



# U.P. Ag Connections Newsletter

June 2020

Agricultural News from MSU Extension and AgBioResearch

Volume 24 Issue 6

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### New and Views: The glass half-full

By James DeDecker, MSUE

In my recent conversations and thoughts regarding the many ways COVID-19 has affected our lives, a handful of bright spots are emerging. Now, it might be my personal tendency to see the glass as half-full, or a basic desire to find some light in the darkness, but my list of things that COVID-19 has apparently improved is quickly growing. The word *crisis* comes from the Greek *krei-* or *krisis* meaning, "to sieve," thus "discriminate, and distinguish". The beauty of this definition is its focus on what is gained, rather than what is lost. Through a crisis like COVID-19 we remember, or maybe realize for the first time, what really matters. In that spirit, this month's New and Views will highlight aspects of our work in agriculture that have (so far) benefited from COVID-19.

#### Educating Consumers about the Food System

It is very difficult to convince consumers that a working knowledge of the food system and their role in it is important when everything is functioning properly. If nearly any food imaginable is available within a few minutes drive at a relatively competitive price, why look any further to understand where it all came from? The coronavirus pandemic was for many Americans, including myself, the first time that potential weaknesses in the industrial food system touched our lives directly in the form of widespread product shortages. Regardless of how consumers responded to that experience - online research about agriculture, purchasing direct from local farms, planting a garden, or simply learning to do without - we can all agree that consumers care and understand more about the food system today than prior to COVID-19. It has still been surprisingly uncommon to find a COVID-19 P.S.A. or billboard thanking farmers alongside healthcare and grocery workers, but we'll take what we can get!

#### Focusing Research Efforts

Sometimes in research, as in life, we get so busy doing what we have always done that needed changes are ignored or postponed. A crisis, as defined above, is the perfect opportunity to reassess and streamline our operations for projects where less may actually be more. Take for example our annual on-farm potato variety trial supported by MPIC. In the last few years, our trial had ballooned to include nearly 50 potato varieties across every class imaginable. Our feeling was, why not include as many varieties as feasible in case something interesting comes along? That approach was working alright, but was it as effective and efficient as possible? I would argue that it wasn't. Despite including all that diversity, it seemed that every year at our UP Potato Field Day growers focused on the same limited set of varieties that best fit their current business model and markets: Russets, chippers (of interest to UP seed growers), and maybe one or two red varieties. Given all the uncertainty this spring regarding travel, labor availability and physical interaction, the decision was made to reduce the number of potato varieties in our trial by 50% (24) focusing on the most relevant material. I know that planting sure went faster than in years past, and our crew is looking forward to less work at harvest. I am also confident that we are better, and more efficiently, serving the needs and interests of our UP potato growers as a result.

#### Enhancing Digital Outreach

I pride myself on having just missed being a digital native. At 34 years old, I remember a (beautiful) time before cell phones and the internet were widespread. That said, I've never particularly appreciated or prioritized digital outreach modes, preferring instead to base my extension program on traditional, flesh-and-blood interactions. There is also a mountain of evidence in the literature to suggest that farmers generally prefer hands-on learning, especially through peer interaction (other farmers), which only bolstered my case for farm visits and field days. When COVID-19 wiped the calendar clean of in-person extension programming for the foreseeable future, suddenly digital outreach became the only option. (In fact, some of you missed receiving one month of UP Ag Connections in hard copy due to COVID-19.) Yet, with more time available and the help of colleagues like Jim Isleib, we have since doubled down on digital outreach efforts including website updates, regular social media posts and a new online video series called "What's UP @ UPREC?" (see Pg 4). While our traditional modes of communication will remain important, it is already apparent that increased digital outreach effort is reaching a larger and more diverse audience than we could have ever imagined hosting at a field day. This audience includes not only the farmers we work to serve, but also the other 99% of the US population that eats, votes and pay taxes.

