online petition that



Kor Mulder speaks about his move to Minnesota from the Netherlands in 2001 to start a dairy farm here with his young family. Because of immigration issues, he may have to leave the U.S. and has already begun packing up his house.



Kelsey Mulder, 20, says the thought that he could be forced to return to his birth country has hung over his head since he was a little boy. He wants to stay in Minnesota, but under his current visa, he will have to return to the Netherlands before he turns 21 this summer.

has more than 38,000 signatures – with the count going up each minute. It’s signed by people all over the country and is addressed to Gov. Tim Walz, Sen. Amy Klobuchar, Sen. Tina Smith, Rep. Collin Peterson and Lee Francis Cissna, the director of U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services.

Buoyed by the support and renewed interest, Mulder now has hope.

“The response nationwide is unbelievable,” he said. He’s put the move on hold in case the strong interest in his story can result in a change that would allow him and his children to stay and farm.

He said his story, and that of many others with E-2 investor visas, needs to be heard in Washington, D.C.

Mulder said people here on E-2 visas “contribute big time to the economy” and yet are left out when

it comes to citizenship. “Why does it have to be so hard, when it should be so much easier?” he said.

The flurry of news stories and public attention to their situation is like a “snowball” that’s rolling to the East Coast, he said.








“Never say never,” Mulder said. “It’s always been an uphill battle and maybe now it’s changing for the best.”

As a little kid, Kelsey Mulder said the prospect of being forced to leave his home in Minnesota was an ever-present possibility that hung over the family’s head. It “cut deep,” he said.

Kelsey said he’s been optimistic before about becoming a U.S. citizen, but “each time you get let down, it gets worse.”

But this time feels different. “This is the biggest it’s ever gotten,” he said.

Willmar 5-Day Forecast





Morning	Afternoon	Evening	
 (7 a.m.) 48° Mostly cloudy, showers around SE at 7-14 mph	 (Noon) 53° Mostly cloudy, showers around SSE at 8-16 mph	 (7 p.m.) 57° Cloudy and mild with a t-storm ESE at 8-16 mph	
Tomorrow	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday
 61° 42° A little a.m. rain; mostly cloudy WNW at 7-14 mph	 66° 41° A morning shower; some sun, mild WNW at 7-14 mph	 56° 34° Sun and areas of high clouds ESE at 7-14 mph	 43° 28° Cooler with rain, then snow E at 10-20 mph

Almanac

Willmar through 5 p.m. yesterday

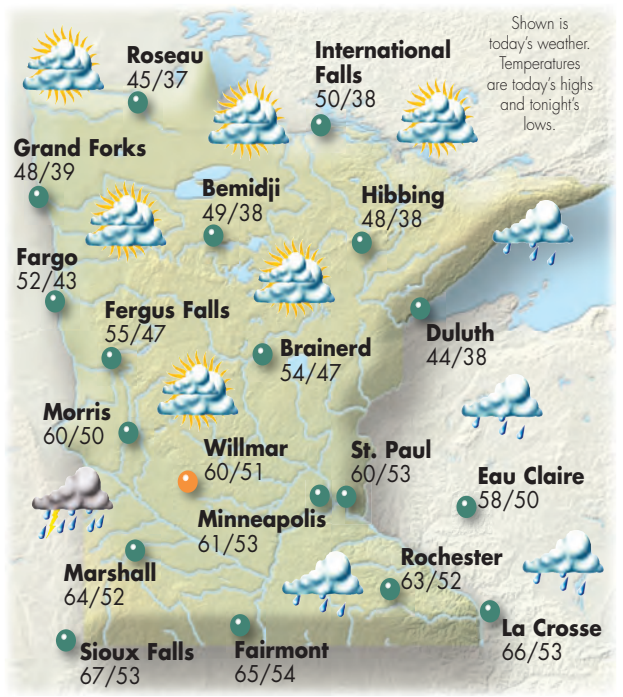
Temperature
High/low 52°/36°
Normal high/low 50°/30°
Record high 76° in 1929
Record low -5° in 1926
Precipitation
24 hrs to 5 p.m. yest. 0.00"
Year to date 3.35"
Normal year to date 3.14"

