



MOMENTUM

**Vulture
Vexation**

**Conflicts Escalate
Between Livestock
Producers and
Black Vultures**

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Scented
SPLENDOR

Page 6



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Summer 2023



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On the Cover:

Long Row Lavender is a U-pick flower farm run by Chad and Tracy Smith in Wright City, Mo. The farm has a variety of flowers that bloom from spring to fall and a café and gift shop that sells various handcrafted lavender products. *Photo by Jessica Lauren Photography.*



Liquid Fuels Still Matter

IF YOU THOUGHT EFFORTS TO

reduce carbon emissions in transportation were limited to electric vehicles, that would be understandable given the press coverage EVs have received in recent years. The reality is that a broad mix of sustainable energy, including liquid fuels, will play a pivotal role in curbing greenhouse gas emissions, especially in agriculture.

Biofuels like ethanol and biodiesel burn cleaner than conventional gasoline and diesel fuel and are readily available from a wide range of fuel suppliers like MFA Oil. Our cooperative has a long history of backing these renewable fuels, providing a valuable market for corn and soybeans grown throughout our trade territory. We've sold ethanol since the 1980s and biodiesel since 1993. Additionally, MFA Oil is a part-owner of Mid-America Biofuels, a biodiesel production facility in Mexico, Mo.

Independent research shows how biofuels are well on their way to helping the United States reach net-zero carbon emissions by 2050 or sooner. According to the U.S. Department of Energy, corn-based ethanol provides 44% greenhouse gas (GHG) savings compared to gasoline, even when unverifiable emissions from direct and indirect land-use changes are included.

Like ethanol, biodiesel and renewable diesel offer affordable, low-carbon solutions to immediately improve sustainability. These clean fuels are available now and work in existing or new diesel equipment to provide immediate carbon reductions. Biodiesel and renewable diesel reduce GHG emissions by at least 50% compared to petroleum diesel. Depending on the feedstock used, biodiesel and renewable diesel can reduce emissions by more than 80%.

If you're unfamiliar with renewable diesel, it is predominantly made from soybean oil, just like biodiesel, but produced using a different process. The result is a diesel fuel chemically identical to petroleum diesel that can support today's modern agriculture, construction and over-the-road trucking needs.



Jon Ihler

Renewable diesel has experienced increased demand in states with carbon credit markets. Generous policy environments for renewable diesel credits have led to new stand-alone facilities, conversions of existing refinery units and coprocessing with fossil fuels at existing refineries. A report, "The State of Sustainable Fleets—2023 Market Brief," showed domestic renewable diesel production doubled from 800 million gallons in 2021 to more than 1.7 billion gallons in 2022.

While other vegetable oils can be used, biodiesel and renewable diesel production primarily rely on soybean oil. Further growth would require increases in soybean production and crushing capacity.

Nearly 20 years ago, the ethanol boom generated substantial support for corn farmers. Could we see a similar impact with soybeans from the combined forces of biodiesel and renewable diesel? Time will tell.

Despite media fixation on electrification, we know our owners and customers will rely on liquid fuels for the foreseeable future. No matter where the fuels industry is headed, MFA Oil is devoted to providing products that best meet your needs. That's our continued commitment to you.

Jon Ihler,
President and CEO



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Training for the Road

NEW FEDERAL ENTRY-LEVEL

Driver Training (ELDT) requirements went into effect on Feb. 7, 2022, establishing a single national standard for obtaining a commercial driver's license. The regulations set a baseline for training requirements for drivers seeking to:

- obtain a Class A or Class B CDL for the first time;
- upgrade an existing CDL from Class B to Class A; or
- obtain new endorsements for their CDL covering hazmat, passenger or school bus vehicles.

Current CDL holders were only affected by the new rules if they sought to upgrade or add endorsements to their existing licenses.

With an in-house ELDT program, we can ensure our trainees have the resources they need to be successful and that we have appropriate trucks and facilities available for testing.”—Ed Harper

MFA Oil put together its own certified ELDT program with assistance from the National Propane Gas Association and the Propane Education and Research Council to train employees seeking a CDL. The company's in-house ELDT program curriculum includes theory training modules and behind-the-wheel instruction by registered trainers at approved facilities.

The 31 theory training modules are available to employees through the company's online learning platform. Once employees have completed the online educational units, they must pass an exam with at least an 80% score.



Photo by Starboard and Port

MFA Oil currently has four registered trainers: Tom Procter, director of safety and maintenance; David Grothoff, safety manager; Kenny Rawlings, senior safety specialist; and William Allison, senior fleet safety specialist. The company plans to register additional trainers soon.

Hands-on driving instruction is offered at the company's two registered facilities: the bulk plant in Rogersville, Mo., and the Business Support Campus in Moberly, Mo. A third training site for behind-the-wheel instruction in southeast Missouri will be operational by Fall 2023.

Ed Harper, MFA Oil vice president of risk management, said the company's development of an internal ELDT synergizes with a companywide focus on driver training and safety.

“The federal standardization presented us with a great opportunity to create a comprehensive driver teaching program tailored to our employees,” Harper said. “With an in-house ELDT program, we can ensure our trainees have the resources they need to be successful and that we have appropriate trucks and facilities available for testing.”

MFA Oil allows employees going through the program to drive the same trucks they would be working in daily.

“Training in the trucks they will drive and in the environment where they will work is beneficial to our employees and provides valuable hands-on experience,” Harper said.

Approximately 47 MFA Oil employees obtained new CDLs through the company's ELDT in the past year. **M**



Scented SPLENDOR



LEFT: Long Row Lavender is a bucolic flower farm that grows flowers that bring in pollinators and tourists from March to the first frost. ABOVE: Chad and Tracy Smith bought their farm in rural Warren County, Mo., in 2007. Their lavender farm has become an agritourism attraction for visitors from St. Louis and surrounding counties.

Long Row Lavender Allows Guests to Relax with an Ancient Herb.

By Adam Buckallew • Photos By Jessica Lauren Photography

On a brilliant May morning, Tracy Smith led a group of 10 ladies through rows of lavender—her farm’s signature crop in rural Warren County, Mo. While she discussed the do’s and don’ts of growing the fragrant shrub, she encouraged her workshop participants to bend down and sniff the silvery-green foliage. The Old World herb, known for its floral fragrance and showy whorls of purple flowers, is the star of the Smith family’s Long Row Lavender farm.

While Smith shared her lavender-growing expertise with her eager audience, the farm’s café hosted visitors ordering lavender bloom lattes, fresh-squeezed lemonade with lavender simple syrup and made-from-scratch soups, salads and sandwiches from the kitchen. Some guests were enjoying the idyllic surroundings while picking beautiful blooms to take home. Others were relaxing at tables beside a tranquil pond.

