



# U.P. Ag Connections Newsletter

September 2025

Agricultural News from MSU Extension and AgBioResearch

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## News and Views

By Frank Wardynski

Autumn is rapidly approaching, and many farmers begin looking forward to fall harvest. As we look to fall harvest, we also start thinking about commodity prices. Commodity prices across the Upper Peninsula are going to be a mixed bag this year. Grain and soybean prices are significantly lower, milk prices appear to be trending downward, hay prices are deflated due to the large forage harvest of the past two years, and beef prices continue to rage higher to new records.

I thought I'd offer some of my thoughts and opinions regarding two factors affecting these prices. Some of our low prices are obviously affected by the tariffs and the trade war. Unfortunately for agriculture, we frequently bear the brunt of these situations. Especially in the grain markets and the dairy markets, exports are an important factor in determining our prices.

China is the largest importer of American soybeans and has shifted their soybean purchases to South America and significantly reduced buying from the US. To a lesser extent the same has been the story for the corn and small grain markets. The national drought monitor looks mostly good through the plains and Midwest, with good yields expected. Grain and soybean prices are lower than last year, and domestic livestock producers are going to be the benefactor.

China and Canada milk tariffs are having an impact on prices. Fewer pounds of milk exports are starting to put an overburden of supply here in the United States domestically. Without exports helping consume our locally produced dairy products, dairy cooperatives across the United States are producing more product than we're consuming here in this country.

Over the last two years, weather patterns have been very favorable for hay production across the Upper Peninsula. Much of the beef quality hay is not moving. Most beef producers have an excess of hay that they've produced on the farm and those needing to purchase hay have found adequate supplies at reasonable prices.

Probably the only true shining star from a commodity price perspective is in the beef industry. The national cow herd is extremely low in numbers, and the American consumer has not backed off purchasing beef products at high prices. Dairy farmers have also significantly taken advantage of these beef prices with cull cow prices and calf prices both being at record levels. With these high prices, beef producers are going to be challenged to make the decision of when to expand the cow herd. Each of the last two years have offered prices to beef producers that signal the increased count numbers, yet the national cow herd has not increased.

## Student-led Projects Bring Local Food to School Lunch

By Abbey Palmer

2025 marks another successful year for the LIFT-UP (Locally Integrated Food Teams - Upper Peninsula) program. This year three schools, Negaunee High School, Munising High School and Ishpeming High School, each wrote grant proposals and received \$2,500 in grant money to support a project the students developed around the question, “how do we get more local food into the school lunchroom?”

At Munising High School, Hilary Ludecke’s Environmental Science class worked as a team with knowledgeable adults to replace the hoop house plastic, add an irrigation system, build raised beds, and improve soil health in their school garden. Guidance about how to accomplish these updates and what to grow was provided by Yooper Country Farm. In the spring, the class began taste testing new recipes that feature local foods that could make their way to the lunchroom. Crops like potatoes, lettuce, string beans, peppers, tomatoes, and even some fresh herbs -- all of which they hope to source from their hoop house or from local growers. The progress this year not only lays a strong foundation for classes to come, but it will give the students valuable hands-on experience with growing and preparing food.

At Negaunee High School, Todd Backlund’s Environmental Science Class went to work rebuilding their school garden beds and bringing in fresh soil, creating a refreshed and improved area for growing. They also expanded their garden to attract and host pollinating insects. These little friends will be able to feast on some flowers while also lodging in new insect hotels. Along with the garden, students also focused on including local foods in health education through communication with their teachers about what is included in the nutrition curriculum. The grant was also used to purchase a new salad spinner for their cafeteria. This was purchased with the goal of making it easier for the staff to get greens grown in the school’s hydroponic system into the lunchroom and on the plates of students. This part of the project is a continuation of a prior project that helped them acquire the hydroponic systems. Students at Negaunee are not only laying strong foundations, but they are also looking at how they can build on these foundations in the future.

At Ishpeming High School, Melissa Meldrum’s Senior English class turned their focus to education in collaboration with Partridge Creek Farm. The students developed recipes and provided taste tests to their classmates and elementary school students of delicious and nutritious food, and passed information about how those recipes were received along to their foodservice director. The local foods featured included carrots grown at MSU UP Research and Extension Center and

potatoes that students helped to grow at Partridge Creek Farm, which were processed at Northwoods Test Kitchen. They have also been working on educating their fellow students on



*Photo caption: Students from Munising, Negaunee, and Ishpeming High Schools gathered at Belsolda Farm in May to share their projects and celebrate.*

*Photo credit: Abbey Palmer*

How to properly compost so that the nutrients that are not eaten are put to good use, continuing a collaboration with Partridge Creek Compost. Two paid internships at Partridge Creek Farm are underway, where students are growing vegetables that will be served in the cafeteria in the fall. This experience has deepened Brynn Way-Lanala’s understanding of food: “I’ve learned different vegetables and gotten to see the whole life cycle of plants through this internship.” The potential impacts of this internship also look forward to the future: “I want to be a teacher, and my experience with this project means that I will bring kids to gardens and teach them what I’ve learned here,” said Partridge Creek Farm intern Journey Comment.