These three items are just a few examples of the way that COVID-19 has "sieved" the contents of our work at UPREC to help us distinguish and focus on what's most important. My comments are in no way intended to minimize or overlook the significant challenges that many in our UP communities and across the globe have faced due to the coronavirus pandemic. Our hearts and minds continue to be with you all. However, I hope these examples encourage you to see the glass half-full whenever possible, and perhaps even celebrate the opportunities this crisis has created.

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## On-Line offerings from MSUE—tailored for U.P. Ag/Consumer Hort Clientele (Update May 29, 2020)

### UPCOMING ON LINE MEETINGS, (registration required to participate)

**Virtual Breakfast** - weekly (Thurs mornings, 7am) Free ZOOM meeting for all farmers growing field crops. 15 minutes on crop topic + 15 minute state ag weather update <https://www.canr.msu.edu/events/field-crops-virtual-breakfast-4> This week, soil fertility + ag weather

**Farm Employee University** - Farm Employee University provides a training platform accessible to all dairy employees and employers. Our goal is to provide education that will improve the skills of both employers and employees, lead to a better work environment for all, and reduce employee turnover on farms. Material is currently provided in English and will be available soon in Spanish, and is available with closed captioning. Please visit our webpage for enrollment instructions. All current courses are free. <https://www.canr.msu.edu/farm-employee-university/>

**Cabin Fever Conversations - Fridays** Free [https://www.canr.msu.edu/home\\_gardening/resources/learning-online](https://www.canr.msu.edu/home_gardening/resources/learning-online)

**Cornell Small Farms Program** - offered Fall 2020. Fee required <https://smallfarms.cornell.edu/online-courses/>

### RECORDED PROGRAMS AVAILABLE ON-LINE

**COVID-19 Pandemic Response for Agriculture (MSU resources)** <https://www.canr.msu.edu/agriculture/Rapid-Response-for-Agriculture/covid-19-pandemic-response-for-agriculture>

**Agribusiness Resources for Novel Coronavirus** – Web page featuring articles and resources to help your farm stay up to date on Federal assistance programs, and to keep your workers and yourself safe. [https://www.canr.msu.edu/farm\\_management/Agribusiness-Resources-for-Novel-Coronavirus/](https://www.canr.msu.edu/farm_management/Agribusiness-Resources-for-Novel-Coronavirus/)

**Beginning Farmer Webinar Series** - 100+ archived videos from MSU Extension educators, specialists, ag organizations and private farmers on wide variety of topics for beginning farmers.

[https://www.canr.msu.edu/beginning\\_farmer\\_webinar\\_series/index](https://www.canr.msu.edu/beginning_farmer_webinar_series/index)

**Field Crops Webinar Series** - One-hour recorded webinars offered in winter 2016-2019 (2020 recordings to be added soon). Feature MSU Extension specialists addressing topics of interest to crop producers across Michigan.

[https://www.canr.msu.edu/field\\_crops/field-crop-webinar-series](https://www.canr.msu.edu/field_crops/field-crop-webinar-series)

**My Horse University** <https://www.myhorseuniversity.com/>

**2020 MSU Tree Fruit Webinar Series** - Recorded 1-hour programs for commercial fruit growers from April 2020. Available through May 2020. <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCY0fCxPAEJN-EsK-iPjq1Dw>

**Virtual Breakfast archive** - See description above, [https://www.canr.msu.edu/field\\_crops/virtual-breakfast/](https://www.canr.msu.edu/field_crops/virtual-breakfast/)

**Virtual Coffee Break with the MSU Dairy Team** - Archives of our weekly (Wednesday mornings, 10 am) Podcast and Zoom meetings for dairy farmers. Approximately 20 – 30 min. each. <https://open.spotify.com/show/4xkwxOzbtUomxwsdAc68eu> . Some sessions are also available on the MSU Dairy Team YouTube channel: <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UC5zgDnjQ-cxRgp20rRUu06g>