Anyone who appreciates the serene setting and floral experiences Smith and her family have cultivated can thank the local wildlife. When the Smiths bought the land that would eventually become Long Row Lavender in 2007, their plan was to grow

produce. Pesky critters nibbled those ideas away. Soon afterward, Tracy learned about lavender farms from a Midwest Living magazine article that mentioned the plants’ strong taste and aroma make them naturally deer- and rabbit-resistant. She decided to try growing lavender and soon found the beginnings of a business.

“The farm has come a long way and evolved as quickly as we could handle it as a family,” Smith said.

Business Blooms

Without any experience raising lavender, Tracy and her husband, Chad, sought as much information as they could find. They read online articles, attended a conference and experimented with floricultural techniques to find what would work best for their farm through trial and error.

“As a Mediterranean native plant, growing lavender in Missouri can be tricky,” Smith said. “It’s not a forgiving plant. We learned quickly that lavender will not thrive in our state’s clay soils without amendments like pea gravel. Planting into well-drained soils



is a must. Lavender likes water, but it doesn't want to sit in it. Too much water will rot the roots; if that happens, you're done."

Once the Smiths harvested their first crop, they took bundles of lavender to a farmer's market in Lake St. Louis to gauge its marketability. When they returned to their Wright City home with \$150 in sales and plenty of interest from browsing shoppers, the Smiths decided they may be on to something.

More than a decade later, the Smiths have found four key lavender varieties upon which they rely. Guests who visit Long Row Lavender in early June are treated to views of compact English lavenders like Hidcote, with its dramatic purple flowers, and Munstead, which has cool, lavender-blue floral spikes. In mid-June, taller French lavender hybrids like Phenomenal, a cold-hardy variety with purple-blue blossoms, and Edelweiss, which has profuse snowy white flowers, are in full bloom.

The farm has evolved since the first lavender took root with the addition of



ABOVE TOP: The Smiths extract lavender oil from their annual crop to produce various cosmetic products such as lip balm. BOTTOM LEFT: Lavender's unique scent, sometimes described as a mix between mint and rosemary with a sweet floral twist, can be found in products like body butter, bug spray, bath bombs and more at the Long Row Lavender gift shop. BOTTOM RIGHT: The farm grows English and French lavender hybrids that typically bloom in early to mid-June.



LEFT: The café at Long Row Lavender is an inviting place to enjoy a lavender lemonade, a lavender mocha, or made-from-scratch soups, salads and sandwiches. RIGHT: The Smith family (L to R): Dylan, Chad, Tracy, Ella, Jessica and Colin.

an array of flowering plants to add visual interest throughout the spring, summer and fall. The waves of flowers draw pollinators and tourists seeking colorful floral backdrops for Instagram photos.

“Our lavender only blooms in June, and we learned that people expect to see something blooming when they visit the farm,” Smith said. “Flowers drive traffic, so we’ve diversified with daffodils, snapdragons, peonies, chamomile, zinnias, sunflowers, cosmos and Mexican sage. We now have plants that bloom from early spring all the way to the first frost.”

Delivering Experiences

Two years ago, the Smiths introduced the U-pick concept to their farm, allowing guests to harvest their own bouquets. Tracy said the idea made her nervous at first, but it has proven to be the right decision.

“Letting our customers pick the flowers themselves has transformed our business,” she said. “We’re not only providing flowers but experiences that bring people joy.”

The introduction of Long Row Lavender’s café has been another winning idea. Once the farm was opened to the public in 2016, visitors began asking about things to eat. Demand for food led to the construction of a 1,000-square-foot addition to the barn that housed the farm’s gift shop.

When the café opened in April 2019, the Smiths were greeted by more than 500 guests who came to try their coffee and baked goods. Later that July, lunch items were added to the menu.

The café has grown to become a fundamental piece of the business. Another 800 square feet of space is being added to the kitchen to allow for a wider assortment of foods to be offered and to service catering demands for reserved events such as bridal and baby showers.

“The flowers bring people in, but the café keeps us alive,” Smith said.

Beyond its striking appearance, lavender use dates back to the ancient Egyptians, Greeks and Romans, who favored the potent herb as an essential ingredient in incense and herbal baths. Studies have shown that the herb’s essential oil, found in Long Row Lavender’s bath and body products, possesses calming qualities that can reduce anxiety.

Guests looking to take home an assortment of lavender-based goods can head to the farm’s gift shop, where handcrafted goods like lip balm, facial serum, herbal bug spray, sugar scrub, body butter and bath bombs are available for purchase. Shoppers who prefer aromatherapy products can opt for lavender sachets, flower bundles or candles. The farm also offers live lavender

plants seasonally for guests looking for a perennial pick-me-up they can add to their gardens.

Lavender Love

The laid-back, relaxing atmosphere permeating Long Row Lavender is no accident. Tracy and Chad say their family, including their four children, and the farm’s employees have worked hard to provide a peaceful, clean environment where people feel welcome.

“When people come to our farm, I want them to relax, take a load off and enjoy the beauty of nature,” Smith said. “This is a place where you can walk in, take a deep breath and step out of whatever may be worrying you.”

Hundreds of online five-star reviews from satisfied visitors attest that Long Row Lavender has more than fulfilled that goal. The farm’s visitors call it a “charming” “local gem” that is “well worth a visit.”

Lavender may not have been part of the Smiths’ original plans for the land, but it’s certainly transformed their farm into a successful agritourism attraction. Whether it was serendipity or fate that led the Smiths to plant lavender after deer and rabbits chomped on their vegetable patch is hard to say. But there’s no arguing that the end results sure smell sweet. **M**



VULTURE
vexation

By Adam Buckallew

Conflicts Escalate Between Livestock Producers and Black Vultures

Six years after Charlie Beshers' first experience with black vultures, the memory of the encounter remains vivid. He and his wife, Donnia, were checking on their cattle in Perry County, Mo., when they came upon a grisly scene. At least 20 vultures were ravaging the corpse of a newborn calf and attacking its mother.

"It was like walking up on a murder scene," Beshers recalled. "There was blood everywhere."

The onyx-plumed birds with bald, gray-black heads had plucked the calf's eyes out. The Beshers chased the vultures away, but the damage had been done. The calf's mother would eventually die of her infected wounds.

Conflicts between black vultures and livestock producers are becoming more frequent in Missouri as the birds have extended their range farther north. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service estimates that black vulture populations in the Show-Me State have grown from 6,900 birds in 2015 to 12,000 birds in 2021—an increase of 73.9%.

