

■ **June 22-26 — Young People's Citizenship Seminar** at Northwood University. Teens learn about the American Democratic system and enhance their leadership skills. **Matt Kapp, (800) 292-2680, ext. 2027** or **Lisa Pruden, ext. 3246**.

■ **June 1-3 — AFBF Midwest Commodities Conference** in Indianapolis, IN. Attendees will get a regional status report as middle-American agriculture continues to weather ongoing economic challenges. **Bob Boehm, (800) 292-2680, ext. 2023**.

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Attention Media: This is an abbreviated issue of AgriNotes & News. Look for AgriTips and Quick Facts to resume in future issues.

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THIS WEEK:

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Emily Ries of Lenawee County



Brenda Sisung of Clinton County



Julie Thelen of Washtenaw County

Michigan Farm Bureau announces Marge Karker Scholarship recipients

A trio of Michigan State University agriculture students have each earned a \$1,000 tuition 'stimulus' in the form of Michigan Farm Bureau's annual Marge Karker Scholarship. Honoring the legacy of the pioneering, mid-century Farm Bureau leader, the scholarship bearing Karker's name recognizes students in agriculture-related fields of study for their academic excellence, extracurricular achievement and leadership experience. More information available in the following release. Photos are available to download at <http://www.michfb.com/education>.

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Farm Bureau applauds MSU's position on animal entertainment

Contact:

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LANSING, April 24, 2009 — Michigan Farm Bureau (MFB) officials expressed their appreciation to Michigan State University (MSU) for clearing up months of ill-informed discussion and rumors surrounding last winter's cancellation of the Royal Hanneford Circus on campus.

"We appreciate the work MSU has done to clear up the misunderstandings that have come up over this controversial issue," said MFB President Wayne H. Wood. "In the end, we believe MSU handled the issue appropriately and did the right thing for its students, graduates and all the animals involved."

While rumors were spreading ahead of the April 24 MSU Board of Trustees meeting that it would discuss a new policy regarding animal care, in fact, the board did not discuss any animal entertainment issues or vote on the so-called policy, which is more of a protocol and procedure for animal care and treatment than a policy.

Similar to guidelines and procedures used for animal-based research, which is an integral part of MSU's mission as a land-grant university, the document being touted by some as new policy is in fact simply titled "Contract requirements for events involving the use of animals at Michigan State University facilities."

The university did not have to burden its trustees with discussing a new policy, said Dr. Jeff Armstrong, dean of MSU's college of Agriculture and Natural Resources, because the contract is simply part of normal administrative work commonly done there.

With the new contract in place for events such as circuses, rodeos and even stage plays that involve animals, Armstrong said it was time to put the Royal Hanneford Circus discussion into context and cut through the misinformation that has riled animal rights extremists on and off-campus, as well as farmers – mostly MSU graduates – who thought MSU had abandoned its commitment to animal agriculture.

"If I had heard that the university had banned the circus with no explanation, I would want to know why myself," Armstrong said. "And based on what people heard, I understand why they were upset. But what they heard was not true."

The rumors, encouraged by the student group Youth Caravan, which promoted the circus, and the on-campus animal rights group Students Promoting Animal Rights (SPAR), indicated that the university had banned the circus. SPAR took immediate credit for what it called the university's decision, since it had protested against the circus, but nothing could be further from the truth, Armstrong said.

"There were no personal decisions made to ban the circus," Armstrong said. "Last year, we discovered that MSU did not have a procedure governing the humane treatment of animals in its entertainment venues, although we did develop policies for the use of animals in our research, teaching and Extension programs throughout the rest of campus. At that time, we decided that it would be appropriate to have a procedure governing the humane treatment of animals in entertainment venues. We were unable to put the procedure in place in sufficient time to meet the deadline for scheduling required by the circus for this year. Local supporters of the circus then put out a press release inaccurately announcing that MSU had banned the circus from campus. Animal rights groups touted their success in forcing the university to ban circuses from campus."

Since then, the university has begun to require all third-parties who contract for the use of MSU facilities to fill out paperwork required by the contract. It basically requires that the third-party have a veterinarian present at the event or a written plan for "appropriate and timely veterinary care during the event for any animal utilized at the event." The

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third-party must also furnish evidence of routine veterinary care of the animals.

If the Royal Hanneford Circus agrees with those terms and signs the contract, Armstrong said, it will be back on the MSU campus.

“In fact,” he said, “MSU has not banned circuses or any other animal acts in its entertainment venues on campus. Why would MSU go to the trouble of developing a procedure governing the humane treatment of animals in entertainment venues if this practice was planned to be banned?”

