

LEADER

FARM CREDIT OF THE VIRGINIAS

FALL 2021



Photo by Lacy W. - Marion County, WV

MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT

LEADER

is published quarterly for stockholders, directors and friends of Farm Credit of the Virginias.

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Brad Cornelius

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Farm Credit of the Virginias furnishes data to credit reporting agencies. The Association's reporting efforts are important for aiding consumers in obtaining credit, assisting businesses in credit approval, providing consumers with timely and accurate personal credit information, reducing fraud and abuse, helping prevent identity theft, and minimizing errors in credit reporting. If you have questions regarding this process, please contact our Credit Desk at 540.886.3435 ext. 5224.

FINANCIAL REPORTS

Address changes, questions, comments or requests for copies of our financial reports should be directed to Farm Credit of the Virginias, ACA, by writing P.O. Box 899, Staunton, VA 24402 or calling 800.919.3276.

Our annual and quarterly financial reports can also be obtained by visiting our website at FarmCreditofVirginias.com.

As we enter the fall season, our rural communities are once again faced with uncertainty surrounding the COVID-19 virus, and now, the implications of its' variants. While we navigate the shared uncertainty, one thing you can be confident in is our continued commitment to protect our team and valued customer-owners. We're prepared to adjust our services, if needed, as we've done in the past, to safely serve you. The well-being and health of our rural community members is key. That being said, the financial health of our customer-owners is also of great importance to us. Rest assured, we'll be here for you, in more ways than one, just as we have for more than a century.

I am pleased to report that despite the ongoing uncertainty, Farm Credit of the Virginias continues to achieve strong financial results. As of June 30, 2021, the loan volume for the association totaled \$1.96 billion, a \$90.7 million increase compared to loan volume at the conclusion of 2020. The growth can be attributed to an increase in real estate mortgage loans, in addition to the efforts of our dedicated team

members who continue to take pride in effectively serving the needs of our members and prospects.

One way you can help our association maintain its' strength is by voting in the annual director election, which will take place in October. All our customer-owners are eligible to vote for all the seats up for election this year. While we nominate candidates by region, our elections include our whole customer base to ensure that our members have a voice in every board seat, not just their local seat. Taking part in your board of directors' elections is one of the many benefits of belonging to a cooperative.

You can also continue to help strengthen our cooperative by referring new business. Your referrals go a long way in growing and diversifying our portfolio which contributes to our financial strength. Your referrals communicate your trust and confidence in our association, and we do



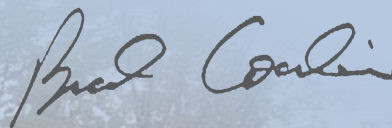
not take that lightly. Please continue to visit our website to submit your referrals. We'll ship you a YETI tumbler for your recommendation and support of the cooperative.

As a gesture of our continued appreciation, we hosted our first-ever Farm Credit Dairy Days events this past summer. If you weren't able to join us, we hosted 22 events across our footprint that spanned the months of June and July. The ice cream social-style functions were organized to celebrate our membership, the reopening of our offices and the dairy industry. We think these fun and delicious events hit the mark! Furthermore, as the cherry on top, we will donate \$23,500 to organizations in our tristate territory that provide support for the dairy industry on behalf of our membership! Get the full scoop on Farm Credit Dairy Days on page 9.

The Farm Credit Knowledge Center

continues to serve as a value-added offering for our customer-owners and rural community members. The Knowledge Center team engages our constituents with monthly newsletters, educational industry webinars and an expansive online archive of digital resources which range in subject matter, including agricultural tips and best practices, business planning, advocacy efforts, personal finance and more. You can help strengthen the efforts of our Knowledge Center by providing input on our current resources and future offerings. Learn more about the Knowledge Center's newest on-demand educational offering, the AgHub Portal, on page 19.

In closing, I would like to once again thank you for your continued partnership and reiterate that you can count on Farm Credit. We're committed to being here for you, through good times and bad. Lastly, I'd like to wish each of you a blessed fall. May it be filled with family, good harvest and all the things you cherish.



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Photo by Andrew H. - Doddridge County, WV

ASSOCIATION NEWS



ATTENTION
VOTING STOCKHOLDERS:

WATCH YOUR MAILBOX

Your Director Election Ballot should be arriving soon. Don't miss your opportunity to be heard. **Vote!**



FARM CREDIT

FarmCreditofVirginias.com

Holiday Schedule

Offices will be closed on the following days:

October 11	Columbus Day (Monday)
November 11	Veteran's Day (Thursday)
November 25 & 26	Thanksgiving (Thursday & Friday)
December 24 & 27	Christmas Observed (Friday & Monday)

Photo by Jennifer. H - Fairfax County, VA

Phishing and Cybersecurity— STAY VIGILANT!