Alan Leary, wildlife management coordinator with the Missouri Department of Conservation, said there's no doubt black vultures are now more prevalent in the state. The scavengers' historical range has always included southern Missouri, but sightings and nuisance complaints for black vultures are now more common.

"Black vultures are now frequently reported throughout the southern portion of Missouri up to Interstate 70," Leary said. "We've heard from people up to the Iowa border."

HELP IS AVAILABLE

All native North American birds, including vultures, are protected by the Migratory Bird Treaty Act of 1918, prohibiting harm to more than 1,000 avian species. But that doesn't mean livestock producers are without options for dealing with black vultures causing trouble.

In southeast Missouri, Beshers encounters black vultures weekly on his Perry and Bollinger County farms. He has lost 12 cattle to black vultures since 2017, but he said that number would be higher if he hadn't received support from the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS) Wildlife Services.

Wildlife Services' mission is to provide federal leadership and expertise to resolve wildlife conflicts and allow people and wildlife to peacefully coexist. David Marks, USDA Wildlife Services assistant state director for Missouri and Iowa, said several proven strategies for dispersing vultures exist.

"We are available to offer advice, suggest ways that livestock producers can address the issue themselves, or, if necessary, we can take direct action," Marks said.

While black vultures are federally protected, it's perfectly legal to harass them away. Non-lethal control options include making loud noises with propane cannons or shotgun blasts, firing pyrotechnics or disturbing roosting vultures with laser pointers. One of the most effective tactics is using effigies, hanging dead black vultures or life-like replicas upside down by their feet from trees or fences with their wings splayed outward to spook away other vultures.

"Effigies work well and, many times, they will take care of any problems someone might be having," Marks said.

Livestock producers can obtain special permits from Wildlife Services or their state Farm Bureau to shoot a limited number of nuisance black vultures for use as effigies. Wildlife Services can also provide frozen black vultures to producers.

"I called USDA, and they got me a permit quickly," Beshers said. "I could then take black vultures I killed and hang them as effigies to scare off others. That's what has worked best for us. I would hate to see where we would be without USDA's help."

Davin Althoff, who manages Missouri Farm Bureau's black vulture depredation sub-permit program, said he has received a steady stream of applications.

“We’ve had tremendous interest in our sub-permit,” Althoff said. “Last year, we issued 38 sub-permits from April 1 to March 31. We’ve already eclipsed that number, issuing 41 since April 1, 2023.”

The sub-permits issued by Missouri Farm Bureau are free and allow livestock producers to take up to five black vultures per year. Applicants must complete a brief, two-page form that asks for information about livestock losses, the total head of cattle or sheep on the farm, the number of black vulture roosts within five miles, and the estimated number of black vultures per roost in the area. Membership in Missouri Farm Bureau is not required to receive a permit.

Producers can also take steps to limit the attraction of black vultures. Marks encourages producers to move vulnerable livestock into barns or areas near human activity. Once a calf is born, the nutrient-rich placenta should be buried. Proactive removal of livestock carcasses and management of dumping sites is also recommended.

BAD REPUTATION

Often portrayed as harbingers of death, vultures are underappreciated for the public good they do as ecological janitors—removing carrion and disease from the environment. Even naturalist Charles Darwin was unimpressed the first time he sighted a turkey vulture from the deck of the *Beagle* during an expedition to the Americas in 1835. Darwin called it a “disgusting bird” that was “formed to wallow in putridity.”

Lacking the regal majesty of eagles and the charm of colorful songbirds, vultures may be uncharismatic, but the good they do is well-documented. When vultures dine on death, they rid the environment of killer diseases. Studies show that when vulture species in the Indian subcontinent experienced catastrophic die-offs due to poisoning, cases of rabies and anthrax in humans and animals skyrocketed. At the same time, rat and feral dog populations drastically increased.

While vultures prefer fresh roadkill to putrid carcasses, they are not picky and will eat the remains of nearly any vertebrate. The carrion eaters feast on rotting meat with sharp, hooked beaks that can speedily strip away the flesh of disease-ridden carcasses. Researchers who’ve studied the guts of black vultures and turkey vultures say a potent

combination of stomach acid nearly as strong as battery acid and a microbiome loaded with gnarly bacteria allow the birds to digest meals that would sicken or kill most other animals.

“Vultures get a bad rap, but they eliminate dangerous diseases and bacteria and keep our ecosystems in tune,” Marks of Wildlife Services said.

Gruesome attacks on young, helpless livestock don’t help with black vultures’ image problem. Unlike their peaceful cousin, the turkey vulture, black vultures can gang up and prey on calves, piglets, lambs, newborn goats, and sick or otherwise weakened animals. The vultures often target soft tissues first, eviscerating eyeballs, tearing out tongues and nipping at navels.

Marks said it’s easy to understand why livestock producers can assume the worst when they see black vultures devouring their livestock.

“If you walk into your field and see a dead calf and a flock of vultures in a feeding frenzy, it’s not hard to come to that conclusion,” Marks said. “But things

are not always as they seem. We know there’s always a percentage of calves that are stillborn or have serious congenital issues that won’t survive, regardless of the situation. We get many calls about suspected depredation, but after conducting a necropsy, we often find the calves were already dead before the vultures began feeding.”

Professional wildlife biologists like Marks are working to further develop non-lethal black vulture control tactics to provide livestock owners with options that resolve depredation problems while maintaining sustainable populations of the native scavengers. They plan to study where the birds go after dispersal, how far they travel, and determine whether black vultures return to sites of conflict.

“The black vultures aren’t going away, and the limited permits are not part of an eradication program,” Marks said. “That’s not the goal, but we want to help prevent damage. It’s all about balancing native wildlife conservation with protecting humans, livestock and our natural resources.” **M**

KNOW YOUR VULTURES

Two species of vultures are native to Missouri: black vultures and turkey vultures. While turkey vultures may appear black from a distance, they can have dark-brown or black plumage with a featherless bright red head. Black vultures have sooty dark feathers, bare black heads and shorter tails. Turkey vultures extend V-shaped wing patterns when soaring, while black vultures hold their wings out straight and have white stars at their wingtips.

Both species operate as opportunistic scavengers, cleaning the environment of carrion. While searching for food, black vultures fly at higher altitudes than turkey vultures to monitor predators and other scavengers visually. Whereas turkey vultures use their keen sense of smell to sniff out carcasses, black vultures rely on sight and will follow turkey vultures to find meals.



Black Vultures



Turkey Vultures

MFA Oil Foundation Grant Recipients



The MFA Oil Foundation provides cash grants to nonprofit organizations that are working to improve communities where MFA Oil has a significant concentration of members and employees. In June, the foundation approved \$118,250 in grants to 39 different organizations.

