

Opinions

EDITORIAL

Help is available, just reach out

The flooding that has devastated Nebraska, parts of Iowa and Minnesota is heartbreaking. However, it is heartening to see the assistance farmers and their communities have received from volunteers who fill sand bags, rescue threatened livestock, deliver feed for animals as well as human, and other acts of kindness.

It's the latest example that core values remain. It is seen time and time again when a fallen farmer's last crop is harvested and when fire necessitates emergency livestock shelter.

Another crisis, albeit a silent one, is stalking farm country. The financial crisis, which has led some flooded farmers to say they can't afford to rebuild, is stalking the countryside.

Although farmers have long been hesitant to seek help, it's time to break the mold. While Minnesota lawmakers work to find legislative help, one-on-one assistance to improve mental health already exists.

The Minnesota Farmer and Rural Help line exists for just that purpose. The help line operates around the clock so that farmers and rural residents can receive emotional, legal and financial advice.

It is sometimes easier to talk to a stranger than it is to discuss such matters with friends.

The Minnesota Department of Agriculture's Farm & Rural Helpline is available 24-7 for anyone experiencing symptoms of stress or distress — including spouses or neighbors who

are worried about someone, but don't know how to approach them.

Those who call 833-600-2670 will speak with a counselor who is trained to ask questions and discuss the unique stresses seen in agriculture.

Callers are not required to offer any personal information beyond his or her first name and a callback number if disconnected. Counselors are trained to direct callers to resources for assistance.

Their main objective is to listen, and then help farmers find solutions.

The Iowa Concern hotline, offered by the state's Extension Service, provides the same purpose. It can be reached by calling 1-800-447-1985. Other confidential assistance is offered by localized agencies.

The national Farm Aid hotline, which is supported by funds generated from the annual outdoor concerts put on by musical stalwarts each September, reports the number of calls it receives has doubled in recent years as farm income fell from the highs seen earlier in the 21st century.

A flood that destroys farmsteads is easily seen while the emotional toll taken by struggling to make financial ends meet is hidden. Both can have devastating impacts.

A bipartisan effort by Iowa Sen. Jodi Ernst and Wisconsin Sen. Tammy Baldwin successfully pushed for money to address mental health issues in the 2018 Farm Bill. The legislation includes \$50 million over the next five years to address those issues

If you need help

MINNESOTA FARM AND RURAL HELPLINE: 833-600-2670 x 1
RURAL MENTAL HEALTH COUNSELOR: 320-266-2390
SUICIDE PREVENTION LIFELINE: 800-273-8255
CRISIS TEXT LINE: Text MN to 741741

in underserved rural areas. It's not a lot of money, but it is a good start.

It is up to all of us to ensure that troubled people have access to the help they need to survive until financial conditions improve.

ED FISCHER'S POINT OF VIEW



COMMENTARY

I don't want to sound like a spoiled brat

BY MYRON FRIESEN

I wish I had the foresight 20 years ago to record all of my appointments.

The purpose of those recordings would have nothing to do with looking for any wrongdoing or invading any privacy, but rather to gather a collection of what people have said. The recordings would include all the wise things people have said from experience to ignorant things you can hardly believe people say, to kind, compassionate and sincere words of parents caring for their children, to absolutely filthy rotten feelings that people spew about others.

I enjoy most of these conversations and they leave me everywhere from amazed to bewildered and laughing to crying.

I recall a conversation with a 70-year-old mom, telling me she and her husband had decided they were going to use a generation-skipping trust to distribute their farm to their family. This would give their sons the life use of the farm and then the remainder would go to their grandchildren. I had known the family for a number of years and I was perplexed by the plans.

First, they have a smaller operation so there were no federal estate tax issues involved.

Second, they absolutely love and trust their sons, so there did not appear to be any trust or marriage or financial issues going on.

Third, both of their sons had farming interests they

wanted to continue and they got along well together.

So why the generation-skipping trust idea? Was it the parents' idea? Was it their attorney's idea? I was not sure.

To the parents' credit, they asked me to discuss their idea with their sons to get their input. The sons were baffled by the plan and then raised the question about the use of existing land for collateral. They also questioned how things would be handled in the future depending on what their children decided.

I wish I would have recorded what one of the sons said to me: "I don't want to sound like a spoiled brat, but we would prefer to have the land in our names, not in a generation-skipping trust."

When I heard him say that I knew exactly what he was getting at.

It is interesting how many times I see a farm family grow their farm for a period of years and then, when the parents reach a certain age, their assets are paid for, but those assets never get leveraged for a period of 20 to 30 years until the next generation receives them.

In this situation, not only was that going to occur for part of the older generation, but it would occur for another full generation where they could not use that land for collateral.

I understand the parents' perspective of trying to protect assets that were already paid for, but in

today's farming environment, the next generation will need some collateral to continue growing the operations.

In this situation, the use of a generation-skipping trust did not appear to be the best choice.

What is your goal for your farm? Will the next generation be able to use it so your farm is able to grow? Are you going to freeze the use of your assets or will the next generation be able to use them for collateral and at what point will you allow them to start doing so?

Don't get me wrong because in some situations skipping a generation is exactly what should happen.

Think about the competitive difference between a farming operation that consistently, maybe even slowly, moves forward with a systematic plan versus a operation that grows, freezes, divides, and then tries to repeat that process.

For this family, they have decided to allow their sons to have control of the assets when they pass away so they can grow the operation.

All in all, this was a kind family conversation and the children were hardly spoiled brats, they just saw the value of keeping the operation growing.