It's not uncommon to receive an unsolicited phone call or email on the daily about your car's extended warranty or congratulating you on winning a prize you didn't sign up for. Farm Credit of the Virginias wants to remind you that we will never send you an unsolicited communication (email, text or phone call) asking for your loan number, AccountAccess password, or any other personal information.

If you receive any correspondence asking for this information, do not provide it and contact us immediately at 800-919-FARM or by email, info@fcvirginias.com. You can find more information regarding our privacy and security policies and practices on the Farm Credit of the Virginias website.

Things to Look Out For

- Farm Credit customers with mortgages should be wary of official-looking mail documentation from companies posing as Farm Credit that includes messaging such as “we have been trying to reach you regarding a matter of importance related to your mortgage”. Look closely and you will likely find a small disclaimer indicating they are “not affiliated with or endorsed by any bank or lending institution”.
- Scam artists may send text messages mentioning your loan at FARM CREDIT OF THE VIRGINIAS ACA and provide the link for a report. Never click on hyperlinks. Instead, type them into a web browser so that you can verify you are going to a valid, official site.
- Never open an email attachment that you are not expecting and do not attempt to open an attachment with a file extension that you are unfamiliar with.
- Be very suspicious when you do not expect an email from someone, even if the party appears to be legit.

How Does this Happen?

When a loan or mortgage closes, it goes on public record. Illegitimate businesses then have access to a consumer's address and information, such as the name of your mortgage lender. These businesses then send solicitation posing as your recent lender, leading some homeowners to believe it is a necessary business communication. This deceptive, predatory marketing is disguised and presented to look real and may cause a sense of urgency, when in fact the opposite is true.

Remember to never provide personal financial information over the phone or the internet if you did not initiate the contact. If you are suspicious of a fraudulent communication, always contact Farm Credit of the Virginias first so we can help you separate fact from fraud.



STATE FAIR OF VIRGINIA CELEBRATES COMPLETION OF FARM CREDIT PAVILION

A socially distanced crowd gathered at The Meadow Event Park in Caroline County, Virginia in May to participate in a special ribbon-cutting ceremony. The Farm Credit Pavilion had just been completed, which serves as a modern livestock facility built in partnership with the State Fair of Virginia and the three Farm Credit associations serving Virginia—Colonial Farm Credit, MidAtlantic Farm Credit and Farm Credit of the Virginias.



The 42,000-square-foot Farm Credit Pavilion is partially enclosed and includes 675 square feet of climate-controlled offices and restrooms. The building will be available year-round to hold ag-related events and activities for the community, including opportunities for youth to engage and compete.

Many folks from around the state gathered in celebration. The crowd included representatives from the Virginia Farm Bureau, Farm Credit and the State Fair of Virginia, as well as Bettina Ring, Virginia Secretary of Agriculture and Forestry.

Marlene Jolliffe, Executive Director for the State Fair of Virginia and Vice President of Operations for The Meadow Event Park, said, "We have big plans for the Farm Credit Pavilion.

This new facility has absolutely been worth the wait, and it will enhance The Meadow Event Park's ability to host numerous agricultural events, particularly youth-oriented events like those at the State Fair. We look forward to partnering with Farm Credit to support Virginia agriculture's next generation."

Brad Cornelius, CEO of Farm Credit of the Virginias, added, "The State Fair of Virginia is a staple to the Virginia agricultural community. We are pleased to support the fair and fund the construction of a new youth livestock facility. The Farm Credit pavilion is sure to encourage and enrich youth agricultural participation, both at the annual state fair and at various agricultural events throughout the year."



EQUIPMENT PURCHASE IN YOUR FUTURE?

*You've picked out the perfect piece of equipment you need for your operation. You can picture what it looks like in your fields, how it's going to make your farm more efficient and your life a little easier. There is only one question left – how are you going to pay for it? Will you finance it through a dealer program? Get a loan or lease from Farm Credit **EXPRESS**? Pay cash? Let's look at the options and what you should consider before making a decision.*

Pay Cash

Think in terms of your total financial picture before you dig into your pockets for a cash equipment purchase. While it sounds enticing to get a discount on the equipment, not have payments, and avoiding paying interest, it may not be the best option in the long run. First, make sure your revolving lines of credit are paid to zero. If they are not, you're actually financing equipment on the revolving line, which is never a good long-term solution. Second, make sure you have adequate cash reserves and liquidity to run your business and take advantage of opportunities like cash discounts for inputs. Finally, if you owe money on other loans, you may be able to get the equipment loan at a lower rate and use your cash to pay down or pay off higher rate loans.

