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For the love of camels

Every day a learning opportunity about camels for Randall woman

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Ever since Amber Thesing of Randall visited "Safari North Wildlife Park" in Brainerd, she fell in love with camels.

"They had a weanling and it was nursing on my earlobe and jacket lapel. It was bawling for its mom and was in a fence that was maybe three feet high and easily could have gone over it, but chose not to. I thought, 'Oh my gosh, I need one if they are this docile,'" she said.

That was the beginning of Thesing's quest to find a camel and to learn as much as she possibly could about them. She also wanted to make sure that she had a veterinarian and a trainer lined up before she even purchased a camel.

"I crossed my T's and dotted my I's before I started looking seriously for a camel," she said.

Part of getting a camel including convincing her husband, Mike, about the purchase. He was OK with it as long as she'd let him name the camel. About two

and half years later, they found a camel in Oklahoma. The seller was willing to hold him for Thesing while she and Mike had their home and barn built.

"The gentleman I got him from was willing to hold him for me, but pulled him as a bottle baby, but never really gave him the bottle and started him on feed right away, so that was unfortunate," she said.

Thesing's camel arrived at their farm in Randall in July 2018. Four months old, Mike named him, "Beefcake." Although the name was initially thought of as something funny, both agree it is very fitting. As Beefcake is a hybrid between two breeds of camels, Bactrian and Dromedary, Thesing estimates he will top out at about 2,000 to 2,200 pounds.

"They are supposed to get really massive, so it is a very fitting name," she said.

Later, Thesing purchased "Captain" from Wisconsin



(110120-Thesing-Amber)

Staff photo by Sheila Bergren

Every day is an opportunity to learn more about camels for Amber Thesing, especially about her own camel, Beefcake.

and she could clearly see the difference in behavior between a camel who was pulled from his or her mom and who was not.

It isn't uncommon for camels to be pulled from their mothers at an early age to be bottle fed. It is far easier to give camels a positive experience with humans at an early age to create a deeper bond and trust. They are also easier to handle when they are small in com-

parison to when they are quite grown, Thesing said.

Beefcake, who now is 3 years old, has the personality of a goofy teenager, but is still very friendly and curious. For some reason, he also has to gently taste every single one of Thesing's fingers when he sees her and is always checking for treats.

"He's like a giant dog and I think that is because he was pulled early from his mom," she said.

Captain, on the other hand, was another story. Thesing said that by the time she purchased Captain, he had barely been handled besides being halter broke. A year older than Beefcake, he had grown quite large, as well.

"He, in my opinion, scared me more than Beefcake, because he was much bigger and hadn't been handled. He also knew how to be a camel and how camels could kick and bite," she said.

After working with Cap-

tain,

Thesing recognized his potential and the need to do more. As a result she sold him. Her trainer, Jason Martin of Racine, Wis. also went with him to finish training him.

"Four days after I sold him, they had him doing public rides. He had only had one rider before, so he

had a lot more potential than I knew what to do with," she said.

Since Beefcake arrived at the farm, he has made several friends, including the potbellied miniature pig, Dude,

the donkey named Donkey, the giant Schnauzer, Zeus, and the Sphynx cat, Jackson, a cat whose breed is

known for its hairlessness, but who has acclimated to winter and now has fur. In addition, the Thesings have 18 chickens.

Since Thesing started researching camels, she has learned of a multitude of benefits the animal has. One is that they carry a unique microbe in their gut that, when shared, such as by swapping saliva when drinking out of the same water trough, can help cattle digest poor quality hay and grass at a more efficient rate, Thesing said.

Camels are also way cheaper to feed in comparison to horses as they eat less and fare best on hays and grasses usually considered poor quality.

Thesing said the use of camel milk has shown many benefits, too. Since camel milk contains less lactose than what is found in cow's milk, it is an alternative to many who are lactose intolerant. While it is somewhat comparable to cow's milk in relation to calories, proteins and carbohydrates, camel milk contains more vitamin C, B vitamins, iron, calcium and potassium.

"I wish more people would know about the benefits of camel milk," she said.

One woman Thesing has connected with over the years is Christina Adams, author of "Camel Crazy."

(Continued on Page 5F)

USDA, NRCS Minnesota announces EQIP sign-up for 2021 funding

Courtesy of the USDA
Natural Resources
Conservation Service

Farmers, ranchers and forest landowners can plan ahead and sign up for U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) conservation funding.

Troy Daniell, USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) state conservationist in Minnesota, announced farmers, ranchers and forest landowners interested in the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) need to apply by Friday, Nov. 20, for funding in 2021. Applications are being taken at all USDA Service Centers in Minnesota.

EQIP is the primary program available to farmers and landowners for farm, ranch, and woodland conservation work, offering payments for more than 100 conservation practices.

"The Farm Bill allows NRCS to support conservation that ensures cost-effective financial assistance for improved soil health, water and air quality, and other natural resources benefits," said Daniell.

All eligible applications received by Nov. 20, will be evaluated, prioritized, and ranked for funding in 2021. Farmers may contact their local USDA Service Center to get started on producer eligibility and planning. Daniell reminds farmers who are interested in practices that may require permits, such as manure storage or streambank restoration, to begin planning and seeking permits as soon as possible.

If funding allows, a second application cutoff will be set for March 5, 2021.

Landowners interested in applying for EQIP funding should contact their local NRCS office at the USDA Service Center their county.

For more information, visit www.mn.nrcs.usda.gov.

"He is like a giant dog and I think that is because he was pulled early from his mom."

— Amber Thesing



(110120-Thesing-Friends)

Staff photo by Sheila Bergren

Since the camel Beefcake arrived in July 2018, he has made many friends on the Thesing farm, including the potbellied pig, Dude.

COVID-19 relief funds help farmers restructuring debt

Courtesy of Minnesota
Department of Agriculture

Eligible Minnesota farmers restructuring their debt can get half of the loan guarantee fees on USDA Farm Service Agency (FSA) restructuring loans covered through a Minnesota Department of Agriculture (MDA) program, paid for through federal COVID-19 funding.

The Minnesota Legislature appropriated \$175,000 in COVID-19 relief toward a grant program that covers 50% of loan guarantee fees for FSA loans to restructure farmers' debt. Loan fees are 1.5% of the loan value and average \$3,000-\$5,000 in total.

To be eligible, farmers must have closed on an FSA restructure loan between May 28 and Nov. 9. Preference will be given to farmers currently in mediation or who have recently received a mediation notice. They must be residents of Minnesota who regularly participate in the labor or operation of their farm and have a net worth of \$800,000 or less. Applications will be accepted now through Nov. 9.

For more information about how to apply and the application, visit the RFA's Farm Loan Guarantee Fee Grant Program web page at www.mda.state.mn.us.

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