Advocates for Community Choice.....	Marthasville, MO
Anderson County EMS.....	Garnett, KS
Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary.....	O'Fallon, MO
Audrain County Shelter Resource Coalition.....	Mexico, MO
Black River Technical College.....	Pocahontas, AR
Blackwater Preservation Society.....	Blackwater, MO
Bridge of Hope Lincoln County.....	Troy, MO
Bridge of Hope Ministries, Inc.....	Pocahontas, AR
Chillicothe Fire Department.....	Chillicothe, MO
City of Buffalo.....	Buffalo, MO
Columbia Center for Urban Agriculture.....	Columbia, MO
Cooper County Agricultural and Mechanical Society.....	Blackwater, MO
Delta C-7 School District.....	Deering, MO
Empire FFA.....	Duncan, OK
Family Violence Center Inc. (DBA Harmony House).....	Springfield, MO
Friends of Arrow Rock.....	Arrow Rock, MO
Friends of Rolla Robotics.....	Rolla, MO
Fun and Friends of Thayer Area.....	Thayer, MO
Gallatin Theater League.....	Gallatin, MO
Green City FFA.....	Green City, MO
Hale Organization of Parents, Teachers & Students (O.P.T.S.).....	Hale, MO
Izard County Animal Rescue Effort.....	Melbourne, AR
Jasper Volunteer Fire Department.....	Jasper, AR
Lockwood R1 Schools Parents as Teachers Program.....	Lockwood,MO
Missouri Farmers Care Foundation.....	Jefferson City, MO
Montgomery County Arts Council.....	Montgomery City, MO
My Hometown Carrollton.....	Carrollton,MO
Naylor R-II.....	Naylor, MO
North Central Missouri Business Facilitation.....	Pattonsburg, MO
Owensville Senior Center.....	Owensville, MO
Owensville Volunteer Fire Department.....	Owensville, MO
Peavine School.....	Stilwell, OK
Prairie Home Swimming Pool.....	Prairie Home, MO
Saxon Lutheran Memorial Inc.....	Frohna, MO
SeniorAge Area Agency On Aging.....	Springfield, MO
The Salvation Army of Warsaw Benton County.....	Warsaw, MO
Tipton Rural Fire Protection District.....	Tipton, MO
Unfinished Pieces.....	Moberly, MO
Village of Pollock.....	Pollock, MO

INVESTMENTS FOR THE FUTURE

— By Adam Buckallew —



Photo by Starboard and Port

Much has changed in the nearly 100 years since MFA Oil Company's founding, but the need for a dependable energy supplier remains as vital as ever for the cooperative's farmer-owners.

MFA Oil understands the importance of investing in infrastructure to ensure the success of its member-owners. The cooperative is committed to building and maintaining the infrastructure members rely on, from fuel and propane delivery to its extensive network of Petro-Card 24 fueling stations. These investments not only improve the efficiency and reliability of the co-op's operations but also provide tangible benefits to MFA Oil members.

Kenny Steeves, senior vice president of MFA Oil operations, said the cooperative

is continually working to ensure the needs of members and customers are met by balancing demand with sufficient supply infrastructure.

"As a farmer-owner cooperative, we are always looking for ways to add value for our members," Steeves said. "That means we are providing timely deliveries, dependable supply, eliminating environmental risk for our communities and neighbors, and providing a safe work environment for our employees."

PETRO-CARD 24 GROWTH

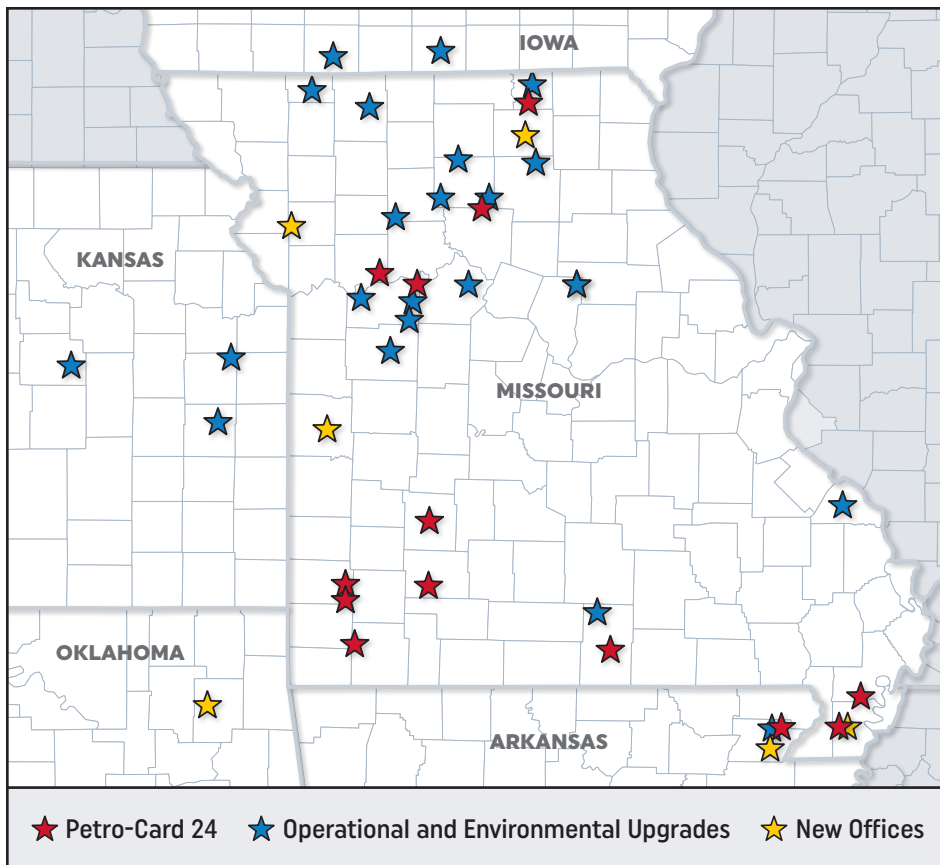
The company continues to expand its network of Petro-Card 24 locations. The company has built or upgraded 13 locations since 2019. All new or revamped locations have been equipped

with large-volume tanks to allow for deliveries from fuel transport trucks, which frees MFA Oil drivers to focus on customer deliveries rather than refilling Petro-Card 24 stations.

Steeves said new Petro-Card 24 locations and sites that have received upgrades are determined by how much value they would bring to the membership.

"We have more than 180 Petro-Card 24 locations, and we continue to evaluate potential sites that would further enhance the value of the network to our member-owners," he said.

Beyond tank upgrades, the company recently installed digital price signs at 15 Petro-Card 24 stations with plans to install another 18 within the near future.



