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Summer 2019

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Greg Judy has doubled his herd's stocking rate and drastically reduced winter hay feeding by following a holistic grazing plan. *Photo by Casey Buckman.*

Reflecting on 90 Years of Service

IN JUNE, MFA OIL COMPANY CELEBRATED the 90th anniversary of its founding. If you look back on the history of the cooperative, you will see that the company has evolved over time with a purpose to return the most value to our farmer-owners. Some highlights include:

- 1929 – Initial bulk fuel plants established
- 1962 – Entered the propane business
- 1983 – Introduced our first Petro-Card 24 station in Chillicothe, Mo.
- 1985 – Opened our first Break Time convenience store
- 1990 – Purchased Jiffy Lube franchises in mid-Missouri
- 1998 – Became a Big O Tires franchisee
- 2013 – Acquired American Petroleum Marketers fuel distribution business

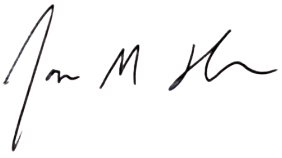
Jon Ihler

While it's clear some things have changed over the years, as I reflect on our past, I also see characteristics that have stood the test of time. Since the beginning, when our original 24 bulk plants opened in 1929, our employees have cared deeply about serving our members and customers. We remain just as committed to those ideals today as we did 90 years ago. There have been thousands of people that have worked for MFA Oil throughout the years, and we certainly would not be where we are today without their dedication and diligence.

When I was elevated to the role of interim CEO in April, I spoke with the MFA Oil Board of Directors about the importance of our focus on delivering exceptional customer service. To me, this goes hand-in-hand with valuing the long-standing relationships we have with our farmer-owners and reinforcing our commitment to you. We know your energy needs can be time-sensitive, and our goal is to meet those needs in a safe and timely manner.

I want to thank you, our farmer-owners, for your continued loyalty. This cooperative has a strong agricultural heritage and many farmers and ranchers who have served the company as delegates and board members in our storied history. Your support means everything to us.

While MFA Oil is currently in a transition period, you don't have to look too far in the rearview mirror to find times when the co-op faced both good times and bad. We can never be certain of what tomorrow will hold, but I think that's half the fun of looking forward. No matter what we face, I want to assure you that we are well-equipped to handle the future.



Jon Ihler
Interim CEO

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This magazine comes to you courtesy of MFA Oil Company, a farmer-owned cooperative providing energy solutions to customers for 90 years. We deliver high-quality propane, fuels and lubricants to farmers and other customers across an eight-state region stretching from Indiana to Kansas. *Momentum* is an information service for farm families, published by MFA Oil.

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Columbia Ag Park Holds Grand Opening

AN OVERCAST AND FOGGY morning couldn't dim the enthusiasm of thousands of shoppers who showed up at Clary-Shy Park on July 6 for the grand opening of Columbia's new agriculture park.

Nearly 100 vendors offering farm-fresh fruits, vegetables, meats, baked goods and flowers were present for the unveiling of the Columbia Farmers Market's newly opened MU Health Care Pavilion, which restores shelter to the farmers market for the first time since 1992.

The new home for the farmers market and the ag park itself is the result of a public-private partnership that began in 2015 between Columbia Farmers Market, Columbia Center for Urban Agriculture, Sustainable Farms & Communities and Columbia Parks and Recreation.

Construction on the first phase of the pavilion provides space for 98 vendor stalls (38 of which are sheltered) and includes public restroom facilities. A second phase of construction will eventually provide shelter for all vendor booths.

> "In the past, if it rained, it really hurt our sales. It will be nice to have more shelter to keep customers dry while they are shopping."
> – Austin Stanton

Adam Saunders, who led the fundraising for "Build This Town: Campaign for the Agriculture Park" and is development director at the Columbia Center for Urban Agriculture, is a self-proclaimed food enthusiast with a passion for increasing agronomical education in urban communities. He says the presence of the new ag park will support the growth and stability of mid-Missouri farmers and keep profits from local food production sales in the state.

A dedication and ribbon cutting ceremony was held at Clary-Shy Park on July 13 to celebrate the opening of Columbia's new agriculture park. *Photo by Jonathan Asher Photography.*

"The market is a great way for farmers to capture a fair price on their goods without paying the fees of a middle man, and it also helps connect Missourians with the agricultural community," Saunders says.

Funding for the project began with Columbia Parks and Recreation providing $400,000 along with a federal match of the same amount. Columbia-based businesses, trusts, foundations and other organizations contributed the rest of the money to make the park a reality. The MFA Oil Foundation partnered with the MFA Foundation, MFA Incorporated and Shelter Insurance to support the project.

Austin Stanton of Stanton Brothers Eggs has been coming to the Columbia Farmers Market since 2007. He says the construction of the pavilion should prevent rain from ruining a vendor's day.

"In the past, if it rained, it really hurt our sales," Stanton says. "It will be nice to have more shelter to keep customers dry while they are shopping."

Beyond the market pavilion, the first phase of the ag park includes a farm-themed playground; a practice field; space for outdoor classrooms; an orchard; a barn and greenhouse for the Columbia Center for Urban Agriculture; new parking spaces; trails; and a pedestrian plaza.

Saunders expects the park's first phase of developments to be completed by the end of the year. The second phase of the park's construction will include building a 10,000-square-foot multipurpose building equipped with office space and a commercial kitchen, extending shelter to the full pavilion, and pouring concrete for additional parking spaces.

The Columbia Farmers Market is open every Saturday morning from 8 a.m. to noon, on Tuesdays from 10 a.m. to 1 p.m., and on Thursdays from 3 p.m. to 6 p.m. at 1701 W. Ash Street in Columbia.

– BY MEGAN HILL

TIMELESS TOOLS

Ozark County Blacksmith Creates Garden Implements Built to Last Generations

Story & photos by Jason Jenkins

LEFT: A passion for pounding hot steel led Will Dobkins of Squires, Mo., to follow family footsteps into the profession of blacksmithing. ABOVE: Homestead Iron offers a complete line of high-quality, hand-forged garden tools, including hoes, trowels, cultivators and weeding forks. Each comes with a lifetime guarantee.

At 47 years old, Will Dobkins still remembers an age when things were built to last. Whether it was a television set, a vacuum or some other household convenience, there was an expectation that products would stand the test of time and regular use. And, should something go awry, there would be a repairman with the parts and skills to get them running again.

Those days are but a memory. Like dinosaurs, TV and small-appliance repairmen have gone extinct as the products they once maintained are now built to be replaced, never repaired.

"It seems everything in our world is designed to be cheap, immediate and disposable, and garden tools are no different," Will says. "There are some good tools out there, but there's also a lot of junk. We owe it to the resources we consume to at least try to turn them into good stuff."

For the past six years, Will and his wife, Melissa, have put this belief into practice. From their small farm in Ozark County, they operate Homestead Iron, a blacksmith shop offering a complete line of high-quality, hand-forged garden tools. Their products have gained a loyal following among gardeners, homesteaders, small-scale farmers and others who recognize the value of implements crafted for a lifetime of use.

"Our most popular trowel sells for $36," Will explains. "Now, that may seem like a lot for a trowel, but compare it to buying a $5 one that you're constantly replacing. All of a sudden, that $36 trowel is cheap because you never have to buy another one. Plus, it just works better."

Blacksmith Beginnings

Anvils, forges, hammers and tongs always have been part of Will's life. The tradition of blacksmithing can be traced back four generations to Will's great-grandfather, William "Willie" Dobkins.

"Grandpa Willie was a traveling preacher, photographer and blacksmith in the Ozarks in the early 1900s," Will says. "He'd load his wagon and cruise around taking pictures of people, preaching, shoeing horses and doing simple blacksmith repairs."

When he'd return home after a two-week circuit, Willie would process his photographs, making prints to sell the next time he traveled through an area. Today, a collection of those images is preserved by the State Historical Society of Missouri as a record of everyday life in the Ozarks in the early 20th century.

Willie passed his penchant for blacksmithing to his son, Theodore, who spent time in the 1930s working with steel and fire at Crockett Bit & Spur Co. in Lenexa, Kan., one of the world's most renowned spur makers.

Blacksmithing in the Dobkins family continued with Theodore's son, James. He worked in Wyoming both as a pipeline welder in the oil industry and heavy equipment repairman in the coal industry. He eventually moved his family back to Missouri, settling in Steelville.