Despite the university’s explanation, the SPAR group organized a protest the morning of the board meeting, in opposition to a proposed ‘animal care’ policy.

Citing support from “Michigan punk rocker Iggy Pop,” the SPAR group said on its Web site “Neither us, nor this issue will go away. The circus will go away.”

In Pop’s letter to the board of trustees, he proved his ignorance of animals and the people who care for them, said Ernie Birchmeier, livestock specialist with Michigan Farm Bureau. Pop’s letter said, in part:

“As students who are concerned about animal welfare have told you, performing animals are deprived of everything that is natural to them, including the ability to roam, forage and form families and friendships.” The letter was written on behalf of People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals, according to SPAR’s Web site.

“Mr. Pop, as is the case with most extremist animal rights groups, doesn’t have the slightest idea what he’s talking about,” Birchmeier said. “No one in the farming community who I know would stop anyone in this world from a right to his or her personal beliefs. But they don’t have the right to impose those beliefs on people just because they disagree with them. We believe that MSU’s position on animal entertainment venues is appropriate and sets a strict, moral and legal standard for animal care. This issue has been blown way out of proportion by a group that has used misinformation to promote its agenda. We applaud the university’s decision to continue to do what’s right. For too long, our society has caved in to groups with agendas that would take rights away from anyone who doesn’t follow their line of thinking. It’s time everyone steps back from their emotions and remembers that these are animals. Proper, humane and intelligent care is part of the commitment made by expert, educated and compassionate individuals who work with animals every day, and they don’t need to crumble in the face of opposition from misguided people who feel a need to find an axe to grind. It’s time people in our society took a good dose of common sense and started to face reality instead of letting emotions and other people’s beliefs dictate their attitudes and agendas. We thank MSU leadership for clearing up this divisive issue, and for doing the right thing.”

The spring 2009 edition of FB Update, MFB’s quarterly video newsletter, is on the Web at www.michfb.com/video. This edition is dedicated to animal welfare issues.

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Spartan trifecta!

Michigan Farm Bureau awards scholarships to three MSU students

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LANSING, April 24, 2009 — For the first time in the program's history, Michigan Farm Bureau (MFB) has selected three recipients for its 2009 Marge Karker Scholarship: Emily Ries of Lenawee County, Brenda Sisung of Clinton County, and Julie Thelen of Washtenaw County. Each will receive a \$1,000 scholarship to apply toward her tuition at Michigan State University (MSU).

MFB's annual Marge Karker Scholarship has historically gone to a student enrolled in a two-year, agriculture-related program at MSU. This year the MFB Scholarship Committee expanded the program to award three recipients, and also opened it to students in four-year and graduate programs.

Ries, daughter of Richard and Linda Ries of Sand Creek, is a junior majoring in agriculture and natural resources communications. In addition to making the dean's list every semester at MSU, she is extensively involved in student leadership roles with the College of Agriculture and Natural Resources.

After college Ries aims to work with an organization that supports Michigan agriculture.

"I will serve the agricultural industry as a dedicated individual offering my time and abilities," Ries said. "I also plan to continue farming with my family, and remain involved with organizations such as Farm Bureau, the National FFA Alumni Association and the Michigan Corn Growers' Association."

Sisung, daughter of Donald and Jane Sisung of St. Johns, is a sophomore pursuing an animal science degree. Her interest in agriculture is evident through her long-term involvement in 4-H, the Michigan Shorthorn Association and MSU's Block and Bridle program.

Following her graduation she intends to pursue an agricultural career in swine and cattle breeding and genetics.

"I see myself involved in agriculture both in my job and during my everyday life," said Sisung, who looks forward to a lifetime of agricultural education, promotion and advocacy.

Thelen, daughter of Steven and Nancy Thelen of Saline, is a senior who will graduate this spring with degrees in agriscience education and animal science, along with a teaching minor in biology. A long list of service to agricultural organizations, from the Saline Lamb Club to the Michigan Angus Association Board of Directors, testifies to her commitment to agriculture.

Thelen intends to complete a post-graduate certificate program to further her education, with the goal of teaching agriscience and biology.

"I know I will always be involved in agriculture," Thelen said. "My future is in agriscience education, promoting and encouraging the leaders of tomorrow."

Marge Karker Scholarship recipients are selected based on criteria such as academic performance, extracurricular achievement, leadership experience, and written references from academic faculty and administrators. Eligible applicants must be enrolled in an agriculture-related program.

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Michigan's young farmers optimistic despite challenges

LANSING, April 24, 2009 — Though confronted by numerous challenges, Michigan's young farmers remain optimistic about agriculture and believe they are better off than they were five years ago.