ENVIRONMENTAL AND OPERATIONAL UPGRADES

When company fuel tanks begin to show signs of leak risks, they become a priority target for replacement. Such was the case in Garnett, Kan., where the bulk plant was rebuilt in 2022. MFA Oil acquired the Garnett plant when it purchased Lybarger Oil in 2015.

“We have a duty to do what’s right for our customers, our employees and the community,” said Tom Procter, MFA Oil director of safety and maintenance. “Before our equipment becomes aged to the point where it can compromise safety or product quality, we make changes.”

The new, state-of-the-art equipment the cooperative installed helps drivers refuel their delivery trucks more quickly, and, in turn, get fuel to customers faster.

MFA Oil has invested in larger, double-walled tanks at 22 locations throughout its eight-state trade territory in recent years. The upgraded tanks have a built-in secondary containment compartment that is vacuum sealed. The backup containment built into the tanks protects against leaks and eliminates the need for

a concrete containment area around the tanks. Additionally, the outer wall of a double-wall tank protects the inner layer from snow, rain, sleet and other weather conditions that cause rust. With proper maintenance, double-walled tanks can last up to 50 years.

The company is also investing in new propane and refined fuel storage sites in Indiana, Kentucky and Tennessee. The new storage locations will allow drivers to refill their trucks at strategically placed sites, lowering the number of miles they must drive, reducing stress on drivers and their trucks and improving logistics.

Beyond tank and storage improvements, MFA Oil is working to upgrade its offices at six locations. The company has built or acquired new offices in Deering, Mo.; Gower, Mo.; and Paragould, Ark. Construction is underway or soon to begin on new offices in Butler, Mo.; Kirksville, Mo.; and Pryor, Okla.

“Adding strategic storage sites and rebuilding our aging infrastructure is integral to our plan to ensure we best serve the needs of members and customers,” Steeves said. “We continue to evaluate these types of projects on an annual basis.” **M**

Petro-Card 24

- Avila, MO
- Bolivar, MO
- Brookline, MO
- Deering, MO
- Hardin, MO
- Marceline, MO
- Marmaduke, AR
- Portageville, MO
- Queen City, MO
- Sarcoxie, MO
- Waverly, MO
- Wheaton, MO
- West Plains, MO

Operational and Environmental Upgrades

- Alma, MO
- Browning, MO
- Bucklin, MO
- Centralia, MO
- Concordia, MO
- Corydon, IA
- Council Grove, KS
- Garnett, KS
- Grant City, MO
- Lancaster, MO
- LaPlata, MO
- Ludlow, MO
- Marmaduke, AR
- Meadville, MO
- Mt. Ayr, IA
- Perryville, MO
- Ridgeway, MO
- Slater, MO
- Warrensburg, MO
- Wellington, MO
- Wellsville, KS
- Willow Springs, MO

Offices

- Butler, MO*
- Deering, MO
- Gower, MO
- Kirksville, MO*
- Paragould, AR**
- Pryor, OK*

*Under Construction

**Planned



MOWING HAY LOW MAY COST MONEY, TIME

By Linda Geist, University of Missouri Extension

There are many reasons to avoid cutting low when mowing hay, but money is the main one, said University of Missouri Extension agronomist Tim Schnakenberg.

Schnakenberg recommends a height of 4 inches for cool-season grasses like tall fescue, bromegrass, orchardgrass and Timothy and 8 inches for native warm-season grasses. Typically, legumes such as alfalfa and clover may be cut lower. It is important to cut cool-season grasses before seed heads develop, if weather permits.

Too often, the first cut of hay is too low, he said. That sets the stage for the season's growth and beyond. Hay mowed too low likely will result in thin stands over time. Low-mowed pastures may need renovation or planting, resulting in extra expense.

When you cut too low, you're getting the worst of the plant because the lowest-quality forage is at the base of the plant, Schnakenberg said. The lowest 2 inches also contains the most endophytes, putting livestock at risk in toxic Kentucky 31 fescue fields.

There is an estimated 100-150 pounds of forage per acre-inch near the base of the plant. Lowering a cutter from 4 inches to 2 inches only gains about 200-300 pounds more forage in the bale. "As a result, there is only a small amount of gain in tonnage, but it comes at a significant price," he said.

Mowing low also puts your equipment at risk. Blades are more likely to come into contact with soil, gravel and rocks. This leads to more grit and dirt in the hay, which lowers digestibility and intake by the animals. "Mowers were never intended to be a ground contact tool," Schnakenberg said.

Plants need residual leaves to absorb the sun. When leaf-to-stem ratio is too low, plants must rely on their root systems for regrowth. When leaves are cut too short and too often, roots die back because there is not enough photosynthesis to feed them. Strong root systems are especially important during dry periods. Also, when too much of the canopy is removed, more soil and the crown of the plant are exposed to the sun.

Scalping forages can push back regrowth two weeks. "This is a two-week loss of the growing season," Schnakenberg said.

Low cutting also is a missed opportunity for better hay drying. Forage laid out on high stubble receives better air circulation below the windrows instead of direct contact with moist soil.

Cutting hay is not without its drawbacks, but they are few, said Schnakenberg. There might be minor tonnage losses, and mowing equipment may not work as well and leave behind a tattered field.

A common question is how to cut a crop high with modern hay cutting equipment. "There is no doubt we have much better technology than ever before in harvesting equipment, and speed of harvest has been the greatest advantage compared to prior generations of equipment," he said. "Hay producers should consider setting up skid shoes on disc mowers. These could be fabricated if necessary. Hydraulic cylinder stops are also a possibility on some equipment."

For more information, see the MU Extension publication "Making and Storing Quality Hay" at www.extension.missouri.edu/g4575 or consult your local MU Extension agronomist. 

Whole farm perspective. **Whole farm value.**



Q&A with Marion Kertz of the MFA Oil Board of Directors



Q When you look back at your time on the Board, what are you most proud of?

A Serving as the representative for the cooperative's southeast district has been a rewarding experience. I enjoy participating in the governance of MFA Oil and working with the management team to set our strategic direction. We've had many great leaders throughout our cooperative's nearly 100-year history, and I was honored to serve as chairman of the Board of Directors for two years. It was a big responsibility, but one I proudly accepted.

Q You have had the opportunity to serve on many different boards for a variety of organizations. How did that experience help prepare you for joining the MFA Oil Board of Directors?

A One thing you learn quickly when you take on the responsibilities of being a board member is that there are sometimes tough decisions that need to be made. You learn how to work together with people and find consensus. But the number-one thing you must remember is why you're there. Board members are meant to look out for the interests of their constituents. That's the thing I always come back



to when considering votes. You've got to do what's best for the people you represent. That principle applies to all boards, whether you're talking about a community bank, your church or your local cooperative.