Dealer/Manufacturer Provided Loans

Equipment companies learned a long time ago that they sell more equipment by making the process easy and offering "low interest rate" financing. Zero interest rate loans have become a selling tool in equipment and automotive finance. But, are they really 0%? The stated interest rate in the contract is 0% but put simply, dealers and manufacturers have to make money somewhere so financing is seldom what it appears. Be sure to ask what the price would be if you paid cash or did not use dealer/manufacturer financing. Unless the price is the same either way, you're essentially paying a pre-paid finance charge equal to the difference. The real effective interest rate caused by the hidden, prepaid finance charge can end up quite high if the loan is paid off early. Make sure you ask questions and understand the terms. Dealer provided financing can be a great option to consider and may be an inexpensive way to acquire equipment—but it isn't always the best.

Farm Credit **EXPRESS**

Our specialized equipment financing program, Farm Credit **EXPRESS**, is offered at over 1,200 dealership locations in the southeastern region. Your dealer handles the entire transaction and it is just as simple as dealer financing. For the dealer, it is the same as a cash purchase so you get the same discounts or free upgrades as if you paid cash. All loans have fixed interest rates with monthly, quarterly, semi-annual or annual payments. Farm Credit **EXPRESS** loans are eligible for our Patronage Refund, which returns a portion of your yearly paid interest, as long as your account remains in good standing. New equipment and used equipment less than 10 years old may qualify for 0% down payment and up to a 7-year term. Used equipment less than 25 years old may qualify for a 10% down payment and up to a 7-year term. Used equipment from 25-45 years old may qualify for a 15% down payment and up to a 3-year term.

Leasing

Historically, leasing was used as a tool to manage income taxes. There are other reasons why leasing can be a good tool to meet your equipment needs, though. Simply put, leasing transfers the ownership risks to someone else. If you need equipment that's atypical or uncommon in your area, in circumstances where the latest and greatest technology evolves rapidly, or if you want to keep relatively new equipment at all times, leasing can be a good option. It also typically avoids using cash to make a down payment and features lower payments when compared to financing the full cost of the equipment. On the negative side, total cost of leasing tends to be more expensive than owning because you're paying a premium for someone else to take on the ownership risk. Because of this, the process and paperwork also tends to be a bit more complex. Make sure you understand all of the terms of the lease—especially hour/mileage limitations, excess wear penalties and the residual purchase amount. If you're considering leasing, speak with your accountant to ensure the agreement is properly structured to work best with your situation.

This all seems like a lot to consider but you can keep it simple by following these three steps:

1. Ask the right questions, and lots of them. Be sure you understand what the terms are.
2. Consider all of the options and compare the total cost of acquiring the equipment.
3. Choose the best option for you. Remember — the cheapest total cost to acquire the equipment is usually best BUT only if:
 - a. Paying cash doesn't leave you owing a balance on your revolving line of credit and you still have adequate cash reserves and liquidity.
 - b. The cheap interest rate and lower interest cost that comes with shorter loan terms is manageable without creating a cash flow crunch during the life of the loan.

Whether you farm full-time or part-time, you'll likely need to purchase equipment at some point. When you get to that point, remember that you may be eligible for Farm Credit and Farm Credit **EXPRESS** loans. The program is available for almost any type of farm equipment including tractors, combines, forage harvesters, trailers, farm implements and even commercial equipment like excavators and loaders for farm use. Whatever you are buying, ask your dealer for financing through Farm Credit **EXPRESS**. Visit www.farmcreditepress.com for more information including a list of all participating dealers.





AG IN THE COMMUNITY

AGRICULTURE NIGHT at Calfee Park

Farm Credit employees from the Wytheville branch joined the Pukaski River Turtles in July for a special evening honoring those involved in Agriculture. Calfee Park in Pulaski, VA hosts an Agriculture Night each summer to celebrate the agricultural heritage of the region. Farm Credit was on scene to distribute t-shirts and other goodies for those in attendance.



WV DAIRY DAY at Power Park

Chief Financial Office Justin Weekley threw out the first pitch at the West Virginia Department of Agriculture's Dairy Day at Power Park in Charleston, WV this June! Employees from the Ripley branch also attended, providing a booth and kid-friendly dairy activities.