**Sharpen Your Dairy Skills While We Flatten the Curve** - Archives of MSU Extension podcast hosted by Dr. Barry Bradford of MSU. Originally held Tu and Th mornings at 10 a.m. from April 14 – April 28. Get up to date on the latest research, financial tools, and software skills. Approximately 1 hr. each <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UC5zgDnjQ-cxRgp20rRUu06g>

**Smart Gardening with Vegetables 101** - Online, self-paced course, \$15 registration fee through May 15, then \$30.

Article and registration link: <https://www.canr.msu.edu/events/smart-gardening-with-vegetables-101>

**Pollinator Champions** - online, self-paced course about pollinators and how to support them. Always available for free or you can become a certified Pollinator Champion for a small fee

Registration link: <https://pollinators.msu.edu/programs/pollinator-champions/>

**MSU Apiculture Team Webinars** - recorded webinars for beginning and intermediate beekeepers. Available for free

<https://pollinators.msu.edu/resources/beekeepers/webinars/>

**Integrated Pest Management Academy, Desire to Learn Course** \$10 fee, self-paced multi-part program worth 6 pesticide applicator recert credits [https://www.canr.msu.edu/ipm/agriculture/integrated\\_pest\\_management\\_academy](https://www.canr.msu.edu/ipm/agriculture/integrated_pest_management_academy)

## **FOR KIDS**

### **4-H Livestock Learning Video Series**

[https://www.canr.msu.edu/animal\\_science/Resources/livestock-learning-videos](https://www.canr.msu.edu/animal_science/Resources/livestock-learning-videos)

**H.O.M.E.S. at Home** - Fun half-hour videos about Great Lakes (H.O.M.E.S. = Huron, Ontario, Michigan, Erie, Superior) topics. Produced by Michigan Sea Grant Extension staff in March and April, 2020.

<https://www.michiganseagrant.org/educational-programs/h-o-m-e-s-at-home/>



## **MSU Extension Farm Stress Program partners to connect farmers with mental health services**

Farmers can now access counseling with licensed therapists via teletherapy.

Eric Karbowski and Paul Gross, Michigan State University Extension

Michigan State University Extension's Farm Stress Program is now equipped to connect farmers experiencing stress and mental health issues with online counseling. Through this pilot project, MSU Extension can link farmers with a licensed mental health therapist via teletherapy. What is online counseling? Online counseling or teletherapy provides mental health and counseling services through the internet rather than in-person. Traditional therapy is typically conducted during face-to-face meetings in an office. Teletherapy is a counseling session that is completed through video chat between mental health care providers and clients. This advanced approach provides flexibility for people to access behavioral health supports in the comfort of their own environment. Even with the current "Stay Home, Stay Safe" executive order in Michigan, farmers can access behavioral health services.

The pilot project does have funding limitations. Primary insurance plans with behavioral health coverage will be billed to offset costs. Those without insurance or without behavioral health coverage still qualify for participation. Farmers will be supported on a first come first serve basis while funding is available. Farming is a demanding and stressful occupation. There are characteristics and demands of the agricultural industry that are unique to farmers. Through this partnership, therapists will have a connection with the agricultural community and an understanding of farming practices and lifestyle.

There are two ways farmers can access services with the pilot project. You can reach out to Eric Karbowski, MSU Extension farm stress educator, at 989-317-4079 or [karbows8@msu.edu](mailto:karbows8@msu.edu), or self-refer for services by calling 866-852-4001. Please note that self-referrals must state "MSU Extension Teletherapy" to qualify for the pilot project.

## Surface application of agricultural lime

By Jim Isleib, MSUE Extension Educator

Scenario: Your soil pH is too low for good hay or pasture performance, but you're not planning to work up your field in the near future. You feel that raising soil pH would make plant nutrients more available and improve plant performance.