Q When you were elected as chairman in 2019, there were organizational changes that the Board deemed necessary. What was it like leading the Board during this period of transition?

A There were hard decisions that needed to be made about our leadership that we, as a Board, thought were unavoidable. We had different visions for the direction we should

be heading, and we had to act. That was not an easy thing to do at the beginning of my term as chairman, but it couldn't be delayed. We knew what we needed to do for the best interest of the cooperative, its farmer-owners and its employees, and we did it.

Our Board and the company's management team are now in alignment with a shared vision. Restoring our focus on customer service and making the company a great place to work has been a major accomplishment. There is a tremendous responsibility in stewarding this great cooperative that was created by our grandfathers and kept going by our fathers. I'm proud of the part I've played in positioning the company to serve future generations.

Q How important is community to a successful cooperative?

A The foundation of the cooperative movement is built on community. When seven farmers gathered at the Newcomer School near Brunswick, Mo., in 1914, they set the wheels in motion for the formation of what we now know as MFA Incorporated and MFA Oil Company. When we band together and work cooperatively, we can achieve great things.

The MFA Oil slogan is “We Live Where You Do,” for good reason. Our farmer-owners and employees are important members of their respective communities. Many of them serve on school boards, are leaders in their churches, and volunteer in fire departments and in other organizations that serve the community. Additionally, MFA Oil gives back to our communities with grants

through our charitable foundation and scholarships to local high school students. I’ve had the opportunity to present several grants to organizations in the southeast district, and it is fantastic to see the many ways we help people. Giving back makes our communities stronger, which, in turn, makes the cooperative stronger.

Q What’s something you want more people to know about MFA Oil?

A I wish more young people had a better understanding of the value I saw when I was their age and continue to see in cooperatives. We have a great thing going with MFA Oil. Our co-op fills an essential need as an energy supplier. The fuel we sell keeps rural communities moving. On top of that, we are given ownership and patronage in exchange for

doing business with the cooperative. That’s a major perk. The more you buy from the co-op, the more you have the opportunity to get back at the end of the year in your patronage check. It’s a nice reward for doing business with MFA Oil. **M**

» Marion Kertz of Ste. Genevieve, Mo., is a retired farmer who has turned his farming operations in both Missouri and Illinois over to his two sons and nephew. He has been an MFA Oil delegate since 1997 and was elected to the Board of Directors in 2011. He served as chairman of the MFA Oil Board of Directors from 2018 to 2020.



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» The Big Picture



Payment Upgrades at Petro-Card 24

A MAJOR UPGRADE TO THE CREDIT CARD READERS at MFA Oil Petro-Card 24 locations is nearing completion. The company has activated chip card readers and pin pads at more than 75% of its Petro-Card 24 fueling sites. The MFA Oil maintenance team is visiting each site to verify that the card reader hardware is functioning and the software is up to date. The upgrade activates Europay, Mastercard and Visa (EMV) protections that keep MFA Oil in line with requirements from the Payment Card Industry Security Standards Council.

Moving forward, Petro-Card 24 customers using chipped cards will no longer swipe to pay. Instead, chipped cards will need to be inserted and left in the reader while the customer follows the on-screen prompts on the payment kiosk. Customers paying with MFA Oil Petro-Card 24 or Preferred Customer credit cards will continue to swipe them as usual to pay.


Receipts will now be easier to obtain at the upgraded sites as well. Rather than having to reswipe or insert a card, customers can now press a yellow receipt button on the kiosk after the transaction has been completed. MFA Oil has made pump-topper signage and screen savers to communicate the change in payment and receipt procedures to its customers. 



Photo by Starboard and Port

PROJECT-BASTE LEARNING

Osceola students win national BBQ championship.

National champion. That's something few Missouri FFA chapters achieve.

National food champion. That's something no Missouri FFA chapter has ever achieved until the Osceola High School FFA BBQ team, directed by Charles ("Chuck") Simpson, did so at the World Food Championship in Dallas in late 2021.

Simpson, the agricultural education instructor and FFA advisor at the school, said it took a lot of time, hard work and sponsorship to get to the championships. Sponsorships were especially needed to cover the lodging, meal and travel expenses, as well as the cost of ingredients for the five categories in which the team competed: chicken, steak, burgers, ribs and a Dutch oven dessert. Despite the costs, he said, there are compensations. The students get to eat their homework.

"Students were responsible for preparation, building the fire, trimming, cooking—the whole thing," he said. "No adults could help them." If an adult stepped into the contests' dedicated cooking area, the team would be disqualified.

The first judging criteria was appearance of the food.

"I tell my kids, no matter what it tastes like, we judge by our eyes," Simpson said. "I want that judge to say, 'Oh man! I can't wait to dig into that.'"

The second criteria was how well the food was cooked. For example, a steak or burger had to be medium well, and ribs had to be easy to bite through but not falling off the bone.

Lastly, teams were judged on taste. Was the item well-balanced? Not too much salt, pepper, heat, sweetness, etc.

Juggling all that's a lot of pressure to place on professional barbecue chefs, much less on a high school team. The championship Muddy River Smokers, named after the stretch of Missouri River on which Osceola sits, consisted of two freshmen, two sophomores and one senior who had never smoked meat a day in his life until he decided he wanted to be on the team.

The Muddy River Smokers' chicken and Dutch Oven Apple Cobbler won second place. The burgers and ribs both won first. "They were announcing scores and I was doing the math in my mind,



Chuck Simpson, Osceola High School ag education instructor and FFA advisor, with World Food Championship ribs first place winner Cole Thomas

and I knew we placed high," Simpson remembered. "The judges announced the third-place winner, then the second, and I just screamed. They probably thought I was crazy, but I was cheering because I knew right then, 'Hey, we just pulled this off.'"

Each student also received \$10,000 in scholarships to Sullivan University, a private school in Louisville, Ky. More importantly, said Simpson, his students learned how to store and process raw and cooked foods as well as how to think and operate under pressure.

"The teamwork, written and verbal communication, problem-solving, and analytical thinking takes place more than they ever realize," he said. "It's all about the opportunity, getting the kids out there, letting them experience this, and the competition becomes another layer in the curriculum. If we get a chef out of this, ... that's awesome."

But they couldn't have done it without the 23-year FFA veteran. The Missouri House of Representatives recognized this, lauding the Muddy River Smokers and Simpson in an official 2022 resolution: "The Osceola Muddy River Smokers could not have attained such phenomenal success without the exemplary leadership provided by Coach Charles Simpson."

