



WHERE DOES YOUR FOOD ORIGINATE?

Why, the grocery store, of course! If you're involved in production agriculture, that answer might sound amusing. The reality is, however, that a growing number of people in our nation have a disconnect with agriculture. In many Nebraska families, the last farmer or rancher may have been a grandparent or a great grandparent. And with the passing of time, our population's knowledge of American agriculture is almost gone.

In this issue of *Trailhead*, you will discover how one Farmers Ranchers Co-op

family is working to close that information gap through the Nebraska Ag in the Classroom program. Kerry and Anita Keys of Elsmere, NE, are actively engaged with a classroom of children, helping the next generation better understand production agriculture. Our way of life is not to be taken for granted. The Keys are making sure people know that our food has a history long before it is placed in the grocery store aisle.

Also in this issue, we welcome our newest associate director, Julie Rau Ruhter. Julie's family has been part of the Sandhills

MANAGER'S MOMENT

By Kent Taylor
President & CEO
ktaylor@frcoop.com

area for generations. We are excited to have her input and perspective on the board of directors.

Farmers Ranchers Cooperative: It is your business, and together we feed, fuel, and clothe the world. Not a bad way to live, and a great story to pass on! ■

BRIDGING THE AG GAP WITH KIDS

The question was one of several that came in a handwritten letter from a fourth-grade student at Maxey Elementary School in Lincoln, NE. "Where do the cows and the cattle sleep at night?" The young girl finished her letter with a plea: "I hope you answer these questions."

That type of letter is typically received by Kerry and Anita Keys at their ranch near

Elsmere, NE. And yes, Anita did answer the young girl's questions, plus the many others that came from the class after she paid a personal visit to the school over 270 miles away. The classroom visit and correspondence are all part of the Keys' involvement in the Nebraska Ag in the Classroom Ag Pen Pal program.

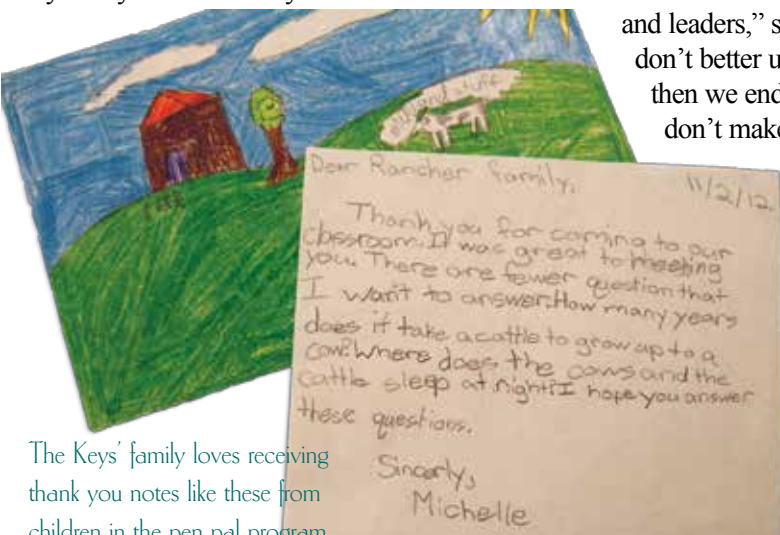
"These kids are our future legislators and leaders," says Anita. "If they don't better understand agriculture, then we end up with laws that don't make sense." They are also future consumers.

"This is a good age group to reach," she explains. "There are misconceptions about agriculture. We have a safe food supply which, at times, we take for granted. When I show a picture of a cow in

a pasture, I share that the cow is the protein that helps feed the world."

The Keys have been an Ag in the Classroom Ranch Family for about eight years, partnering with classrooms in Lincoln and Omaha. Participating farm or ranch families can request school locations—either urban or rural—and the preferred age-range of students. They are then paired with a classroom whose teacher has signed up to be part of the program.

"I send an introductory letter to the classroom in the fall explaining about our family—including grown daughters Stacey and Amanda—where we live and what we do," says Anita. She includes information and photographs that make their story come to life—deer in their yard, baling hay, working cattle. The remoteness of the Keys' ranch—50 miles from the nearest town—also captures the students' attention. "I try to make them feel like they've been here," she says.



The Keys' family loves receiving thank you notes like these from children in the pen pal program.

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Families are asked to write to the classrooms and send photographs at least three times a year. “A lot of that correspondence is now done by e-mail,” she explains, “and so it’s easy to do.” While not required, she tries to visit the classroom once a year, showing a Power Point presentation and taking Ag in the Classroom resources and beef jerky to share. The students also write back to the Keys. “I love reading those letters,” says Anita. “It’s amazing the different things they pick up.”

Anita encourages other farm and ranch families to become involved in the pen pal program. “You don’t have to have an education background, and any member of your family can participate,” she says, explaining that the couple’s youngest daughter, Amanda, visited the classroom with her mother when she was attending the University of Nebraska-Lincoln. And, she says, if your child or grandchild is a teacher, you might want to suggest they look into becoming part of the Ag in the Classroom program. “As a society, we live further and further away from the farm,” says Anita. “We’re trying to bridge that gap. With this program, you truly feel like you’re making a difference.” ■



Anita and Kerry Keys love partnering with Nebraska classrooms.