Options:

1. Live with it. Most perennial grasses are quite tolerant of low soil pH. The legumes may not thrive, but you can get by without them. Fertilize to improve grass yield, if feasible.
2. Change your rotation plans and work up the field, apply lime at the recommended rate (or whatever you can afford), incorporate it thoroughly, fertilize and reseed.
3. As a compromise, surface apply one ton of lime per acre to improve soil pH. This would involve a lot less expense and risk than choice #2, and get you at least partway toward solving your soil acidity problem.

Naturally, you'll want to pencil out the financial pro's and con's of this decision before you lay down your dollars. A rough estimate (may or may not match your figures):

1 ton of ag lime per acre, surface-applied

Cost at source: \$14/ton

Loading: \$4.50/ton

Trucking (based on 54 ton load)

\$12 - \$28/ton (depending on distance)

Spreader rental: \$5 per ton spread

Assumption #1: Estimated cost of 1 ton of surface-applied lime on a typical U.P. farm: \$45

Assumption #2: This lime application will be effective for 3 years.

Assumption #3: Improved soil pH will result in increased hay yield of 0.2 tons/acre annually

Assumption #4: The value of your hay is \$75 per ton.

So...you spent \$45 an acre on surface-applied lime, or \$15 per year based on a 3-year impact. You hope your hay yield will increase by 0.2 tons per acre, worth \$15. Given these figures, your investment in lime may be a 'wash', with no net gain or loss. However, improved soil pH makes plant nutrients more available to your forage crop. If you apply fertilizer, you should get more 'bang for your buck' with it if soil acidity is under control. Also, if a good forage year occurs, with weather and soil moisture favorable for good yields, you are in a better position to benefit.

If your soil really needs it, lime usually pays off. Thorough incorporation of ag lime in the plant root zone is best, but if not practical, surface application is a good second choice.

During this period of reduced contact with U.P. farmers, Jim Isleib has started an on-line, video project to keep people informed about current activities at the MSU Upper Peninsula Research and Extension Center at Chatham, MI. He's calling it "What's U.P. @ UPREC?". The videos are short, 4-5 minutes, and feature interesting activities going on at the Center. Please check it out at [MSU Extension Upper Peninsula facebook page](#). He plans to add new video regularly through the spring and summer.

## Coronavirus Food Assistance Program (CFAP)

### Get Signed Up!

By Frank Wardynski, Excepts taken from [farmers.gov/cfap](https://farmers.gov/cfap)

The USDA Farm Service Agency signing farmers up for the Coronavirus Food Assistance Program (CFAP). Signup started May 26 and goes through August 28, 2020. Info can be found at <https://www.farmers.gov/cfap>.

Commodities covered include:

**Non-specialty Crops:** malting barley, canola, corn, upland cotton, millet, oats, soybeans, sorghum, sunflowers, durum wheat, and hard red spring wheat

- **Wool**
- **Livestock:** cattle, hogs, and sheep (lambs and yearlings only)
- **Dairy**
- **Specialty Crops**
  - **Fruits:** apples, avocados, blueberries, cantaloupe, grapefruit, kiwifruit, lemons, oranges, papaya, peaches, pears, raspberries, strawberries, tangerines, tomatoes, watermelons
  - **Vegetables:** artichokes, asparagus, broccoli, cabbage, carrots, cauliflower, celery, sweet corn, cucumbers, eggplant, garlic, iceberg lettuce, romaine lettuce, dry onions, green onions, peppers, potatoes, rhubarb, spinach, squash, sweet potatoes, taro
  - **Nuts:** almonds, pecans, walnuts
  - **Other:** beans, mushrooms

An Excel spreadsheet can be downloaded from the website and makes sign up much easier. The spreadsheet helps to identify all of the eligible commodities. Farmers that have not participated in USDA programs in the past will need to fill out additional forms: CCC-901, CCC-941, AD-1026, AD-2047, and SF-3881. For more information Contact your local FSA office or Frank Wardynski with MSUE ([wardynsk@msu.edu](mailto:wardynsk@msu.edu)).