Simpson knew barbecue would be a great fit for teaching. He was already teaching an introduction to food science course, "and to teach kids about where things come from, breaking down and butchering a pig each year in science class, being able to take all that a step further, show them how to put it in a pit and cook it, there's just a sense things come full circle."

Simpson is also the director of the Missouri High School BBQ Association, and encourages FFA advisors who are interested in starting their own team to email him at csimpson@osceola.k12.mo.us or find him on the Missouri High School BBQ Association Facebook page.

"It's project-baste learning at its finest," Simpson quipped. **M**

— BY NEAL FANDEK

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.

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MORE LODGING AND SUPPORT

space will soon be available for families traveling to central Missouri to seek medical care for their children. Ronald McDonald House Charities of Mid-Missouri has begun constructing a new, larger home at the corner of South College Avenue and Stadium Boulevard in Columbia. The charity is relocating to keep its facilities as close as possible to the University of Missouri's new Children's Hospital.

"Our focus is on providing a home away from home for families with sick or injured children, helping to ensure that every child has support and access to the best medical care," said Terri Gray, executive director of Ronald McDonald House Charities of Mid-Missouri. "We know having families in a home close to MU Health Care's new Children's Hospital will be well worth the changes we must make in 2023. We are grateful to the community for their support during this transition."

Keeping families close is not just a motto Gray said. It has been the heart of the mid-Missouri Ronald McDonald House for 40 years. Stress and financial burdens are lessened by keeping families together and nearby during a child's medical crisis. The togetherness and Ronald McDonald House's network of support help prevent feelings of isolation and make it easier to cope with difficult situations.

Ronald McDonald House's proximity to care centers can significantly benefit parents with children in severe conditions, like premature babies.

"Imagine you are the new parent of a 3-pound baby who was placed in an incubator instead of your arms," Gray said. "Suddenly, you are hours from home with your baby clinging to life. Thankfully, the Ronald McDonald House is close by as a safe and comfortable place to stay, so all your focus can be



on your fragile newborn. If you get a call in the middle of the night that your baby has taken a turn for the worse, you can be there immediately for support. If you get a call in the middle of the night that your baby can finally feed from the bottle, you can be there immediately to celebrate. Minutes matter when you are a new parent whose child is surrounded by monitors and machines instead of family and friends."

Families who stay at a Ronald McDonald House receive compassionate support and the daily amenities families require—warm meals every evening, comfortable beds in private rooms with attached bathrooms, laundry facilities, family play areas and more.

"Our house is built on the simple idea that nothing else should matter when a family is focused on healing their child—not where they can afford to stay, where they will get their next meal or where they will lay their head at night to rest," Gray said. "We believe that when a child is sick or injured, the love and support of family is critical."

MFA Oil Company has committed to contributing \$75,000 across three years to the charity's campaign to fund the relocation and expansion of the Ronald McDonald House. The new

31,000-square-foot building, expected to open in Spring 2024, will have six additional guest bedrooms, housing for up to 24 families per night, expanded recreational and living areas, a large eat-in kitchen, an exercise room, outdoor play areas, and ample parking spaces.

"We are so grateful for the contributions from MFA Oil in helping us build the new Ronald McDonald House," Gray said. "These gifts are more than an investment in a building—they are an investment in the lives of so many kids and their families, as well as our local community. Their support ensures we have room for every family who needs us—at no cost to the family."

While the new home is under construction, Ronald McDonald House is temporarily serving families at the Drury Plaza Inn and Suites in Columbia. The charity covers lodging, breakfast, dinner and snacks, and has staff at the hotel around the clock to assist families and provide shuttle services to and from the hospital and medical facilities. **M**

To donate to Ronald McDonald House Charities of Mid-Missouri or inquire about its services, visit rmhcmidmo.org.

Call to Farming Keeps Historic Kansas Farm Going

THE GILLILAND FAMILY HAS ROOTS RUNNING DEEP in the gently rolling hills of eastern Kansas. Five generations of Gillilands have cultivated the sandy loam in Miami County. Here, along the gravel roads bordered by fields of row crops and pasture, the family has proudly farmed the land since 1896.

In late April, the Gillilands had just finished planting this season's corn acreage and were preparing to transition to soybeans. Jerry, an MFA Oil delegate, works alongside his father, Gary, and his son, Levi. The family farms land in three Kansas counties (Franklin, Johnson and Miami). Dividing the workload among the three of them, a few part-time employees and seasonal helpers ensures crucial activities like planting and harvest are completed on time.

Born to Farm

Each of the Gilliland men has chosen to follow in their fathers' footsteps. Gary, Jerry and Levi say farming is a satisfying but challenging profession.

"I've been on a tractor for basically all of my life," said Gary, 80, who fondly recalls riding with his dad on their Allis-Chalmers tractor. "My father had a little box made, and I rode on that little tractor with him every day since I was two years old."

"It's a good life if you can tolerate all the ups and downs," he said.

When Jerry was younger, he split his time between work on the family farm and a job in town. When the demands of the family's farming operation grew, he returned to the farm full-time at age 25. Thirty years later, he has no regrets.

"There's nowhere else I'd rather be," Jerry said. "I've been involved in other businesses in the past—we had a trucking operation at one time—but none of it excites me in the same way as farming."

Like his grandfather, Levi, 29, has been riding in tractors since he was old enough to walk. From a young age, Levi knew he wanted to farm when he grew up. In his childhood, he was known for deconstructing farm equipment to learn how it works. As agricultural technology has advanced, Levi has grown to become the family's technical specialist. He monitors the family's farm equipment with an app on his phone and brings new ideas to the table.

A Cooperative Partner

Jerry said his family is thankful for reliable suppliers like MFA Oil, who "take great care of us." The Gillilands buy all of their fuel, propane and lubricants from the co-op, and Jerry has served as a delegate since MFA Oil acquired Lybarger Oil, Inc. in 2015.



FROM LEFT: Gary, Levi and Jerry Gilliland

"Becoming a delegate was one of the best moves I've ever made," he said. "I've met so many good people and learned a lot. I was amazed when I heard about all the scholarships and grants MFA Oil gives back to our local communities."

Jerry values being a member of the co-op and the partnership that it brings.

"They take care of us, and we know we can count on them," he said. "If something comes up, the employees are always quick to help. The service is top-notch."

The Gillilands said they've never had any issues with the fuel they buy, and they appreciate the monitors that MFA Oil installed to ensure they have plenty of energy to keep their machinery moving.

"The monitors are a godsend," Jerry said. "When five or six people pull fuel out of your tanks on a given day, it can be hard to know when to call for a delivery. The monitors have kept us fueled up and saved us from many headaches."

But more than anything else, Jerry appreciates the people at MFA Oil.