TOP: The Dobkins family — Will and Melissa, along with their children Samantha, 6, and Aengus, 4 — has found a unique business niche that allows them to make their home deep in the Ozarks while still earning a living. ABOVE: In his fully equipped blacksmithing shop, Will spends his days turning raw steel into useful garden tools, some of which are inspired by designs from the past.

"There's a picture of me at 6 or 7 years old cranking on the old coal forge in Dad's shop," Will recalls. "I remember sitting on the bench watching him run the mill or the lathe. I watched him weld a lot, too. As kids, we used to take sparklers around the Fourth of July and pretend we were welding on cardboard boxes. As a teenager, I started forging a few things myself."

James had a love of aviation, especially the war birds of World War II. That passion rubbed off on his son. After graduating from Steelville High School, Will became an aircraft mechanic.

"I worked for airlines in big cities like Toronto and Portland, which is where I met Melissa," Will says. "I enjoyed working on the old-school jet technology. You really had to troubleshoot them and out-think them to make them fly. But as everything went digital, all the ones and zeroes weren't as much fun to work on. It drove me out of turning wrenches."

As a boy, Will read about the mountain men and settlers who tamed the American West. He wondered what it would be like to take a piece of land and carve out a living. He and Melissa decided to give up city life and start homesteading on 40 acres of raw land in Oregon.

"We grew a big garden. We raised goats, sheep and pigs. We lived in a teepee for a year and a half while we built a cabin," Will says. "It was fun, and we learned a lot. By stripping away the trappings of modern life, we learned what was important and what made us happy."

To earn money, Will took a job in a local forge shop and reacquainted himself with his blacksmithing heritage. As he advanced his skills, he began selling a few items — eventually finding a niche with garden tools.

"So, six years ago, we came up with a plan to move back to Missouri and start Homestead Iron," Will says.

Superior Steel

Today, the blacksmith offers more than three dozen garden tools — including cultivators, hoes, trowels, forks, rakes and shovels — ranging in price from $25 to $75. Many of the designs are inspired by tools that may be as old as a century or more. Will crafts his tools from C1075 high-carbon steel, the same material used to make axes and machetes.

"The cheaper tools out there aren't made from the right kind of steel," Will says. "It's not bad material, just the wrong application. It's great for a toaster or a car fender, but it's not tool steel, and there's a huge difference."

He says C1075 offers both toughness and edge retention.

"Most of the tools you'll find have no edge because the material won't hold one, even if you grind it on there," Will explains. "When you have a sharp tool, it lasts longer and makes the work easier. Imagine butchering meat with a dull knife. It's the same concept. We like to say that we make the sharpest tools in the shed."

Over the years, Will has perfected his tool-making process, combining traditional and modern techniques. While he still spends considerable time at the anvil with hammer in hand, turning steel

TOP LEFT: Will uses a wire wheel to clean up the weld on a hand-forged trowel. BOTTOM LEFT: To speed production, Will has embraced modern technologies such as this plasma cutter, which allows him to cut out tool shapes quickly and more efficiently. RIGHT: Adding a twisting to a tool shank ensures that when the handle is installed, it stays put without glue or epoxy. Will says it's an old-school trick that railroad tie hackers once used to keep their spikes from pulling out of the ties as they floated down Ozark streams.

into money is the name of the game. So, Will has embraced technologies such as pneumatic power hammers, TIG welders and plasma cutters to speed production. He estimates each tool now takes 20 to 30 minutes to fabricate, which is significantly less than when he began — a result of both improved experience and efficient equipment.

Homestead Iron tools can be purchased directly from the company's website and at a few retail locations, such as the Baker Creek Heirloom Seed Co. in Mansfield. The Dobkinses also travel to several garden shows during the year. Every tool comes with a lifetime guarantee.

"It's the best guarantee you'll never need," jokes Will, who says that of the nearly 8,000 tools he's sold in the past six years, only two have ever been returned. "Of course, you have to admit to what you did to it first. At the end of the day, they're for planting flowers, not for breaking beads on truck tires or stuff like that."

In addition to his standard tool inventory, which he's constantly expanding, Will offers tool repair and restoration services. He also takes custom orders. "People will bring me a hoe and say, 'This was my grandpa's hoe. Can you make one just like it?'" he says. "I've intentionally made brand-new tools with a hundred years of wear on them because that's how they want them."

More recently, Will has started offering blacksmithing tools, including hammers and tongs.

"Making the hammers is a fun change of pace," he says. "I love forging and hitting hot steel. The garden tools are about 50 percent forge time. The hammers are about 90 percent."

Now with two children — Samantha, 6, and Aengus, 4 — the Dobkinses are grateful to have found a unique niche that allows them to make their home deep in the Ozarks while still earning a living.

"Every day, I have a chance to be better at what I do than I was the day before. No matter how good you get at this, there's always more to learn," Will says. "When I'm done at the end of the day, there's something new and tangible that didn't exist until I made it. I really love that."

For more information about Homestead Iron's hand-forged garden tools, visit www.homesteadiron.com or call 417-543-5182.

BEST MANAGEMENT PRACTICES FOR SOYBEAN PLANTED AS COVER CROPS

By William J. Wiebold
University of Missouri Extension

Cover crops have many benefits including protecting soil surfaces from wind and water erosion, weed suppression, and improving soil health. This year many Missouri acres intended to be planted to corn and soybean were either flooded or too wet to be planted in a timely manner. Leaving these fields fallow without beneficial plants can lead to increased soil erosion, heavy weed growth that adds to the weed seed-bank, and detrimental effects on the soil microbiome. These effects may influence the field well after this season.

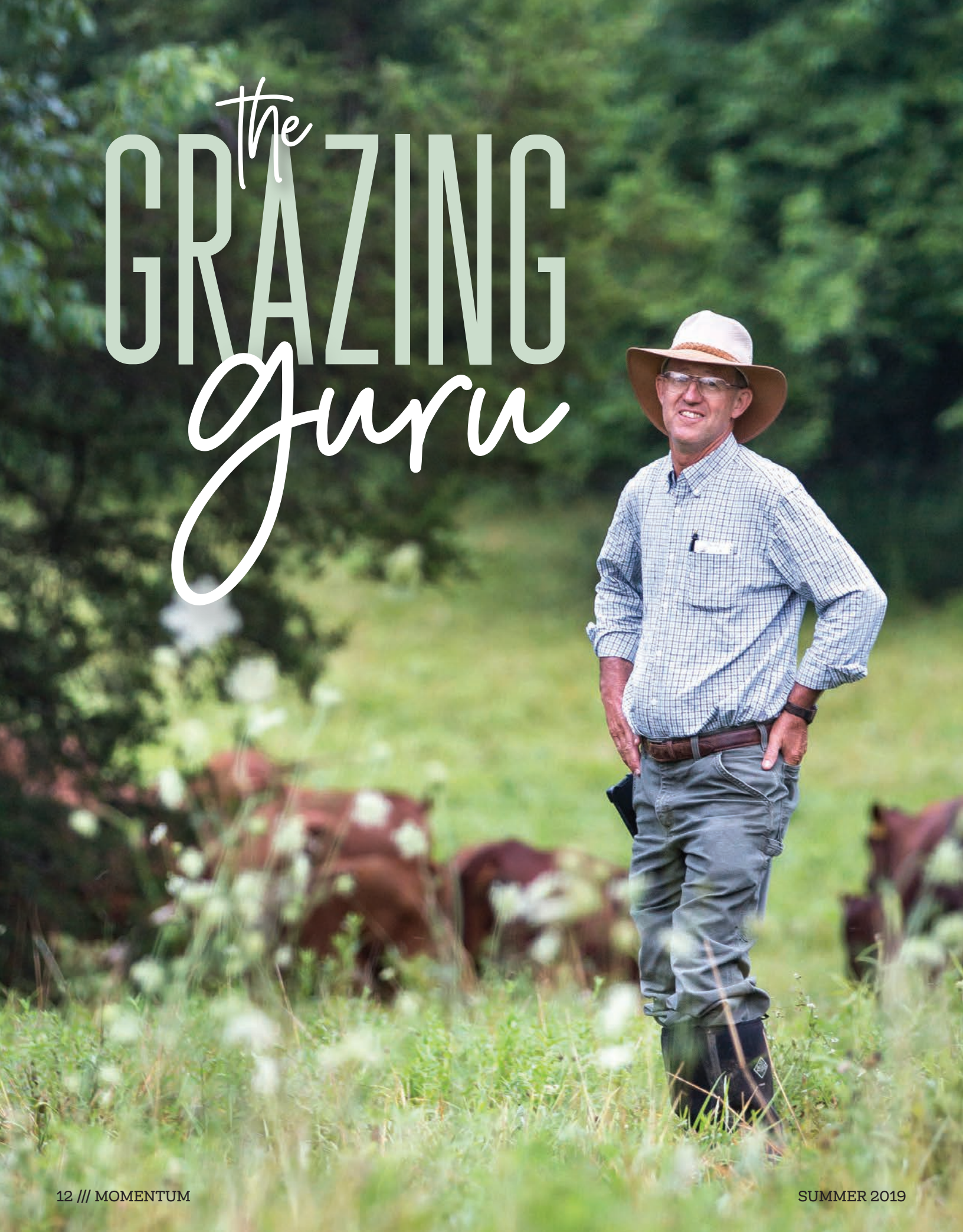
Planting a cover crop after flood waters recede and/or as deadlines are met for prevented planting is an appropriate consideration. Please read the latest Risk Management Agency (RMA) Fact Sheet (available at https://www.rma.usda.gov) addressing prevented-planting insurance provisions. It is critical that producers contemplating planting any species of cover crop obtain permission from their crop insurance agent and follow RMA guidelines. Do not put prevented-planting insurance benefits at risk by performing an unapproved action. In a year like 2019, with highly unusual weather affecting crop management, it is important to check with regulating agencies often because revised provisions are possible.