DAIRY DAYS WERE A DELIGHT!



Our branch offices spent the months of June and July – National Dairy Month and National Ice Cream Month – planning and executing our first ever Farm Credit Dairy Days. We hope you were able to join us! Thank you to each of our 2,392 customers and friends of Farm Credit who came out for a cool treat. The events were intended to celebrate summer and the return of our

customers back to our offices, but we also wanted to use the event to recognize and support a critical industry that Farm Credit serves, our friends the dairy farmers. It is because of our customer support that the events were a success and are the reason we are donating \$23,500 dollars to organizations in VA, WV and MD who provide advocacy and promotion of the dairy industry.



If you weren't able to join us for Dairy Days, you can still partake in one of our sweet treats. Cut out the coupons below; use one for yourself on your next new loan and share the other with a friend!

A SCOOP FOR YOU!

Present
this coupon
to receive

\$500

off loan
origination fees.*

Terms & Conditions:

1. Coupon must be submitted at time application.
2. Minimum loan of \$100,000.
3. Limited time offer. Must present coupon with application by 12/31/2021.
4. Not eligible for consumer loans, Farm Credit **EXPRESS** transactions, or refinance of current FCV loan.
5. This is not a commitment to lend.
6. One coupon per customer.

Coupon has no monetary or refundable credit and cannot be used to make loan or crop insurance payments.



FARM CREDIT

*Subject to credit approval, verification, and collateral evaluation. Must meet regulatory eligibility and scope guidelines. Valid in all Farm Credit of the Virginias, ACA offices (VA, WV, and MD). Farm Credit of the Virginias, ACA reserves the right to discontinue this offering anytime at our discretion.

A SCOOP FOR A FRIEND!

Present
this coupon
to receive

\$500

off loan
origination fees.*

Terms & Conditions:

1. Coupon must be submitted at time application.
2. Minimum loan of \$100,000.
3. Limited time offer. Must present coupon with application by 12/31/2021.
4. Not eligible for consumer loans, Farm Credit **EXPRESS** transactions, or refinance of current FCV loan.
5. This is not a commitment to lend.
6. One coupon per customer.

Coupon has no monetary or refundable credit and cannot be used to make loan or crop insurance payments.



FARM CREDIT

*Subject to credit approval, verification, and collateral evaluation. Must meet regulatory eligibility and scope guidelines. Valid in all Farm Credit of the Virginias, ACA offices (VA, WV, and MD). Farm Credit of the Virginias, ACA reserves the right to discontinue this offering anytime at our discretion.

INTERNS LEARNING AND LEAVING THEIR IMPRESSIONS WITHIN OUR FOOTPRINT



Harmony Harvest Farm



Reese's Farm Fresh Produce



Smithfield Farm



Lazy C Farm



Highland Dairy Farm

Each year, Farm Credit selects four to five college students to complete a summer internship. During this time, they work with their mentors and teams on projects in their respective fields, visit farms from various industries across the Farm Credit footprint, and culminate the summer with a final presentation. The four interns note that they had a “remarkable educational experience,” getting involved with Farm Credit projects this summer. Despite coming from all different areas of the FCV footprint, their passion for agriculture brought them together.

One of the unique things about the Farm Credit internship is the amount of hands-on projects the interns collaborate on and complete on their own. Through the Knowledge Center, Ivy Ward has contributed to installing the new educational portal, AgHub, on the Farm Credit website with Marie Rothwell, Knowledge Center Program Specialist. The educational portal will be valuable to farmers who are looking for additional resources in their industry.

Lauren Fifer and Kelly Irvine completed a case study together, which consisted of looking at a theoretical couple's credit, collateral, and reputation to determine whether they should receive the loan. Not only did this project put to the test what both lending interns learned over the summer, but also gave them a realistic example of what a Farm Credit loan officer does every day.

On the marketing side, it seemed like every

day there was a new project. Mikala Liptrap helped with Dairy Days at her local branches, distributed branch budgets, staffed events, and packaged new member gifts along with many other projects. Mikala noted that the marketing role serves Farm Credit employees so they can, in turn, best serve our customer base.

After many individual projects this summer, the interns tackled a revamp of the Farm Credit record book. The record book helps farmers keep track of their expenses and income in one central location. Although useful, there were aspects that could be modernized and updated. After a long summer of meetings, surveys, organizing and editing, the Farm Credit farm record book is complete and ready for printing. The interns also created a blog and a digital version of the record book and provided a how-to guide for customers to navigate the digital record book.