"It all boils down to the people," he said. "Everyone we work with is kind, helpful and has a good attitude. We've had two people who used to work for us on the farm that went to work at MFA Oil and loved it. Many companies talk about how they are like a family. I think a lot of that is baloney. But I believe it with MFA Oil." **M**

Recessionary Questions Remain

RECESSION, RECESSION, RECESSION.

I have been thinking and writing about this for years now. Have we already had one? Are we in one now? Are we going to have one? These are important questions, and if you ask around, you could find someone who thinks the answer is yes to all three possibilities. Recessionary questions remain a huge factor for predicting where energy prices are headed. A recession would lower energy demand and, in turn, help replenish inventories while putting pressure on prices to move lower. From a bullish perspective, if there is a mild recession, or no recession, and demand stays strong, then inventories will get tighter, and prices will go higher.

Conflicting energy demand reports make it difficult to get a clear reading of whether the economy is struggling or not. In a recent column for Reuters news, market analyst John Kemp said, "Consumption of distillate fuel oil remains subdued as a result of the widespread downturn in manufacturing and freight activity since the third quarter of 2022. Consumption and production have increased by a similar amount since the start of March, an indication of little change in the domestic balance."

However, in a recent earnings call, oil refiner Valero said that petroleum demand is strong with gasoline sales up 16% year-over-year and diesel sales up 25% year-over-year. In its monthly report, the U.S. Energy Information Administration said petroleum demand hit its highest level in April 2023 since November 2022, and U.S. oil production fell in April 2023 to its lowest level since December 2022.

Chinese demand is another wild card, and reporting about China's appetite for oil has been muddled. One report will say demand is strong as the country emerges from strict COVID-19 restrictions;



another report will paint a less optimistic view. Market watchers will continue to pay close attention to this situation because strong demand from China will be supportive of prices.

Trading on the New York Mercantile Exchange (NYMEX) for ultra-low sulfur diesel (ULSD) futures had a COVID-19 recovery high of \$5.8595 on April 25, 2022. The recent low price as of late May was in the \$2.15 area. That is a decline of almost \$3.70, which is a significant price correction. If you consider the high from Oct. 24, 2022, at \$4.5498 to that \$2.15 level, you still have more than a \$2.30 move. Either way, ULSD futures have come down substantially. Is this the result of recession fears or a truly poor economy? If we do see a recession, do prices go lower, or has the market already priced that into account? We're left with many questions, no clear answers and varying opinions.

My hunch is that the markets will get a dose of reality in the medium term, and we are likely to see a correction lower. When might this play out? That again

is a matter of opinion. If you believe a recession is coming to pull markets back, you risk it running higher due to low inventories. At the same time, if you jump into the market now to lock in some fixed-price gallons, you could see the economy take a turn for the worse and prices move lower. The current values for forward prices have moved lower over the last four to five months and look much more reasonable. With all the current uncertainty around the debt ceiling, banking crisis, murky economic outlook and depleted inventory levels, this market is likely to congest over the next month or two, looking for clarity on any and all of these issues.

Most people have already made decisions for the current season, so my advice would be to look ahead to next spring and use the current move off of recent highs to book gallons for your 2024 needs. **M**



» **Tim Danze**
is the hedging manager
for MFA Oil.



Mike Moreland



Randy Pace

Moreland, Pace Elected to MFA Oil Board of Directors

MFA Oil Company hosted district delegate meetings across its eight voting districts in February and March. Two of those districts held elections for their representative on the MFA Oil Board of Directors. Mike Moreland, representing the company's West Central District, won re-election to the Board at a meeting held on Feb. 16 in Harrisonville, Mo. In the Mid-South District, Randy Pace was elected at a March 8 meeting in Jonesboro, Ark. Moreland and Pace will both serve three-year terms.

Moreland is a third-generation farmer from Harrisonville, Mo., where he raises corn, soybeans and cattle with his brother and sons. He is a past president and current member of the Missouri Corn Growers Association. He is the former chairman of the Missouri Corn Merchandising Council and has served on several committees of the National Corn Growers Association. He is a current member of the Cass County Farm Bureau board and a past president. He was a member of Missouri Farm Bureau's (MFB) Young Farmers and Ranchers State Committee, chairman of MFB Dairy Advisory Committee and member of the American Farm Bureau Dairy Committee. He is a former board member of the Cass County Soil and Water Conservation District and past chairman. He serves as a delegate to MFA Oil and was first elected to the Board of Directors in 2019.

Pace co-owns a diversified family farming operation in West Plains, Mo., that includes beef cattle, 20,000 layer hens and commercial haying. After graduating from the University of Missouri in 1977, Pace worked in agriculture finance for 40 years with the Farm Credit System in Arkansas and Missouri while farming part-time. After retiring from FCS Financial in 2017, Pace expanded his farming operation by increasing his cow herd and adding poultry production. He actively serves on the Howell County Soil and Water Conservation District Board of Supervisors, on the FCS Financial Board of Directors, as an MFA Oil delegate, and as vice chairman of West Vue Nursing Home. Pace and his family are members of the First Baptist Church in West Plains.



New Name for Solar Operations

Energized Solar, a subsidiary of MFA Oil Company, announced on May 1 that it has changed its name to BluSphere Energy and unveiled a new visual identity and website at BlusphereEnergy.com.

The new name and rebranding reflect the company's commitment to providing sustainable energy solutions to customers. BluSphere Energy, which was launched in October 2021, offers solar panel installations for farmers, homeowners and businesses in Missouri.

Big O Tires Opens Third Store in Lake of the Ozarks Area

MFA Petroleum Company, a wholly owned subsidiary of MFA Oil Company, has opened a Big O Tires store at 1819 Bagnell Dam Blvd in Lake Ozark, Mo. The new store is the company's third in the Lake of the Ozarks region, joining established Missouri locations in Osage Beach and Camdenton.

Big O Tires offers tire services and repairs, wheel alignment, batteries, shocks, struts, and a wide range of diagnostic, repair and routine maintenance services.

"We're excited to bring another Big O Tires service center to the northern portion of the Lake of the Ozarks community," said Charlie Alexander, senior director of Big O Tires for MFA Petroleum Company. "The Bagnell Dam store will be bigger with a pull-around lane capable of handling trailers, which our Osage Beach location doesn't have room to offer."

The new store boasts eight automotive service bays and is open from 7 a.m. to 6 p.m. Monday through Friday and from 7 a.m. to 3 p.m. on Saturdays. Tyler Danuser serves as the store manager.

Customers can call 573-607-3777 or visit www.bigotires.com to schedule an appointment.

MFA Petroleum owns and manages 36 Big O Tires franchise stores in Missouri, Kansas and Arkansas. 



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