Cover crop management and crop choice for summer differ from choices for fall-planted cover crops. The heat in summer dictates that warm season crops be used. Cool season crops that are typically used for cover crops planted in fall will not grow successfully during hot and humid months. A warm season crop not usually considered for cover crop use is soybean. Soybean is an excellent choice. It is a warm season crop that grows quickly. Seed and planting equipment are available. And, soybean is a legume and fixes nitrogen. Again, please check with your insurance agent and RMA for appropriate cover crop selection.

Farmers are familiar with soybean management, but management as a cover crop may differ somewhat. For best results as a cover crop, consider these soybean management practices.

- Broadcast seeding, including by airplane, is an acceptable practice for cover crops and can be successfully accomplished with summer annuals such as soybean. But the soil surface must remain wet during the entire germination process. At a minimum, germination will require five days. Seeding rates may need to be increased if broadcast planting is used. Planting with a row unit or drill will increase chances for successful establishment, but broadcast planting is usually faster.
- Plant varieties that are available with acceptable cost. Do not worry about maturity group or biotech trait. Remember that most patented seed agreements prevent the use of grain for planting purposes. Check with your seed dealer.
- For a cover crop to be successful, it must develop full canopy closure quickly. Row width should be as narrow as possible with available planters. Rows 15 inches apart are preferred over 30-inch rows. Using a drill with row spacing less than 10 inches for soybean will increase canopy closure by a few days. However, if the only equipment available is a planter with 30-inch row spacing, it is an acceptable management practice.
- Seeding rate should be selected to best balance seed expense with successful soil coverage. Choose a seeding rate between 60,000 and 100,000 seeds per acre. More seeds may seem advantageous for canopy closure, but the difference is too small to balance increased cost.
- Pesticides such as fungicides or insecticides either as seed treatments or foliar applied are not required for soybean use as cover crops. There is minimal risk of seedling diseases with untreated soybean seeds.
- Planting into a clean field and scouting for weeds after emergence are critical. One reason to plant cover crops on flooded and prevented-planting acres is weed suppression. Apply a post-emergence herbicide if weed growth becomes excessive.

the GRAZING Guru



RAISING GRASS-FED BEEF ON PERENNIAL PASTURES

By Adam Buckallew • Photos by Casey Buckman

Rip, rip, rip. The sound fills the summer morning air as red cattle indulgently chomp through a lush pasture on rolling verdant hills ringed with timber. Moving nonchalantly through the herd, rancher Greg Judy sports a broad grin.

"That's music to a grazier's ear," Judy says. "Every time I hear that, I'm thinking cha-ching, cha-ching, cha-ching. That's the sound of cows that are putting on weight and generating my profits."

The herd of 340 South Poll cattle is making quick work of the paddock of grass they had been turned out to the previous night. The animals are all too happy to continue chowing down on forage, but Judy has no intentions of letting the cattle get too content in their surroundings. Soon, the full herd will be moved to a neighboring paddock set up with temporary electrical fencing where a fresh bounty of grass awaits. And they will move again before the day is done.

The twice-daily cattle rotation is standard practice at Green Pastures Farm in Rucker, Mo., which sits in the far northwest corner of Boone County. Here the herd is sustained entirely on perennial meadows that have allowed Judy to double his stocking rate and drastically reduce winter hay feeding. Judy, who farms with his wife, Jan, adheres to a holistic grazing plan which has revitalized his pastures and provided "a huge leverage tool" that has enabled him to expand his operation.

ROUGH START

When Judy began ranching in the early 1990s, his enthusiasm for agriculture was nearly dashed by a bleak financial situation. In 1996, he was forced to liquidate his cattle herd to manage his debt, and by the end of the following year, he was on the verge of filing bankruptcy.

"We were following the same conventional cattle and grazing methods most people in the Midwest practice and it wasn't working for us," he recalls. "We were going broke."

While searching for a way to save his family farm, he came across an article by Allan Nation, former editor of Stockman Grass Farmer, that stated, "Your sole purpose should be not to own the land, but to make a living from the land."

Nation's words were a revelation to Judy and spurred him to begin searching for idle pastureland available for lease in his area. He obtained his first lease in 1999 and began custom-grazing cattle. By focusing on leasing rather than owning land, Judy's grazing business grew from 40 stockers to 1,100 head.

"I was getting paid to run other people's cattle on someone else's land, and all the while I was saving up a nest egg I could put toward buying my own herd," Judy says.

The strategy quickly began to pay dividends, and by 2002, Judy was debt-free. The next year, he bought 22 South Poll cow-calf pairs that would go on to form the foundation of his present-day herd. Now that he has his own herd, Judy no longer offers custom-grazing services, but he credits the practice with getting his farm finances back on track.

SOIL RESTORATION

The pastoral landscape where Judy's cows graze is well-kept and almost park-like in appearance. But it's taken some rehabilitation to get to this point.

When Judy took control of his newly leased properties, he knew he was dealing with land that had been overhayed to the point of exhaustion. The pastures were covered in broomsedge, a low-quality forage ranchers sometimes call poverty grass because it is often a sign of poor soil fertility.

"We were taking the farms no one else wanted," he says. "The soil was bankrupt, the fields were covered in brush, and there was no fence or water. It took some work to get them into shape, but we were willing to do the work for an economical lease."

Once he had taken care of the fence and water concerns, Judy's priority turned to rebuilding the soil. He began by rotating his cattle over the long-neglected land to distribute nutrient rich manure and urine onto the dirt. When the herd departed for a new section of pasture, the trampled grass and cow patties left behind became fertilizer for future growth. The process has slowly recharged organic matter in the soil. Much of the land Judy's cattle graze only had 0.5 percent organic matter when he took control of it.

"Now, we're up to 5 percent, and you can see the difference," he says. "The land soaks up rainwater like a sponge, and our pastures spring back faster after grazing with fresh regrowth."

The steady traffic of cloven hooves combined with all-natural fertilization from the cattle has not only helped revive the soil, but also restored long-dormant native grasses like big bluestem, Indiangrass, switchgrass and eastern gamagrass that once ruled the prairie. The native plants add welcome diversity and warm-weather resilience to the fescue, orchardgrass, Timothy-grass, and redtop grass that make up the base feed source in Judy's pastures.

NATURAL INSPIRATION

Judy is unafraid to try new things on his farm. Whether it's installing 450 tree swallow houses on the perimeter of his fields to control flies, or the decision to stock his cattle at ultra-high densities, he's willing to endure his neighbors' bewildered stares if it means boosting his profitability.

Running all 340 of his cows, calves and steers in one large herd on smaller-than-usual rotational paddocks runs contrary to the traditional management strategies of most Missouri cattlemen, but Judy says the practice has been instrumental in the success of his low-input cattle enterprise.