## Classifieds

**FOR SALE: Pregnant Black Angus Cows**, most due in the month of May, but possibly into the month of June. Contact Jon (906) 265-9333 or email [jahlberg@fast-air.net](mailto:jahlberg@fast-air.net)

**FOR SALE: Mixed hay**, large round bales, 4'x4', \$25/bale. Call Al (906)647-6697.

**FOR SALE: Hay**, large square bales 3x3x7.75 Timothy grass, 4,000 to sell. Former dairy farm doing all big square bales hay. Call Dave Bell in the EUP 906-440-6455 or email [Bellsdairy@yahoo.com](mailto:Bellsdairy@yahoo.com). Also a realtor in the UP so contact me for real estate here. [Dave@smith-company.com](mailto:Dave@smith-company.com)

**Beautiful property** in the Upper Michigan, 130 acres In Perkins for sale or pasture for rent for livestock for the 2020 season. Beautiful river running through it. Great for hunting, building or developing, or simple grazing livestock. Land is divided into 9 paddocks with high tensile electric fence and 5 stock watering ponds. Call (906) 359-4825.

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### Market Report

Choice Steers	\$100-\$124 per 100 lbs.
Holstein Steers	\$75-\$99 per 100 lbs.
Hogs	\$20-\$31 per 100 lbs.
Lambs	\$100-\$160 per 100 lbs.
Cull cows	\$45-\$63 per 100 lbs.
Calves	\$40-\$125 per 100 lbs.
Goats	\$200—\$300 per 100 lbs.

#### Breeding and Feeder Animals

Grade Holstein cows	\$1250-\$1450/head
Grade Holstein bred heifers	\$1400-\$1650/head

#### Feed Prices across the U.P.

	Avg. \$/cwt	Avg. \$/ton	Price Range
Corn	\$11.21	\$224.25	\$175-342
Soymeal	\$19.75	\$395.00	\$372-450
Oats	\$13.49	\$269.75	\$239-340
Barley	\$11.90	\$238.00	\$190-310
Average price/100 wt. for 1 ton lots			

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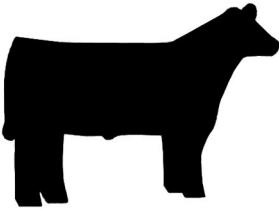
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## **Food Safety Continues Throughout Pandemic**

June 2020

***By Landen Tetil, Marquette County Conservation District***

While many have been at home for the past couple of months due to the SarsCov2 pandemic, farmers have still been hard at work ensuring our food supply chain remains secure. I am so appreciative of all our farmers who have continued to put in the hard work of feeding us, even while we have all been scared, confused, and tentative about the future. Thank you.

Upper Peninsula farmers are resilient, to be sure, and they have faced this season with an impressive tenacity. As important as it is for farmers to keep bringing food to the community table, it is equally important that food is safe and free of potentially dangerous foodborne pathogens. It is imperative that farmers add a section to their food safety plans that address public health concerns with COVID-19. As your Produce Safety Technician, I am here and ready to help you create a written plan for your farm that addresses measures you take to prevent the spread of the virus. There is a lot of overlap in the standard protocols for food safety and protocols for the virus, such as hand washing, worker health, and cleaning and sanitizing surfaces. So, chances are, few drastic changes will be necessary.

Lastly, I want to announce that I am able to perform precautions, social-distanced site visits again, in addition to being available via phone or email each business day. If you would like to have me out to visit your farm so we can chat in person, look at your systems, and brainstorm ways to make your quality produce even safer, please contact me to make an appointment.

*To learn more about assessing produce safety risks on your farm and to earn a produce safety certificate from the state of Michigan, contact your local Produce Safety Technician at [Landen.mqtcondist@gmail.com](mailto:Landen.mqtcondist@gmail.com) or (906) 251-3061*