Along with the record book, the interns

also created an informational youth packet and gift for the youth loan program. They decided on a calendar barn sheet that can help the exhibitor keep accurate records, along with commonly used formulas with a Farm Credit clipboard. The clipboard also has the ability to hang in the barn, contains a storage compartment for receipts, and comes pre-loaded with Knowledge Center information.

Finally, farm tours with local operations are one of the staples of a Farm Credit internship. Farm Credit of the Virginias' large footprint provides many opportunities to expose the interns to our diverse array of agricultural industries. They began in Weyers Cave, Virginia at Harmony Harvest Farm and learned about the struggle and flourish of the cut flower business. After a few weeks of being in the office, they were back on the road and visited several diverse livestock operations including Smithfield Farms, Old Rich Valley Farm, and Highland Dairy in the Abingdon, Virginia area. Next, they were off to learn about the orchard business at Chile's Peach Orchard and Saunders Brothers Farm Market. Chile's not only let them pick blueberries, but also gave them ice cream and donuts! They wrapped up farm tours in Rocky Mount and South Boston, Virginia, where they learned about hydroponic farming at Four Oaks Farm, tobacco farming at the Comer operation, Lazy C Farms, and visited Mr. Donald Reese, FCV Board of Directors Chairman, at his local produce business, Reese's Farm Fresh Produce, to learn about the produce industry.

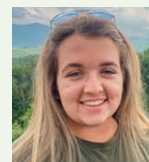


Ivy Ward

Barbour County, West Virginia

*Mentor: Kyle Clevenger
(Knowledge Center)*

Ivy is currently attending West Virginia State University with a major in Agriculture and Extension Education with minors in Journalism and Agricultural and Natural Resource Law. Ivy was heavily involved in FFA and 4-H throughout school and is a member of the Sigma Alpha Chapter at WVU. Ivy grew up on a beef cattle farm showing her livestock. In Ivy's spare time, she enjoys traveling, sunsets, and being with family and friends. This is Ivy's second year interning with Farm Credit and she is very grateful for the experience.



Kelly Irvine

Putnam County, West Virginia

*Mentor: Carrie Casto
(Lending)*

Kelly currently attends West Virginia University and is majoring in Agribusiness and has five minors in Food Science and Technology, Agriculture and Natural Resources Law, Communication Studies, Leadership Studies, and Public Relations. She grew up on her family's cattle and hay operation and was heavily involved in 4-H and FFA showing livestock. At WVU, Kelly is a member of the Sigma Alpha sorority chapter along with Gamma Sigma Delta.



Lauren Fifer

Augusta County, Virginia

*Mentors: Patti Craun and
Ashlie Howell (Lending)*

Lauren currently attends Virginia Tech and is majoring in Agribusiness with a minor in Animal and Poultry Sciences. She has an extensive agriculture background from growing up on her family row crop/poultry operation and participating in FFA at her high school. Lauren is involved in the local agricultural community which has been an advantage for her since interning at Farm Credit. In Lauren's spare time, she enjoys spending time with her family.



Mikala Liptrap

Augusta County, Virginia

*Mentor: Laura Staley
(Marketing)*

Mikala currently attends Virginia Tech and is majoring in Animal and Poultry Sciences. Growing up on her family's small beef cattle farm, she enjoyed showing and livestock judging. Her passion and background with agriculture helped give meaning and perspective to her work with Farm Credit. In Mikala's spare time, she enjoys spending time with family, friends, and hiking.



FOLLOWING IN THEIR DAUGHTERS' FOOTSTEPS



It all started when Staci and Rodney Carr's oldest two daughters got interested in 4H, joining their fellow peers in an early love of animals. They began taking steps into agriculture by buying, raising, showing and selling livestock animals, starting with rabbits and chickens because that's all the family's yard could support. By the time their youngest daughter was ready to join her sisters in the family passion, they were ready to take the plunge into production agriculture.

To be fair, Rodney had always wanted to farm, and both he and Staci have fond memories of their grandparents' farms. In fact, the backyard of the family's home was spread edge to edge with produce plots. With the further incentive of supporting their daughters' interest in livestock, the Carrs bought three acres with a barn in 2011. Rodney was also interested in the remaining acreage that the barn originally belonged to. In 2016 that acreage became available for purchase and with FCV financing, the couple founded and moved to Three Sisters Farm in Accident, Maryland, named in honor of their daughters, Sara (21), Emma (18) and Kyla (14).