Friesen is the co-owner of Farm Financial Strategies, Inc. in Osage, Iowa. If you have further questions, he can be contacted at 866-524-3636 or email friesen@farmestate.com

COMMENTARY

Time's reluctant elders

On an April Sunday afternoon a year ago, the last ancestral connection to the southern Illinois dairy farm of my youth was severed when my mother died quietly and peacefully.

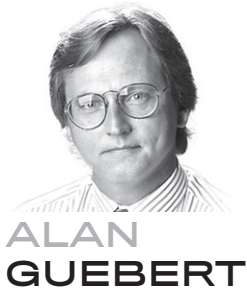
Her passing, quickly followed by her sister's death, means that this Easter will be the first in the last 64 that I will not be with or speak to any of my family's older generations of parents, grandparents, aunts, and uncles.

That irreversible fact recently arrived like the news of Mom's passing: while its coming was as inevitable as nightfall, it still hit like an unseen punch. The recognition quickly gave way to other elements of Aprils past that will now be unvisited and unspoken about between them and me.

For example, on the farm of my youth, April was the birth month of my father, mother and grandfather. Dad's birthday was the 10th, Mom's the 12th, and Grandpa's the 16th. And even though our family birthdays were never balloons-and-party-hat occasions, they usually featured Sunday dinners followed by lazy pinochle games filled with languid conversation.

Most years, however, Easter, a sacred holiday in my family, landed in April so it was easily more important and more celebrated than all those birthdays combined. Moreover, six of those farm Easters featured either my or my siblings' confirmations, a critical rite of passage to Missouri Synod Lutherans.

That big day held three ceremonies unique to those Easters: our public recitation of the vows first spoken for us by family at our baptisms, our first taste of Holy Communion, and — best of all to any just-



...the last ancestral connection to the southern Illinois dairy farm of my youth was severed

crowned prince of the church — the biggest, best meal this side of now-within-reach heaven.

Those dinners featured a beef roast the size of Rhode Island; mountains of drowning-in-butter mashed potatoes; bowls of summer-canned green beans, sweet corn, beets and tomatoes set aside months before just for the event; freshly-baked bread and dinner rolls; pies as far as the eye could see and belly could expand; and aunts and uncles, great aunts and uncles, grandparents, cousins and a pastor or two all talking and all enjoying the feast the Lord (who, equally miraculous, looked exactly like my mother) had prepared.

The dinners also included the rarest of farm treats, bottled soda for the children. Soda was as scarce as hen's teeth on our dairy farm because who needed soda when 800 gallons of fresh milk were being chilled and stirred in a bulk tank just a couple of hundred yards from the kitchen table?

Those meals, like every one of those aunts, uncles, grandparents and parents — save one, the youngest of that generation, Aunt Suzanne — are as gone as the pleasant chatter and thick cigarette smoke that filled our house on those occasions. So, too, are the youth and innocence of every young person feted those Easters.

None of this should have come as a surprise and yet, this Easter, it did. With almost no notice at all, I became one of those uncles, great uncles, and grandfathers. It seems untrue because all those roles, all those patriarchal offices, at least to me, remain ably filled by the people around the farm's Easter dinner table.

Besides, who can match Uncle Honey's quiet acceptance, Dad's knowing smile, Grandpa's silent intellect, Uncle Pete's ready advice, Uncle Ches's devilish irreverence, or Pastor Gross's commanding presence?

And who could possess Aunt Norma's natural elegance, Aunt Del's devotion to family, Grandma's unrivaled generosity, Aunt Lu's unmatched sweetness, and my mother's unparalleled work ethic?

All, however, now await the resurrection they so fervently believed in while my siblings and I, now the reluctant elders, remain to keep them alive in both word and deed.

Guebert is an agriculture journalist who lives in Delavan, Ill.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Stop carrying water for factory farms in Iowa

The Iowa Legislature just showed its true colors by passing a new version of the ag-gag law. In spite of Iowa's courts ruling the ag-gag law unconstitutional, they feel the need to bend over backwards and kowtow to the factory farm industry.

Legislators down in Des Moines need to recognize that folks are sick and tired of the problems factory farms bring to our communities — polluted air and water, ruined roads, devalued property, and dying rural communities. But that's why

the Farm Bureau and factory farms want ag-gag, to try and keep us quiet.

It won't work. Thousands of Iowans are calling for a moratorium on factory farms. And in the meantime, legislators and Gov. Reynolds need to respect the court's decision and stop carrying water for their big campaign donors by passing bills like ag-gag.

Nick Schutt, ALDEN, IOWA

Plan just doesn't work according to county law

I read a really one-sided article in your March 28 Agri News about Daley Farms suing Winona County that looks like it was written by Daley Farm's attorney. It sure isn't fair.

Seems like, according to the Daleys, if one farm wants to get massively bigger, they shouldn't have to follow the rules like everyone else. The problem is that their plan to expand doesn't work according to county law. They don't just want a "variance," they want to bust the cap out of existence.

But since they don't have a leg to stand on where the law is concerned, their attorney is trying to bully the county and anyone in their community who's a member of Land Stewardship Project. Do the

Daleys think that the county law wouldn't apply if they just had more of their supporters serving on the Board of Adjustment? The law is still the same.

I'm a member of LSP because I share the same values of stewardship of farmland and supporting healthy, thriving rural farming communities. In the United States of America, you can be a member of lots of organizations with different ideas and values and still serve as a citizen on a county board.

The residents of Winona County should all be thankful that LSP does exist and wants to follow the laws that were set up to protect the environment. That means all of us!

Albert Butenhoff, RURAL WINONA COUNTY