"We try to mimic nature and stay out of her way as much as possible," he says. "We used to run three separate herds, but when we combined them, we got more animal impact and grass trampling, which has helped us build pastures capable of sustaining yearlong cattle grazing without having to put down any purchased seed or fertilizer."

By moving his cattle in one large mob two times a day, Judy seeks to emulate the effect herds of buffalo, elk and other wild ruminants once had on the Great Plains's bygone prairies. The concept is to keep the

animals roaming in tight bunches as they would have historically behaved to protect themselves from predation.

"It's all about grazing in the right place at the right time to support regenerative soil and pasture growth," Judy says.

To ensure the mob doesn't overgraze a pasture, Judy moves the herd every morning and evening. He only wants his cattle eating the top third of the plant, which holds the most energy and is most palatable.

"By removing no more than the top third, we're getting a quicker grazing turnaround," Judy says. "When we see the tips of the grass begin to look like sharpened pencils, we know the grass has had adequate recovery time and is ready to be grazed again."

It typically only takes Judy about 30 minutes to an hour to move the herd from one enclosure to the next. When Judy pulls up on his four-wheeler, the cows know to expect fresh forage.

CHOICE BREED

Throughout his more than 20 years of grazing experience, Judy has worked a variety of cattle and claims nothing performs better on a grass-fed diet in Missouri's muggy summer weather than a South Poll. The breed is a four-way composite made up of Red Angus, Hereford, Barzona and Senepol genetics.

Red-hided South Polls are acclaimed by a growing number of graziers like Judy who prize the breed's tolerance of heat and humidity, gentle nature, moderate frame and ability to excel on grassy pastures.

"We like a smaller, red cow with short, slick hair that on average weighs about 1,000 pounds," Judy says. "The smaller cows won't compact the soil in our pastures as badly as a 1,500-pound cow would when it rains. Three 1,000-pound cows will eat the same amount of forage as two 1,500-pound cows. And we get an extra calf to sell from the same amount of forage consumed."

Judy sells South Poll seedstock to other cattlemen, and his grass-fed steers are typically finished after 24 months and are sold whole, in halves or by quarters. He's dabbled in selling meat by the cut but says it's too labor-intensive for his taste.

GRASS POWER

Judy's mastery of the ways of raising grass-fed beef on perennial pastures has allowed him to grow the number of farms under his control to 16, four of which he owns outright. His success in controlling costs and economically maximizing his beef production made it possible for him to quit his off-farm job in 2009, one of the happiest days of his life.

As word of Judy's methods and triumphs have spread, people from across the country have flocked to his farm to hear his story and share in his advice. He hosted his 14th annual grazing school on his farm this spring with 115 participants from 32 states.

"People are interested in learning how our low-cost approach to grazing can help them generate a profit and stay in business," Judy says. "It all comes down to harnessing the power of perennial grass."

As Judy gazes across his pasture at his fattening herd, he smiles in satisfaction. There's nowhere he or his cattle would rather be.

Fair Season

County and state fairs, the ephemeral experiences that bring scores of people together for parades, livestock shows, carnivals, pageants and more, are a highlight of the summer for many rural residents. The draw of blue-ribbon competitions, Tilt-a-Whirl rides, funnel cakes and rodeos entices fairgoers out for fun and camaraderie despite the scorching heat. Though the brevity of the fairs is bittersweet, the way they unite communities makes it all worthwhile.


RAIL
ROAD

MELON Milestone

Story & photos by Jason Jenkins

BEGGS FAMILY CELEBRATES 125 SEASONS OF RAISING WATERMELONS

Whether seeded or seedless, weighing 3 pounds or 30, few foods are as synonymous with summer as the venerable watermelon. The sweet, juicy, melt-in-your-mouth fruit is the ultimate accompaniment to hot dogs, hamburgers and corn on the cob at family picnics and backyard barbecues alike.

For 125 years in the Missouri Bootheel, one family's name has been just as synonymous with the fruit. The Beggs family watermelon tradition began when William Arthur Beggs planted his first crop in Blodgett, Mo., in 1895, and it continues today with Donnie and Sheila Beggs, the family's fourth generation of watermelon producers.

"Back in those days, there apparently were thousands of acres of watermelons raised here and shipped out by rail from Blodgett," Donnie says. "In 1904 at the World's Fair in St. Louis, they even declared Blodgett to be the 'Watermelon Capital of the World.'"

Historical accounts from the early 20th century echo this designation.

"Blodgett is situated in the midst of fine farming country and enjoys the distinction of shipping more watermelons than any other station in the world," reads a passage from History of Southeast Missouri, published in 1912. "During the season of 1911, there were shipped 600 cars of this fruit."

While other cities now lay claim to the title of "watermelon capital," Beggs Melon Co. is doing its part to keep Blodgett on the map. In 2018, the farm produced 125 semitrailer loads of watermelon — about 5 million pounds — grown on only 74 acres.

"This year, we have roughly 155 acres in melons," says Donnie, adding that 26 acres are devoted to Starbrite, a seeded watermelon, while the remaining acreage is planted to two seedless varieties, Majestic and Captivation. "We're not doing any corn or beans this year, just focusing on my melons and our fall agritourism season."

FARMING FRUIT

Watermelon production has changed greatly since William Arthur Beggs's day; however, preparing for the season still begins early each spring. Beggs Melon Co. crews work the farm's sandy loam fields, preparing rows and applying pre-emergent herbicide to control weeds. Rather than directly planting seed, Donnie says the family opts to transplant seedlings that begin life in a greenhouse out of state.

"The transplants help get you going because they're already about 30 days old on average when they get to me," he says. "We never plant anything until after Easter. This year, we planted our first melons around April 20. We planted another batch about three weeks later and then our last batch two weeks after that. It spreads out our harvest."

Donnie employs a water-wheel transplanter, pulled behind a tractor, to speed the task of getting watermelon seedlings in the fields. A planting crew rides on the implement, which has a large wheel filled with water. As the wheel turns, it makes evenly spaced openings in the ground that are immediately filled with water.

"As soon as the wheel punches that hole and fills it with water, we put the plant in the hole," Donnie says. "As the water starts to draw down, it just kind of creates a suction that pulls the plant into the hole. It only takes a second and it's planted."

Spacing for the watermelons in the row is determined by the variety. For seeded watermelons, the young transplants are placed evenly every 38 inches. Seedless varieties also are placed every 38 inches with a special plant called a pollenizer included halfway between every third and fourth fruit-bearing plant.

"By itself, a seedless melon can't reproduce because it's sterile. It needs male pollen from another source," Donnie explains. "We used to use our seeded melons to pollenize the seedless, but we went to pollenizers to

make harvest easier. We've really pushed our yields up the last couple of years by tweaking our systems."

The actual task of pollinating falls to honeybees and bumblebees that move the pollen from plant to plant as they gather nectar. Donnie says that they rent honeybee hives but purchase bumblebees.

"The bumblebees stay around for about six to eight weeks, and that's kind of their life cycle. Seems like since we started with them, we've had really good yields," he says. "The folks we rent the honeybees from come set the hives when the melons start to flower, then come get them and collect the honey at the end."

As the watermelons mature, they begin setting fruit from the center of the plant, continuing down the vine as the season progresses. The first melons to develop are called the crown set, and these are typically the largest and highest-quality fruit the plant will produce, Donnie says. The staggered planting of the crop ensures that not all of these melons are ripe simultaneously.

"Your crowns and your first cutting are about the same, but once you get to that fifth or sixth cutting, the melons aren't as big. The rinds are thinner," he says. "If you get that far, that plant has already done so much. It's running out of steam."

Crews of migrant workers walk the fields every seven to 10 days during the season and harvest the ripe melons. The fruit is brought to the farm's loading facility where it is sorted by size and placed in bins for delivery to various wholesale customers across the eastern United States. Local peddlers also purchase melons to resell.

"We're still kind of our own broker," Donnie adds. "We make every decision on every melon that's sold."

As with any farming operation, challenges abound. While yields have roughly tripled since Donnie was a kid, that greater volume isn't without additional expense. Whereas they once spent about $1 per thousand seeds, Donnie now pays as much as $250 per thousand for today's highest yielding seedless varieties. Add greenhouse, transportation and planting costs, and he estimates it costs $600 to $700 per acre to plant watermelons.