Find out more about the Nebraska Ag in the Classroom Ag Pen Pal program. Go to nefb.org, click the Foundation tab, Programs, and then Ag Pen Pals, or contact Courtney Schardt at 402-421-4461, courtneys@nefb.org.

VALENTINE WELCOME!

By Rocky Sheehan, Feed Division Manager,
rsheehan@frcoop.com

Farmers Ranchers Co-op welcomes April Wester as the new Valentine Feed Store manager. April comes with 18 years of retail experience with Big R Standard Supply, along with a penchant for good customer service, leadership, and a background in animal nutrition and health. April replaces Jackie Lurz, who is transitioning to a sales position to accommodate growth in the Farmers Ranchers Co-op Feed Division. Stop in and greet April and watch for a profile in an upcoming issue of *Trailhead*.



Boosting Calf Creep

Farmers Ranchers Co-op has changed its Calf Creep to better serve our customers’ cattle needs. We have increased the protein level in the creep from 14% to 16% and added Diamond V® Original XPC™, a yeast that aids in gut health at stressful times like weaning. We’re also adding the yeast to our Stocker Starter weaning feed.

Battling the fall fly problem

Flies only seem to get worse in late summer and early fall, but we can help. Ask us to add fly control products to your cattle’s mineral. We have a range of options: Altosid® IGR (insect growth regulator) for horn flies; Rabon™ 7.76 and ClariFly® help prevent the development of horn flies, face flies, house flies, and stable flies. ■

A LONG HONORABLE WALK

On regular days, Chad Lower is busy working at the Feed Mill in Ainsworth, but on two days this past July, he was on another mission. This former U.S. Marine set out on a 45-mile hike to pay tribute to his son, Kolton, who was in Marine recruit training in San Diego. His hike was timed to coincide with Kolton’s Crucible, the 54-hour test every recruit must go through that includes food and sleep deprivation and over 45 miles of marching.

Chad, his oldest son Kyler, and fellow Feed Mill employee Roger Prewett, started off on the Cowboy Trail at Ainsworth at 4 a.m. on July 21. By 1 p.m. the trio had walked 20 miles. They took the next day off before starting again on July 23 and reaching Valentine, the 45-mile-mark.

“This country has forgotten the sacrifices these young men and women make; the physical and mental pain they go through,” says Chad. “We can show them that we appreciate what they’re doing for us.” As the Marines would say, “Ooh Rah!” ■

R7[®] TOOL CAN PAY IN YIELDS

By Justin Nelson, Agronomy Division Manager,
jnelson@frcoop.com

With lower commodity prices, convincing producers to invest in a technology that adds to a farmer's per acre cost can be challenging. However, it's during times like this when precision agronomy technology, like Winfield's R7[®] Tool, is most needed.

The only way to combat a lower commodity price is to have higher yields. Farmers can sign up acres with the R7 Tool and receive satellite maps and imagery that zero in on high risk zones in a field. Once identified, we can go to that specific area, determine the problem, and then address it to minimize yield loss. This year, for example, we're seeing a lot of disease pressure. The R7 Tool allows us to pinpoint those areas and see if a fungicide treatment will minimize that risk.

Ron Heerten is one of our farmers utilizing the R7 Tool. "I don't see saving any dollars' worth of inputs through the program, but we can now put those dollars where they'll turn better for us," says Ron. "We identified some high risk zones in some of the fields, and we've done soil sampling and variable rate fertilizer application and things look tremendous at this point. The truth will be when we go through with the combine, but at this point, I'm enthused about what we expect to find."

What about the added costs of the program? "I would recommend farmers try it out on a field or two first and see if it makes a difference," suggests Ron. "If it works, you can expand the acres involved." If you'd like to know how the R7 Tool technology can help you increase yields, contact Jeff Dolberg, our precision agronomy specialist, at 402-760-1509.



Precision Agronomy Specialist Jeff Dolberg reviews field mapping imagery that can help increase yields.

Seed discounts and treatment

Planning ahead for your 2016 seed needs can make a difference in your costs. Farmers Ranchers Co-op will provide extra savings with an early reservation agreement available into early fall. For more information, contact Mark Ewert or Jeff Dolberg.

Farmers Ranchers Co-op has a wide selection of fall grass seed and seed treatment to help your winter wheat or rye get a good start. We're also ready to handle all of your fall fertilization needs. Contact the Agronomy Center at 402-387-2323.

Saying 'Thank you'

Your Agronomy Division has had a good year, and we will be hosting a Customer Appreciation Event. Watch for an invitation in the mail. ■



Matt Moody is our new appliance service technician.