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Surveyed at the 2009 Michigan Farm Bureau (MFB) Young Farmer Leaders' Conference, Michigan's young farmers age 18-35 generally share the attitudes of young farmers and ranchers across America, who were surveyed for the 17th year by the American Farm Bureau Federation.

Michigan's young farmers have a slightly different view of their greatest challenges, however. While the national survey showed availability of land was the top concern of America's farmers and ranchers, it ranked second in Michigan behind animal welfare issues. Fifty-five of the 246 Michigan young farmers who answered the question listed animal welfare challenges among their top three concerns, while 48 said availability of land was among their top three.

"Michigan's young farmers are committed wholeheartedly to the welfare of their livestock, but pressure from groups outside agriculture that seek to impose costly, inefficient practices on them are a real concern," said Lori Chamberlain, manager of MFB's Young Farmer department. "I think many young farmers are just as frustrated as their older counterparts when laws are made that don't make sense. In many cases those laws have the potential to harm animals more than they help them, and at the same time they damage the ability of farmers to raise their animals in safe, scientifically valid conditions for the good of the food-consuming public."

Prices

Though prices for many farm products have fallen sharply since last year and the USDA is forecasting a 20 percent decline in farm income this year, most of America's young farmers surveyed expressed optimism about their profession. Nearly half (48 percent) said they were more optimistic than five years ago, while just 20 percent said they were less optimistic and 32 percent said their level of optimism was the same.

Of 207 Michigan young farmers who answered the question, 130 said they are better off than they were five years ago. Seventy-seven said they were worse off. Of 229 young Michigan farmers who answered a question about their optimism level compared to five years ago or longer, 120 said they were more optimistic, 68 said they were less optimistic, and 41 said their optimism is the same.

"We're facing very challenging times this year," said AFBF Young Farmer and Rancher Committee Chair Mathew Meals, a first-generation crop farmer from Newville, Pa. "In good times as well as bad, optimism is the No. 1 job requirement for being a successful farmer and rancher. Farming has always been a difficult and challenging business, but most of us wouldn't trade it for any job in the world."

Life-Long Farmers

The survey also shows that 92 percent of the young American farmers and ranchers see themselves as life-long farmers. An even larger group of young farmers – 96 percent – say they would like to see their children follow in their footsteps. The national survey shows that 80 percent believe their children will be able to follow in their footsteps.

Michigan's young farmers reported similar attitudes. Of 261 who answered the question, 244 see themselves as life-long farmers, and of 235 who answered, 228 said they'd like to see their children follow in their footsteps.

"It wasn't long ago that the common perception in rural America was that farmers were telling their children to find an easier life," Chamberlain said. "But when today's young farming parents encourage their children to stay in

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agriculture, it shows that they understand the value of being independent, and of carving out a professional niche that very few people in Michigan or America would dare tackle.”

Environmentalists?

The survey also shows that America's farmers and ranchers are strong environmental stewards, with 65 percent saying balancing environmental concerns with economic concerns is crucial to their operations. In Michigan, of 121 young farmers who answered the question, 62 said they balance both environmental and economic concerns, but emphasize economics; while 27 said their emphasis is on the environment.

The national survey participants said they also use a number of management practices to increase conservation and environmental stewardship on their farms. Conservation tillage ranked highest on the list, with 54 percent of those surveyed using the production practice. Soil and tissue analysis was also important, with 52 percent employing it. The practices listed most often by Michigan young farmers surveyed were crop rotation, conservation tillage, soil and tissue analysis and IPM/field scouting.

Also, 55 percent of the national survey respondents said they do not plan to plant biotech crops this year while 45 percent say they will plant biotech crops. In Michigan, of 116 people who answered the question, 74 said they will not plant biotech crop varieties in the next two years. Forty-two said they will.

On-Line Farmers

The Internet was also vital to survey participants, with 100 percent of those surveyed nationally saying they have access to and use the Internet for their operations. In Michigan, 247 out of 248 said they have Internet access. The greatest use for the technology was research, followed by searching for general agricultural news.

High-speed Internet is used by 64 percent of those surveyed nationally, while 221 of Michigan respondents said they use high-speed cable, satellite or DSL connections. Only 19 said they are limited to slower dial-up service.

Overall, Chamberlain said, the results are encouraging for the future of Michigan's agriculture industry.

“If these young farmers can remain upbeat during one of the worst economic times in our nation's history, that shows a certain determination, a dedication to their work and a spirit that won't be easily broken,” she said.