TOP: Donnie Beggs proudly carries on his family's legacy of watermelon farming, which marked its 125th consecutive season of raising the fruit crop in 2019. ABOVE: Working on a picking crew requires speed, strength and concentration, as workers toss the watermelons bucket brigade style into the wagon.

TOP: The Beggs family, from left, Bryce, Sheila, Donnie, Shelby and Taylor. LEFT: Because seedless watermelons are sterile, watermelon farmers plant pollenizer melons to provide the necessary male pollen for fertilization. The pollenizers produce small, inedible watermelons.

One aspect of melon farming that hasn't changed is the manual labor required.

"Except for some of the spraying, just about everything is manual," Donnie says. "You plant them by hand, you weed them by hand, you harvest them by hand."

And unlike row-crop farming, where bumper crops and carryover stocks can influence grain prices for years, the watermelon market is much more dynamic. Because he's dealing in a perishable crop, Donnie says the market is constantly changing and adapting to supply and demand, which he loves.

"Every two weeks, it's a different ballgame," he says. "What's ripe today is garbage in two weeks. So, if there's a glut and prices fall, it only lasts a couple weeks. Hopefully, that's when our melons get ripe. Then, we can sell at a decent price and make doing all this worth our while."

While Beggs Melon Co. has embraced the cultivation of seedless watermelons, don't expect to see miniature "personal" melons on the farm anytime soon.

"That's not a watermelon," Donnie says jokingly about the latest consumer trend. "Heck, an 11-pound watermelon ain't a watermelon to me. Give me one of my big seeded melons."

At 53 years old, Donnie isn't ready to retire just yet. However, the next generation — Taylor, 26; Shelby, 22; and Bryce, 20 — waits in the wings. When the baton is eventually passed, you'll still find Donnie around, watching his family legacy continue under the cool of a big shade tree — a healthy slice of watermelon in one hand and a salt shaker in the other.

"There's just nothing better than that," he says.

Beggs Family Farm, located 6 miles north of Sikeston, opens for its 2019 agritourism season the last weekend in September. To learn more, call 573-471-3879 or visit www.beggsfamilyfarm.com.

MAINTENANCE CRUCIAL TO PREVENTING COMBINE FIRES

By Jessica Merzdorf
Purdue Extension

Combine fires can be devastating, often resulting in the total loss of a vehicle and causing hundreds of thousands of dollars' worth of property damage, says Purdue University farm safety expert Bill Field. *(Photos courtesy of Andrew Winger/Winger Farms)*

Farmers should regularly inspect their combines' machinery, fuel lines and electrical systems prior to and during harvest season to prevent fires.

Harvest season brings a unique combination of risk factors that increases the risk of combine fires, says Bill Field, professor of agricultural and biological engineering at Purdue University. Dust kicked up during field operations and dry plant material from crops can clog or wrap around machinery, causing it to overheat. Other common hazards are electrical malfunctions, sparks from hitting rocks, loose or slipping belts, and leaks in fuel or hydraulic lines.

Worn bearings or seals and blocked exhaust systems can cause overheating and sparks. Inspecting equipment at the end of the day can help prevent overheated components from catching fire during the night, Field says, and a hand-held thermal camera can help detect hot areas before they ignite.

Some components of the combine's electrical systems are also at higher risk of overheating, particularly parts like starter motors and heating and cooling systems that draw a heavy electrical load.

"Fuses that blow regularly should be considered an important warning sign that a circuit is overheating somewhere," Field says.

"Every fire involves three elements: an ignition source, fuel and oxygen. Removing one or more of these elements will prevent fire, so as you examine the combine, other agricultural machinery or a building, consider the potential for each element and where they are likely to come together to form a fire."

In case a fire does start, farmers should always have a cellphone or two-way radio with them in the cab. Also, combines and other large units should have at least two, 10-pound, type-ABC fire extinguishers installed, Field recommends. These extinguishers should be inspected regularly to make sure the lock pin is intact, tamper seals are unbroken and the tank is still full.

A second line of defense is to have a tractor and disc on standby to create a firebreak around the combine, Field adds. This can help keep the flames from spreading across the field or to neighboring properties.

Since insulated cabs may prevent operators from noticing smoke or flames until it is too late, combine fires can start without warning and quickly grow out of control, Field says.

"EVEN SMALL LEAKS IN A FUEL OR HYDRAULIC SYSTEM CAN CAUSE A SMALL FIRE TO BECOME A LARGE ONE IN SECONDS." — BILL FIELD

"Even small leaks in a fuel or hydraulic system can cause a small fire to become a large one in seconds," Field says. "For example, a leak causing diesel fuel to be sprayed into the engine compartment of a tractor or combine can cause the compartment temperature to go from a normal operating temperature to over 1,000 degrees Fahrenheit in seconds. Fires of that intensity are almost impossible to extinguish before the machine is destroyed."

In addition to damaging or destroying the combine, other consequences may include crop loss, field fires spreading to adjoining properties, and operator injury or death.

"Ultimately, the only good fire is a contained one that keeps us warm," Field says. "Keeping it that way in the field should be part of every farmer's management plan this fall."

Ag Educators Series

SHARING AG EXPERIENCES

For Gary Morris, the rewards of being an agricultural educator are all about the connections he forges with his students. Whether it is discussing how to balance a feed ration in an animal science class, working together to grow plants in the greenhouse, or training FFA members for competition, the Tipton, Mo., teacher appreciates the opportunity to interact with his students and better their agricultural understanding.

"Seeing that ah-ha moment, when what you are teaching finally clicks for a student, is a cool experience," says Morris, who grew up on a cattle farm in Olean, Mo.

Morris was inspired to pursue a career as an ag instructor by his mentors, Willard Haley and Matt Biddle, two former, long-time ag teachers and FFA advisors at Eldon High School in Eldon, Mo.

"Being around them and seeing the way they built a passion for agriculture with their students had a big influence in my life," Morris says. "From high school on, I knew I wanted to work in agricultural education."

Following his graduation from Missouri State University in 2000, Morris went to work at Tipton High School. As part of his teaching duties, Morris became an advisor to the school's FFA chapter that had 60 members and was in need of rejuvenation. Morris was able to grow interest in the school's agriculture program to the point that a second ag educator, Duane Melton, was hired in 2008, and the two men now serve as advisors to an FFA chapter that consistently has a roster of at least 150 members in recent years.

"Before Mr. Morris came to Tipton, the ag program was suffering tremendously," says Rhonda Brauer, whose son, Dale, was an FFA member at Tipton High. "He made a complete turnaround of it and has established a wonderful program. My son was fortunate to have Mr. Morris and Mr. Melton not only as educators, but also as mentors for several years."

Building students' leadership skills and preparing them to compete and succeed in FFA is one of Morris's favorite parts of his job. Last

fall, the school's parliamentary procedure team took first place at the state FFA competition and got a chance to compete at the National FFA Convention in Indianapolis, Ind.

"That was an experience those kids will never forget and the same is true for me," Morris says. "It's gratifying to see your students compete on the national stage and represent themselves and their school so well.

Beyond his work with Tipton students, Morris has made contributions to agricultural education in Missouri by leading teaching workshops with his peers. This summer he worked with fellow educators on ways to improve instruction in ag science classes.

"We discussed different ways to present the information we want the kids to learn, how to teach it in an enjoyable manner and activities that can help to reinforce our lessons," Morris says.

Rachel Hudson, who teaches agriculture classes at Clopton High School in Clarksville, Mo., has worked with Morris and says he has been "a positive influence" on the beginning of her teaching career.

"Gary is willing to offer a helping hand to anyone who wants to learn," Hudson says. "He's made a difference for many young students and agricultural educators in the state of Missouri."

As he prepares for the upcoming school year, Morris remains committed to sharing his passion for agriculture with a fresh crop of students.

"Agriculture is everything," he says. "It's the source of our food supply, our economy and our standard of living. As more and more kids grow up without exposure to farming, we need to help them understand just how vital ag is to our well-being."

Agriculture teachers are vital to developing their students' understanding and appreciation for the agricultural industry. In recognition of their important role, MFA Oil is profiling the amazing work ag teachers do to prepare the next generation of leaders in agriculture. If you know of an outstanding ag teacher, please share their name and let us know why they deserve to be featured in Momentum magazine for the work they do on behalf of their students and communities.