A celebration of student work was hosted at Belsolda Farm, where students from each school presented their projects to one another. They learned about opportunities to continue to study agriculture at MSU's Institute of Agriculture Technology program at Bay College and were treated to a local food lunch provided by Northwoods Test Kitchen.



None of this would be possible without LIFT-UP's community partners: The U.P Food Exchange, Fork Farms, Partridge Creek Farm, Michigan On-Farm Produce Safety, Northwoods Test Kitchen, Chartwells, Marquette-Alger RESA, Michigan State University Extension, and The Marquette Food Co-op. The partners from these organizations helped the students make real world connections and brought priceless knowledge and experience to the classroom. This project was supported by funding from Michigan Health Endowment Fund's Nutrition and Healthy Lifestyles grant program.

*Photo caption: Munising School Hoop House now has raised beds and other updates to improve accessibility.*

*Photo credit: Hilary Ludecke, 2025*

## Chute Side Animal Handling and Processing in the Western UP

By Frank Wardynski

Frank Wardynski, MSU Educator, will be hosting a Pasture Walk on his farm at 18360 Firesteel Rd. Ontonagon, MI at 1:00 pm Eastern on Saturday, October 18, 2025. **Please RSVP by calling 906-884-4386**

Topics of discussion – Castration, Dehorning, Pain Mitigation, Vaccinations, Injection Site Techniques, Utilizing at Home Pregnancy Test for Cattle. He will be demonstrating cattle handling and processing demonstration, along with castrating all the bull calves and checking all calves for horns. (There is probably one calf that needs to be dehorned.) He will also use an injectable pain killer for the dehorning process. He will be demonstrating injection techniques and discuss vaccination protocols, along with demonstration on how to pull blood samples for pregnancy testing and show how to use chute side testing to determine pregnancy.

## Pasture Walk in the Western UP

By Frank Wardynski

Frank Wardynski, MSU Educator, will be hosting a Pasture Walk on his farm in the Western UP at 18360 Firesteel Road, Ontonagon, MI on Saturday, October 11, 2025 at 10:00 am EDT with a light lunch to follow.

**Please RSVP by calling 906-884-4386**

This year we will look at various levels of soil aggregation, aggregate stability, water infiltration, and compaction. We will also talk about using weed identification as indicators of what might be going on in the soil, re-establishing sod on the old dirt road, and finally looking at cows, yesterday's pasture, today's pasture, and tomorrow's pasture.

Topics of discussion will be on-farm soil health testing procedures, protecting bare soil on roadways, near culverts, etc., long rest periods, evaluating pastures, looking at cows.



MICHIGAN ASSOCIATION of  
CONSERVATION DISTRICTS



## Michigan Association of Conservation Districts Welcomes MiFarmLink as a Statewide Program Starting October 1

Partnership will strengthen farmland access, farmer succession, and rural communities across Michigan.

Beginning October 1, 2025, the Michigan Association of Conservation Districts (MACD) will officially bring MiFarmLink under its umbrella, expanding efforts to connect farmland owners with the next generation of Michigan farmers.

“MACD is thrilled to help grow MiFarmLink into a statewide program through our network of conservation districts,” said Rivka Hodgkinson, Executive Director of MACD. “By connecting more farmers with land, we can protect Michigan’s farmland and secure the future of our farming communities.”

MACD and MiFarmLink extend their sincere thanks to Ottawa County and the Washtenaw County Conservation District (WCCD) for their support in growing and strengthening this program since its inception.

MiFarmLink works to connect farmland owners with beginning and established farmers seeking land. By building bridges across generations and supporting succession planning, the program helps keep farmland in production, ensures food security for Michigan families, and strengthens rural communities.

To celebrate this next chapter, MACD will host a virtual Lunch & Learn in November. November 13th from 12-1pm. This will be open to conservation district staff, partners, and the general public interested in learning more about MiFarmLink.

Visit [MiFarmLink.org](https://mifarmlink.org) to learn more. Conservation districts are encouraged to share the program with their communities, and take advantage of outreach materials provided. A promotional folder with ready-to-use graphics, flyers, and talking points is available upon request. An infographic highlighting the program’s work is also attached for easy use.

MiFarmLink is also seeking dedicated individuals to join the program’s growth. Applications are currently open for the Advisory Committee, Regional Representatives, and General Volunteers.

Jill Dohner, existing Program Director, will continue in her role leading MiFarmLink.

“It’s exciting to be moving into this statewide role. Conservation Districts, especially Washtenaw County have been instrumental in our role to grow as an organization. As a farmer myself, I’m thrilled to offer this match making service to all Michiganders who need access to land and want to continue serving the agricultural needs of the state,” Dohner said.