Sun and Moon

	Sunrise	Sunset	
Today	6:52 a.m.	7:54 p.m.	
Sun.	6:51 a.m.	7:55 p.m.	
	Moonrise	Moonset	
Today	7:54 a.m.	9:23 p.m.	
Sun.	8:21 a.m.	10:29 p.m.	
First	Full	Last	New
			
Apr 12	Apr 19	Apr 26	May 4

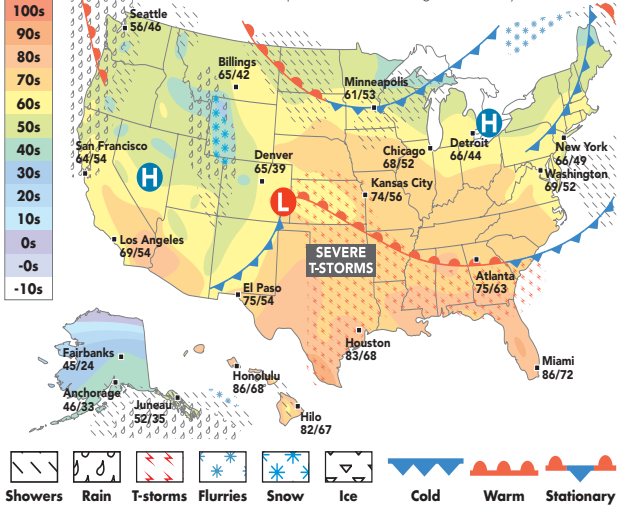
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National Forecast

Shown are today's noon positions of weather systems and precipitation. Temperature bands are highs for the day.



National Summary: In the wake of the storm that brought mostly rain, but also some ice and snow to the East, many areas from the Ohio Valley to the mid-Atlantic and New England can expect dry and mild conditions today. Showers and thunderstorms are forecast to linger in the Deep South. Storms are likely to become severe with strong winds, hail, flash flooding and isolated tornadoes over the South Central states. Spotty rain showers and mild conditions are in store for the northern Plains and the upper Great Lakes. Farther west, rain and mountain snow will fall on the central Rockies.

Forecasts and graphics provided by **AccuWeather, Inc.** ©2019

TODAY'S INFO

What's happening?

Do you know of something that might make a good story or photograph for the newspaper? Just give us a call at 320-235-1150, or stop in our office at 2208 Trott Ave. S.W., Willmar.

Corrections

If you have a question about accuracy of information in a news story, please call the news department at 320-235-1150.

If any corrections are necessary, they will be published here.

Lottery results

Winning numbers drawn Friday night are:
Daily 3: 9-5-2
Gopher 5: 10-14-18-19-27
Northstar Cash: 5-12-18-23-26
Mega Millions: 8-22-24-38-64
Mega ball: 21
For more information, go to mlottery.com.

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Business Office (320-235-1150)
Hours: 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. weekdays, closed Saturday and Sunday.

Circulation (320-235-1154)
Hours: 6:30 a.m. to 5 p.m. weekdays, 6:30 to 10 a.m. Saturday, closed Sunday.

Classified ads (320-235-6766)
Hours: 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. weekdays.
classads@wctrib.com
Fax: 320-235-6769
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Website: wctrib.com

Vol. 92 No. 82
(USPS 675080)

Postmaster: Send any address changes to: West Central Tribune, PO Box 839, Willmar, MN 56201-0839

Publishing: The West Central Tribune is published as a digital E-paper edition on Mondays and as print and E-paper editions Tuesday through Saturday. The Tribune does not publish Sundays or the following holidays: New Year's Day, Memorial Day, Independence Day, Labor Day, Thanksgiving Day and Christmas Day. The newspaper is published by West Central Tribune Media at 2208 Trott Ave. SW, Willmar, MN, 56201.

Subscription rates
Carrier prepaid
\$178.98/yr., \$94.20/6 mos., \$47.10/3 mos. Carrier delivery deadline is 6:30 a.m. daily
Mail
\$199.50 per year, \$105.00 for 6 months, \$52.50 for 3 months

Weekender (Friday/Saturday Delivery)
\$114.00/yr., \$60.00/6 mos., \$30.00/3 mos. Receive discounts on Automatic Payment (EZ Pay) rates; call for information.