MEET MATT MOODY

Matt Moody has come full circle. As an Ainsworth High School senior, Matt worked under Farmers Ranchers Co-op's Wes Luther in 1986 through the COE (Cooperative Occupation Education) program. After 29 years, he's back again working with Wes, only this time as the co-op's new appliance technician at the Appliance Store.

Following high school, Matt graduated from Southeast Community College in Milford in heating and air conditioning. He came back and worked for Farmers Ranchers for a short time before deciding to farm and work in welding. In 2000, Matt set up his own repair shop, Moody Repair. He decided to sell the shop to Farmers Ranchers, which will use

it for its own truck repair, and take a job that won't be quite so physically demanding.

Matt has attended the first CETP (Certified Employee Training Program) at the Propane Training Lab at the Hasting Community College and is handling the general appliance repair, delivery, and hookup of appliances. He says he enjoys meeting the customers and is looking forward to having a little more free time on nights and weekends now that he's not running his own business. He and his wife, Deb, who works at the USDA office in Ainsworth, have a daughter attending the University of Nebraska at Kearney. Welcome back, Matt! ■

INSIDE

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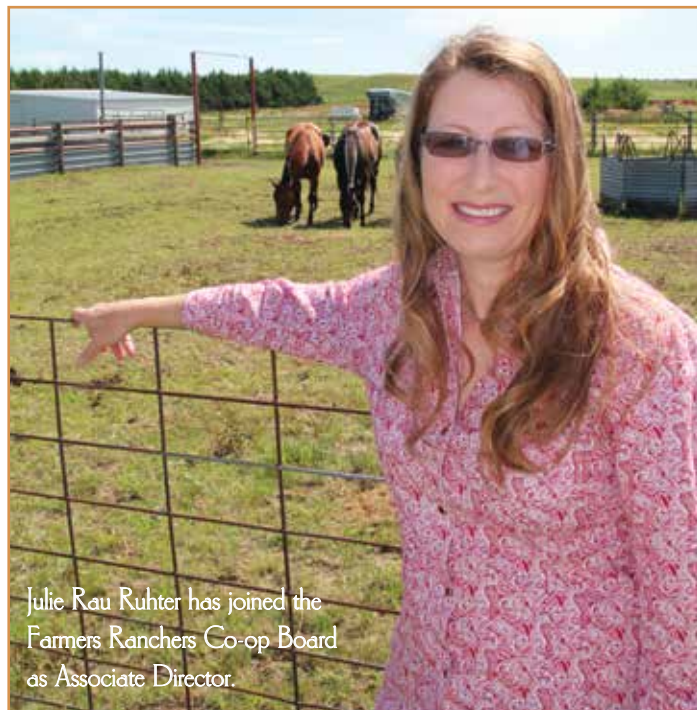
TIME TO GIVE BACK

A few months ago, Julie Rau Ruhter received a call from Farmers Ranchers Co-op President Kent Taylor. Would she consider serving as an associate director on the co-op's board? "I thought about it for a while," recalls Julie. After all, with two young children, a part-time job, and helping husband Tony on the ranch, time becomes a precious commodity. And yet, she felt called to accept.

"My parents and grandparents have always purchased from the cooperative, and we now buy feed, fuel, tires, and appliances," says Julie. "A lot of small towns are losing their co-ops, and I can't imagine not having our cooperative here. I felt honored to be asked and want to give back. I also know that you gain so much more knowledge from serving than you can offer back."

Julie's first board meeting was in June. As an associate, she cannot vote in meetings but can fully participate in discussions. This fourth generation rancher brings experience and a unique perspective to the table. Following graduation from the University of Nebraska-Lincoln with a degree in Animal Science, she worked for the Nebraska Corn Fed Beef branded beef program. She also worked for Platte Valley Feedyard before returning to Ainsworth in 2006, where she was employed by Micro Beef Technologies. Today she is a contract auditor for IMI Global. In that capacity, she travels Nebraska and parts of South Dakota, auditing ranches and feed yards as part of the USDA-approved Non-hormone Treated Cattle (NHTC) program.

"I bring our own ranching experience combined with what I've learned from all of the different ranchers I've dealt with over the years," says Julie. She is also a graduate of the Nebraska LEAD Program, a two-year leadership development program for Nebraskans involved in agriculture.



Julie Rau Ruhter has joined the Farmers Ranchers Co-op Board as Associate Director.

Today, Julie and Tony, who hails from Prosser, NE, and their sons, 4-year-old Buck and 21-month-old Ty, live in the house where Julie grew up—on the ranch south of Ainsworth. They lease the ranch from her parents, Doug and Judy Rau, and run a cow/calf commercial Black Angus herd. It's right where the couple wants to be.

"Our boys are the fifth generation on this ranch, so we're tickled that we have that opportunity to give them this experience," says Julie. "Hopefully they'll decide to come back here, too, but even if they don't, I can't think of a better way to raise them."

If their sons do decide to follow in the ranching footsteps, she'd like to make sure the cooperative is here to serve them. "It's such a valuable business for this area," insists Julie. "I just can't imagine not having that asset." ■