Nominations should be sent to editor@mfaoil.com or mailed to:
Adam Buckallew
MFA Oil Company
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INTRODUCING WORK HORSE™ LUBRICANTS

Since its founding in 1929, MFA Oil has always taken pride in providing a reliable supply of quality petroleum products to meet its members' needs. The company has sold a variety of premium fuels and oils in its 90-year history, and that legacy will continue with a new line of lubricants. This summer, MFA Oil is launching its new Work Horse™ lubricant brand.

All existing MFA Oil heavy duty lubricants are being rebranded to Work Horse, and the lineup includes two new products: X-Tra Guard™ tractor fluid, which will replace GP Hydraulic Fluid, and Heavy Duty Grease with 5% Moly.

As a farmer-owned cooperative, we understand that your equipment and its dependability are vital to running your operation successfully. That's why MFA Oil products have always met or exceeded performance standards set by original equipment manufacturers (OEMs).

Surpassing the industry's highest performance levels, X-Tra Guard is formulated to stand up to severe mechanical and thermal stress. X-Tra Guard provides outstanding lubricant stability under extreme temperatures, advanced wear protection to reduce unplanned downtime and minimize costly repairs, and exceptional oxidation control to prevent deposits and other forms of build-up from compromising equipment performance.

When compared to GP Hydraulic Fluid, which MFA Oil is retiring, X-Tra Guard improves wear protection by 51 percent. It contains advanced additives and the latest lubricant technology to deliver superior results and the protection you demand by reducing metal-to-metal contact and prolonging the life of your equipment's transmissions, final drives, wet brakes and hydraulic systems.

Backed by hundreds of hours of testing in real-world conditions in a wide range of both new and old equipment, X-Tra Guard is proven as a reliable choice for maintaining optimum performance in your equipment. It meets or exceeds the needs of new equipment with modern designs, while meeting the requirements of older tractors, including those calling for J20-C performance.

The Heavy Duty Grease with 5% Moly is outstanding for reducing wear and tear caused by high friction. The moly possesses a high melting point which makes the heavy-duty grease ideal for use in large farming and construction equipment.

Work Horse lubricants are now available in bulk supply, and packaged products will appear on shelves at participating MFA Agri-Services Centers and other retailers later this summer. For more information on the products and rebranding, contact your MFA representative or visit us at www.mfaoil.com.

— BY MEGAN HILL

X-TRA GUARD FEATURES & BENEFITS:

Proven to Perform
Extensively tested in real-world conditions and in a wide range of both new and old equipment.

Superior Brake Protection
Controls brake chatter noise while reducing the damage from repeated vibration to improve operator safety and comfort.

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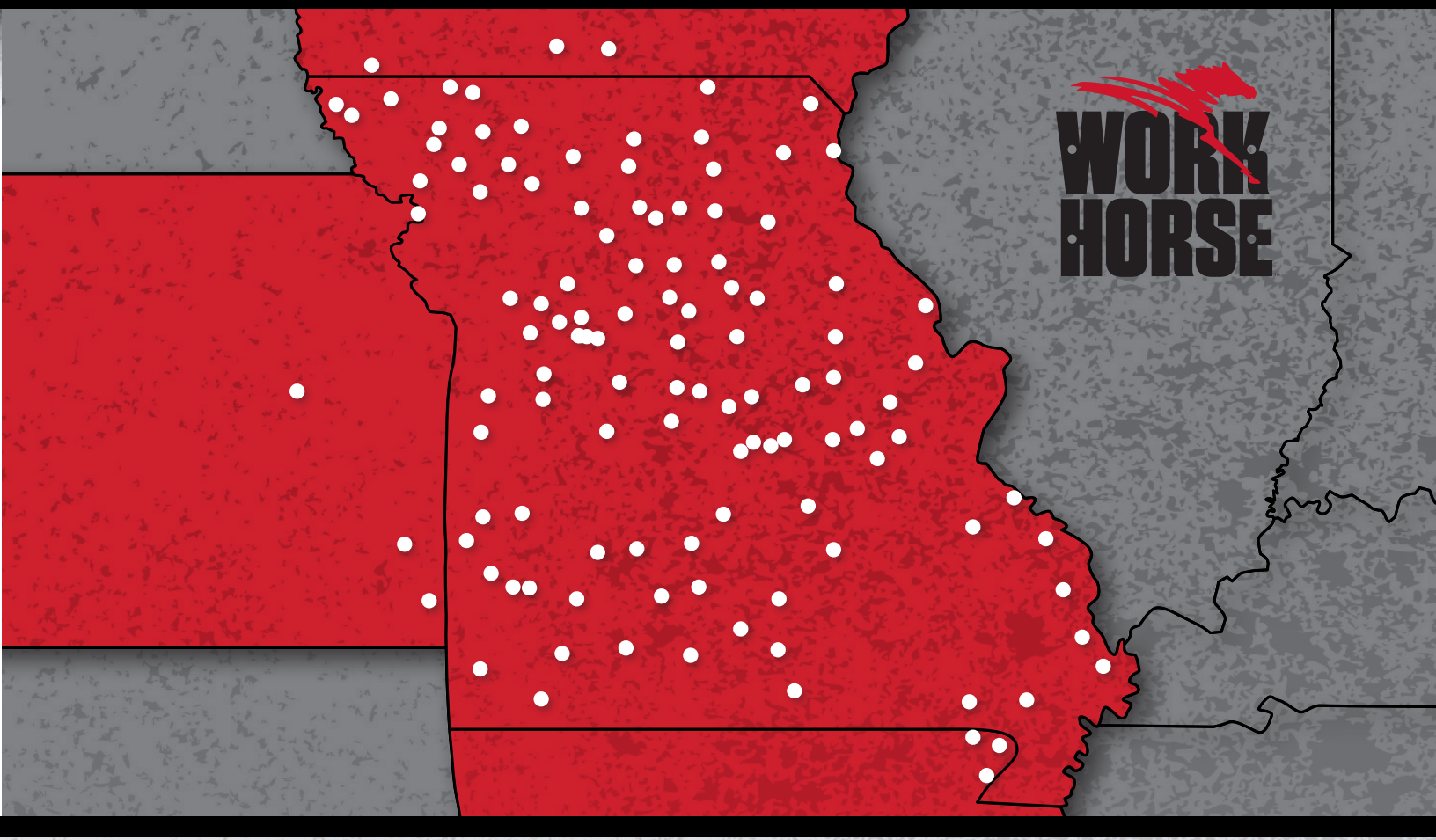
Improved Cleanliness
Keeps tractor parts clean from debris build-up to ensure machinery performance is not compromised.

Transmission Efficiency
Balances fluid friction to ensure smooth operation, from full speed to inching, is maintained and reduces power loss.



Work Horse lubricants will be available at all MFA Oil bulk fuel locations, as well as these retailers:

MISSOURI

Adrain – West Central Ag
Albany – MFA Agri Services
Alma – MFA Agri Services
Argyle – Farmers Elevator
Ash Grove – MFA Agri Services
Aurora – MFA Coop Association
Ava – MFA Agri Services
Benton – MFA Agri Services
Bethany – MFA Agri Services
Bolivar – Bolivar Farmers Exchange
Boonville – MFA Agri Services
Bronaugh – MFA Agri Services
Brookfield – MFA Agri Services
Browning – MFA Agri Services
Brunswick – Agri Services
Buffalo – Dallas County Farmers Exchange
Burlington Junction – MFA Agri Services
California – MFA Agri Services
Canton – MFA Agri Services
Cassville – MFA Agri Service
Centerview – West Central Ag
Centralia – MFA Agri Services
Chamois – MFA Exchange
Charleston – MFA Agri Services
Chilhowee – West Central Ag
Chillicothe – MFA Agri Services
Clark – MFA Agri Services
Columbia – MFA Agri Services
Concept Junction – MFA Agri Services
Concordia – Mid MO MFA
El Dorado Springs – MFA Agri Services
Elsberry – MFA Agri Services
Emma – Mid MO MFA - Enviro Ag Services
Fairfax – AgChoice - Fairfax
Farmington – MFA Agri Services
Fayette – MFA Agri Services
Freeburg – MFA Coop Association
Gallatin – MFA Agri Services
Gerald – MFA Agri Services
Glasgow – MFA Agri Services
Golden City – Produce Exchange 299
Grant City – MFA Agri Services
Grovespring – Farmers Prod Exchange
Guilford – MFA Agri Services
Hale – MFA Agri Services
Harrisonville – West Central Ag
Higginsville – MFA Agri Services
Houston – MFA Agri Services
Jackson – MFA Agri Services
Jefferson City – MFA Agri Services
Kahoka – MFA Agri Services
King City – MFA Agri Services
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La Belle – MFA Agri Services
La Plata – MFA Agri Services
Lamar – MFA Agri Services
Lancaster – MFA Agri Services
Laredo – MFA Agri Services
Lebanon – Farmers Producers Exchange 139
Lexington – MFA Agri Services
Lincoln – Producers Exchange 84
Lockwood – Farmers Exchange
Lohman – Producers Exchange
Macon – MFA Agri Services
Marceline – MFA Agri Services
Marshall – Central MO Agri Services LLC
Marshfield – MFA Agri Services
Maryville – MFA Agri Services
Maysville – MFA Agri Services
Meta – MFA Exchange
Milan – MFA Agri Services
Moberly – MFA Agri Services
Montgomery City – MFA Agri Services
Mountain Grove – MFA Agri Services
Neosho – MFA Agri Services
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Odessa – MFA Agri Services
Orrick – MFA Agri Services
Owensville – MFA Agri Services
Ozark – MFA Agri Services
Pattonsburg – MFA Agri Services
Perryville – MFA Agri Services
Poplar Bluff – MFA Agri Services Midsouth
Rhineland – Cooperative Association 130
Richland – Producers Exchange
Risco – MFA Agri Services
Rock Port – Atchison County AgChoice
Rolla – Rolla Farmers Exchange
Saint Clair – MFA Agri Services
Saint Elizabeth – MFA Coop
Saint Joseph – MFA Agri Services
Salem – MFA Coop Association
Salisbury – MFA Agri Services
Savannah – MFA Agri Services
Sedalia – MFA Agri Services
Shelbina – MFA Agri Services
Sheridan – MFA Agri Services
Ste Genevieve – MFA Agri Services
Sullivan – Farmers Coop
Sweet Springs – Mid MO MFA
Tipton – MFA Agri Services
Vandalia – MFA Agri Services
Versailles – MFA Agri Services
Walker – MFA Agri Services
Washington – Cooperative Association 2
Wentzville – MFA Agri Services
West Plains – MFA Agri Services
Willow Springs – MFA Agri Services

ARKANSAS

McDougal – MFA Agri Services Midsouth
Piggott – MFA Agri Services Midsouth
Rector – MFA Agri Services Midsouth

IOWA

Coin – AgChoice Company
Corydon – MFA Agri Services
Leon – MFA Agri Services
Lineville – MFA Agri Services

KANSAS

Hepler – AgChoice
Osage City – AgChoice
Weir – AgChoice

All-in on Agriculture

WHETHER IT'S RUNNING HIS 500-ACRE FARM OUTSIDE Alma, Mo., conducting business as a seedsman or volunteering his time in the service of various farmer-led organizations, agriculture is an ever-present aspect of David Lueck's life.

In late June, the Lafayette County farmer and MFA Oil delegate was busy cutting hay for his herd of cows and calves. Haymaking had been delayed by the frequent rains that have slowed farming progress across the Midwest, but David says he was fortunate to get all of his corn and soybeans planted.

When David is not busy tending to his row crops or cattle herd, he stays involved with a variety of agricultural pursuits. He has sold seed for the past 27 years, worked as a certified crop adviser for 20 years, and devoted a dozen years of service to the Missouri Soybean Merchandising Council (MSMC).

"Everything I do is focused on agriculture, and really that's true for my entire family," David says. "Agriculture is what we do."

An Ag Family

The Lueck Family has been farming in the Alma area for 80 years. The tradition began with David's grandfather, Norbert, and was carried on by his uncle, Vernon. David's father, Harold, has also been actively involved in the Lueck's farming operation since his retirement. David, who has been married for 40 years to his wife, Debbie, took up farming after attending the University of Missouri for two years. He got his start working land that, at the time, belonged to Debbie's parents.

"I was lucky to have a family connection to get into farming," David says. "Many young people who want to farm today are not given that kind of opportunity."

The Luecks have two grown sons. Brendon, a regional manager in the seed industry, lives with his family in Basehor, Kan. Justin, a grain broker with an international company in Kansas City, resides in Olathe, Kan., with his family. Debbie works for Mid-Missouri MFA Agri Services in Alma. David and Debbie enjoy spending time with their four grandchildren as much as possible.

Soybean Service

David was elected to the MSMC Board of Directors in 2005 and led the state's soybean checkoff as chairman from 2014 to 2016. He is proud of the research developments MSMC has funded.

"Missouri has invested a lot of checkoff money into growing opportunities and demand for our state's top cash crop," he says.

Breeding and seed development efforts are crucial to the soybean board's goal of "giving farmers new options to improve their profitability," David says.

Shortly after he reached his term limit on the MSMC board in 2017, David began serving on the American Soybean Association's World Initiative for Soy in Human Health board (WISHH), a market development program aimed at increasing the use of U.S. soy in worldwide diets to improve global health. David continues to serve on the WISHH board and has traveled to Cambodia, Ghana, Myanmar and Vietnam with various soybean delegations.

Biofuels Backer

David's all-in approach to agriculture extends to his finances. He is an investor in a local ethanol plant and two biodiesel facilities. He says biofuels may be more important to farmers now than when the state first ramped up alternative fuel production in the 2000s.

"The trade side of things doesn't look too promising at the moment, so we need all the domestic demand we can generate for our crops," David says.

He's encouraged by efforts like the Biodiesel Coalition of Missouri, which is working to build demand for biodiesel purchases in the state, and he appreciates MFA Oil's involvement in the group. The Environmental Protection Agency's decision to allow sales of E15 year-round is another positive sign in David's mind, and he hopes it will result in more demand for his corn.

While it's clear he could share more of how his life and vocation are so closely intertwined, David has more pressing matters to attend. There's chopped hay waiting for him in his fields, and it won't be baling itself.

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Planning for Upcoming Energy Needs

AS SUMMER BEGINS TO WIND down, there are a number of things I am closely watching that could sway the direction of the fuel and propane market. I would advise you to consider these factors in preparation for your energy needs for the fall and winter.

Deal or No Deal? - The ongoing trade war between the United States and China could greatly impact global demand for fuel. If the Trump Administration can negotiate a trade deal with China, I would expect bullish optimism for greater economic activity, more shipping and stronger overall demand in the energy sector. However, if the trade war drags on with little to no progress to show, the outlook for the global economy will likely worsen and we could see less demand and downward pressure on energy prices.

Rising Tensions with Iran - Geopolitical anxiety between Iran and world leaders is growing. In July, Iran said it had breached its 2015 nuclear deal with the United States, China, France, Russia, the United Kingdom, Germany and the rest of the European Union. When Iran originally pledged to limit its nuclear program, the aforementioned countries agreed to lift sanctions on Iranian oil exports, which provided a boost to the global oil market. The United States withdrew from the accord last year and re-imposed sanctions on oil and other parts of the Iranian economy. Iran has recently threatened to disrupt oil supplies in the Strait of Hormuz to put pressure on world powers to allow the country to sell its oil abroad. The market is always uneasy with any disruption to supplies, so further escalation of this situation could push prices higher.

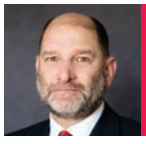
OPEC Keeps Cutting Production – The Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) and other allied major oil producers agreed on July 1 to extend production cuts through March 2020 in an effort to shore up prices. The supply cuts, which are being observed by OPEC's 14 members, Russia and nine other nonmember nations, were anticipated by the market. The energy alliance was put in place on a temporary basis in January 2017 to put a floor under low oil prices stemming from a supply glut that was created, at least in part, by increased U.S. shale oil output. I believe OPEC's efforts have been successful in stabilizing prices thanks in large part to Saudi Arabia's willingness to cut its production below the daily quota of 1.2 million barrels. We shall see how long Saudi Arabia is willing to do OPEC's heavy lifting.

Preparing for Fall and Winter

While you do not have a crystal ball to see how the global issues will play out and impact the energy markets, you do have the option to protect yourself with full tanks and budgeted, locked-in pricing.