Alexa Tedeschi, Communications and Development Coordinator, will also continue on the MiFarmLink team. Together, Jill and Alexa will guide MiFarmLink’s statewide outreach and partnerships.

For more information, visit [www.mifarmlink.org](https://www.mifarmlink.org) or contact [info@mifarmlink.org](mailto:info@mifarmlink.org)

## Respiratory Protection Requirements in Agriculture – Guidance & Resources

By Ed Parsons, Laurel Harduar-Morano and Jeremy Jubenville,

A new guide is intended to provide information and resources to assist in understanding respiratory protection program requirements, the applicable regulatory requirements, and how to select the type of protection based on inhalation hazards found in agricultural workplaces. The guide separates requirements into pesticide and non-pesticide respirator use at agricultural work sites. Some of the main differences between pesticide and non-pesticide respiratory programs are in the areas of exposure assessment, respirator selection, cartridge service life determination and record keeping.



## Indigenous Farmers Needed for Soil Health Testing

By Monica Jean, Jennifer Silveri, Elisa Grossman, Stephen Stresow and Biidaaban Reinhardt

The idea of soil health — the health of Gimaamaaminaan Aki, Mother Earth — is not new. It is rooted in centuries of Indigenous knowledge, which forms the basis for good land stewardship and relationships. Only over the past decade, however, have scientists developed ways to quantify what is living below our feet. By breaking down soil health into physical, chemical and biological aspects, we can holistically compare management practices across different time scales.

A newly funded project, “Replenishing the Beings, the Soil Beneath our Feet,” is working through a partnership with [Michigan State University Extension](#) and [Michigan Inter-Tribal Land Grant Extension System \(MILES\)](#) educators, community partners, technical assistance networks, U.S. Department of Agriculture staff, and Natural Resources Conservation Service tribal liaisons to assist Indigenous farmers with soil health sampling. Our project seeks to understand how soil health and Indigenous farming practices interact and influence soils’ capacity to grow food, enhance fertility and withstand weather extremes.



This work is supported by the American Rescue Plan Technical Assistance Initiative program, project award no. 2023-70417-39233, from the U.S. Department of Agriculture’s National Institute of Food and Agriculture.

### Options for levels of farmer participation:

- A. Interested in attending educational events and field days.
- B. I am an Indigenous farmer who is interested in participating in soil health testing. Up to five samples can be taken depending on your farm size.

### Farmer partners that select option B:

- Contribute to the experimental design of the study by helping to select study fields.
- Engage in annual project meetings.
- Allow researchers to soil sample bi-annually.
  - Soil sampling two times per year.
  - Farmers will receive a comprehensive soil test report for each sample.
- Communicate with Extension staff about field operations to optimize sampling times.
- Share yield history data and cost of production information.
  - All data will be confidential and anonymized.
  - Soil can be returned to farms after sampling.
- Complete management surveys and participate in a needs assessment.
- Estimated time obligation per year is about 5 hours.



What indicators will the soil health test report include?

A routine nutrient test report, pH, texture, soil respiration (similar to the Solvita test), permanganate oxidizable carbon (Active Carbon), Autoclaved-citrate extractable protein (organically bound pool of nitrogen), and enzymatic activity (indicative of microbial activity and nutrient cycling). Samples will get processed at the [Soil Health and Ecosystem Ecology](#) lab.

**Enroll online [here](#), or using the QR code above!**

### Cost:

The cost is free.

### Enrollment deadline:

Deadline to enroll is Sept. 30, 2025.

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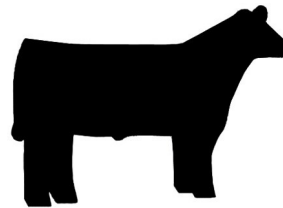
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| Holstein Steers | \$180-\$220 per 100 lbs.  |
| Hogs            | \$71-\$84 per 100 lbs.    |
| Lambs           | \$200-\$240 per 100 lbs.  |
| Cull cows       | \$120-\$175 per 100 lbs.  |
| Calves          | \$600-\$1025 per 100 lbs. |
| Goats           | \$275-\$350 per 100 lbs.  |

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Sunday, September 28<sup>th</sup> - 12pm-5pm  
Saturday, October 4<sup>th</sup> - 11am-5pm  
Sunday, October 5<sup>th</sup> - 12pm-5pm  
Saturday, October 11<sup>th</sup> - 11am-5pm  
Sunday, October 12<sup>th</sup> - 12pm-5pm  
Saturday, October 18<sup>th</sup> - 11am-5pm  
Sunday, October 19<sup>th</sup> - 12pm-5pm  
Saturday, October 25<sup>th</sup> - 11am-5pm  
Sunday, October 26<sup>th</sup> - 12pm-5pm

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