Historically, ultra-low sulfur diesel prices move higher in the fall and peak in late October or early November. Spring flooding has certainly affected agricultural diesel demand in the Midwest and that is likely to continue this fall with so much unplanted acreage. If you expect to buy diesel fuel this fall, early August is a great time to take a look at a fixed-price contract running from September through November. This can provide some protection against any potential price spikes caused by geopolitical or weather-related disruptions. Or, you could simply opt to have your tank filled up at the current price to meet your upcoming needs.

From a propane perspective, this is also a good time to contract your winter propane needs. In seven out of the past 10 years, if you booked your propane through a contract with MFA Oil, you would have come out ahead of the game. Our region should begin the winter season with an adequate supply of propane, but as we all know, there is no predicting how Mother Nature will treat us. Your best bet is to get a head start on winter by contracting your propane now and arranging to have your tank filled before the cold arrives.



» Tim Danze
is the hedging manager for MFA Oil.

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Caring for Kids with Special Needs

THE KENNY ROGERS CHILDREN'S Center in Sikeston, Mo., which provides a wide array of developmental and therapeutic services to children with special needs, has a new tool to design and create intricate prosthetics. In December 2018, the MFA Oil Foundation presented a $2,000 grant to the center to aid in the purchase of a 3D printer capable of producing custom-fit orthotics.

Brandy Dallas, clinical coordinator and physical therapist at the Kenny Rogers Children's Center, says the 3D printer will provide much-needed prosthetics while saving families money.

"There are endless possibilities of prosthetics we can print with this machine," says Dallas. "The best part is that we can make them for only a few dollars versus the thousands of dollars that the insurance companies would charge."

According to Dallas, the 3D printer can use precision scanning technology to create orthotics that fit children better than those created by an actual orthotist. Another benefit of having the 3D printer at the facility is the ability to more quickly create orthotics. Instead of waiting three to four weeks to receive them from the orthotist, children at the center can be fitted for their various orthotics and receive them in one to two days.

Dallas says the support of organizations like the MFA Oil Foundation is what allows the center to improve the quality of life for children dealing with maladies like down syndrome, spina bifida, muscular dystrophy, autism and more.

"We have received previous grants from MFA Oil, and every dollar truly goes to upholding our mission," says Dallas. "Due to the generosity of companies like MFA Oil, we can continue to offer advanced treatment opportunities to special needs children at little or no cost to their families."

For more information on the center's services or to make a donation, visit www.kennyrogerscenter.org.

— BY MEGAN HILL

The MFA Oil Foundation provides cash grants to support nonprofit organizations that are working to improve communities where MFA Oil has a significant concentration of members and employees. In July the foundation approved more than $27,650 in grants to 15 different organizations.

American Legion Argonne Post #360 — Callao, Mo.

Carousel Productions — Macon, Mo.

Concordia Police Department — Concordia, Mo.

Cosby-Helena Fire Protection District — Cosby, Mo.

Dade County First Responders — Greenfield, Mo.

Dawn Fire Fighters Association — Dawn, Mo.

Family Life Community Outreach — Moberly, Mo.

Forget Me Not Senior Citizens, Inc. — New London, Mo.

Hamilton R-2 School — Hamilton, Mo.

Helping Hands Outreach Center — Owensville, Mo.

Jamesport Fire and Rescue Department — Jamesport, Mo.

North Shelby TRACTION Team — Shelbyville, Mo.

Ozarks Family YMCA – Seymour Branch — Seymour, Mo.

Polk County Christian Social Ministries — Bolivar, Mo.

The Golden Age Club — Ste. Genevieve, Mo.

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» News Briefs

MFA Oil presented Operation Homefront with a check for $140,000 at its fifth annual charity golf scramble and concert on June 3.

MFA Oil Raises $140,000 for Military Families

The Fifth Annual MFA Oil Charity Golf Scramble and Concert raised $140,000 for Operation Homefront, a national nonprofit organization that provides emergency and financial assistance to the families of U.S. military service members and veterans. The event took place June 3 at The Club at Old Hawthorne in Columbia, Mo., and featured 61 teams and a private concert by country music singer Lee Brice.

"Our veterans, men and women in uniform, and their families sacrifice so much to protect the freedoms we enjoy daily, and we are honored to partner with Operation Homefront to aid them in their noble mission," says Jon Ihler, MFA Oil interim CEO. "Thanks to the generosity of our event sponsors, golfers, customers and employees, we have raised more than $670,000 to support military families since 2015."

The money donated by MFA Oil will go to active duty military and veteran families in Missouri and Kansas, and surrounding areas.

Founded in 2002, Operation Homefront provides military and veteran families with relief through critical financial assistance, transitional housing programs, resiliency through permanent housing and caregiver support services, and recurring family support programs and services throughout the year that help military families overcome the short-term bumps in the road so they don't become long-term chronic problems.

USDA to Relocate Hundreds of Positions to Kansas City

The U.S. Department of Agriculture announced on June 13 that its Economic Research Service and National Institute of Food and Agriculture will move to the Kansas City, Mo., area. Missouri and Kansas presented a collaborative proposal that beat out 135 other bids to become the new home for two of USDA's principal research agencies.

The Kansas City region beat out proposed locations in North Carolina and Indiana that were considered to be among a short list of finalists. The USDA is expected to move more than 500 jobs from Washington D.C. to the Kansas City metropolitan area.

"Following a rigorous site selection process, the Kansas City Region provides a win-win – maximizing our mission function by putting taxpayer savings into programmatic outputs and providing affordability, easy commutes and extraordinary living for our employees," Secretary of Agriculture Sonny Perdue said in a release. "The Kansas City Region has proven itself to be a hub for all things agriculture and is a booming city in America's heartland."

USDA expects to have its new offices up and running in the Kansas City region by Sept. 30.

MFA Oil Acquires Big O Tires Store in Warrensburg

The number of Big O Tires franchise stores MFA Oil operates continues to grow. On May 31, the company acquired an existing Big O Tires store in Warrensburg, Mo. The store, located at 423 E. Young Avenue, had been operated by a different franchisee.

"We are really excited to expand our presence in the western half of the state," says Charlie Alexander, Big O Tires director of operations for MFA Oil. "As a farmer-owned cooperative, MFA Oil has many members and delegates in the Warrensburg area, and we look forward to serving them and the entire community."

With this latest acquisition, MFA Oil now operates a total of 20 Big O Tires franchise locations with 14 stores in Missouri, three in northwest Arkansas and three in Oklahoma.

Fixed Assets Team Manages Tank Leases and More

MAINTAINING THE VAST NUMBER of assets of a company like MFA Oil is a multifaceted operation. From computers and office buildings to fuel trucks and tanks, the list of assets is extensive.

Managing all of these resources requires a dedicated team to keep track of the assortment of company-owned property. Just ask the experts, Barb Oerly, manager of MFA Oil's fixed assets department, and Melissa Wilson, supervisor of the department. Together, these two women, along with their dynamic team of three, are responsible for managing and accounting for the company's active assets.

One of the primary responsibilities of the department is maintaining customer tank leases on MFA Oil's approximately 120,000 propane tanks and 100,000 bulk fuel tanks. Besides billing tank rental fees, the fixed assets team must keep up-to-date information on installations, transfers, disposals and other records. When a member or customer decides to lease a tank from the company, the department's employees facilitate the process by documenting the details of the lease agreement and recording leak check information—an important safety protocol.

> "Most people probably don't have any idea of the many technicalities we have to account for when tracking the company's resources." – Barb Oerly

Other routine tasks for the fixed assets team include tracking the depreciation of assets, filing property taxes for all company locations in each state and assisting with corporate bookkeeping processes at the end of each month.

Depreciation is an important part of accurately accounting for the true value of property owned by the company. Assets are purchased at a specific value, and that initial value dwindles over a designated time period. For example, vehicles depreciate at a faster rate compared to other company assets.

"It's important to be precise and have a strong sense of detail when it comes to managing so many assets," Oerly says. "Most people probably don't have any idea of the many technicalities we have to account for when tracking the company's resources."

Although the fixed assets department does not typically work directly with MFA Oil customers and farmer-owners, its contributions to managing leased tanks are vital to the company's success in making bulk fuel and propane deliveries.

"By maintaining consistency and precision in our recordkeeping, we can make the leasing process quick and stress-free for our customers," Wilson says. "We want to make it easy to do business with MFA Oil."

– BY MEGAN HILL

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