"When we first started looking into financing, conventional banks told us that farmland didn't have a quantifiable value, and they wouldn't lend to us," says Rodney. "Farm Credit understands farmland and agriculture, and what we're trying to do. They give us the right knowledge and support, along with a very welcome dividend payment in the spring."

Today, Three Sisters is a 30-acre, diversified farm raising produce and livestock and selling through the year-round Mountain Fresh Farmers Market in Oakland, Maryland. They raise a full range of vegetables within several high tunnels — adding a fourth in 2021 — as well as on their acreage, which includes hay fields and a small apple, peach, plum and pear orchard.

"Following my grandfather's advice, we want to have a little bit of everything on the farm so we have diversity if something goes wrong with one crop or another, and we have something to harvest and sell all year," says Rodney.

Three Sisters' is also diversified on the livestock side: they manage a small herd of beef cattle, breeding based on genetic traits that will build the herd for the future. They are also building up a sheep herd from one ram and a dozen ewes, and they produce about 20 pigs each year. The 100-bird or so poultry flock includes chickens, ducks and turkeys. The Carrs strive to build strong herds and flocks that will produce quality young for years to come, both to provide flavorful, high-quality meat to their customers, and to support future generations of children with good genetics for their 4H and FFA projects.

"We take great pride in the production and quality of everything we do, including spending





extra for quality feed regimens and a specialized butcher,” says Staci.

The sisters of Three Sisters Farm didn’t just inspire their family’s farm, they work it. Sara focuses primarily on flower production and livestock, including improving herd genetics and numbers. Emma also works with the livestock, cut flowers, produce and farmers’ market. Kyla enjoys a little bit of everything, and is expected to thrive in the new farm stand the family is planning to add to the property.

Staci runs the farmers’ market, where she educates customers and advocates for agricultural producers while selling her family’s products. She also adds artistic touches from her background in retail display, and back home she oversees planting and harvesting. Rodney names himself founder, father, financier and farm hand, and also works a full-time off-farm job doing maintenance for the railroad, for which he travels Sunday through Thursday each week. Recently, that left Staci, the girls and son-in-law, Sean,



to rescue a cow delivering a breech calf. It took hours of effort, but when Rodney arrived home, they had saved both mother and baby.

The girls’ love of agriculture goes beyond their own pastures. In 2016, Sara was selected Farm Queen and wanted to use the platform to spread ag awareness. Her solution was an initiative to collect ag related toys and books to give to local children, distributing the gifts through organizations like Ronald McDonald House, Foster Appalachia and the Dove Center. When Emma was named Miss Garrett County Farm Bureau in 2020, she stepped up to manage the drive, now formalized as a family-founded and funded non-profit called “Tractors for Tots.” To date, the charity has collected and distributed more than 2,000 toys.

“Our hope is that one kid playing with a tractor or horse figurine or reading a book set on a farm will be inspired to join 4H or FFA, learn something about where their food comes from, or even think about a future in agriculture,” says



Staci. “It’s been gratifying that each year, more businesses and individuals step up to donate toys and help Tractors for Tots grow and educate more and more children about agriculture.”

As diversified as their operation already is, the Carr family isn’t finished by a long shot. In addition to the farm stand, they plan to add a greenhouse, watering systems and a grove of nut trees. They also continue to focus on making the most efficient use of land, keeping their maintenance costs low, and expanding and improving their equipment. Looking to the future, Rodney and Staci hope that their daughters will continue to play integral roles on the family farm as adults, though only time will tell.

“We want this farm to be multi-generational, something that carries on beyond our lives,” says Staci. “In the meantime, we’ll all continue working hard to deliver a wide variety of high-quality, reasonably priced, fresh food to our friends and neighbors.”



BEDFORD COUNTY CONTAINER FARM MAKES WAVES IN RURAL LAKE COMMUNITY

Imagine managing a production farming operation from the convenience of your smart phone. That is the reality for our customer, Jeff Vittone, owner and founder of Vittone Farms located in Bedford County, Virginia, just minutes from the banks of Smith Mountain Lake. Vittone Farms employs vertical hydroponic farming techniques to grow organic leafy greens for the community to enjoy year-round, all within the confines of a 40-ft shipping container.



A national E Coli outbreak which took place nearly 15 years ago left Jeff concerned about the quality and availability of healthful produce for his family. His concern sparked a new hobby in the Florida room of his suburban home that would eventually blossom into the full-fledged business and passion project known as Vittone Farms.

Using vertical hydroponic techniques,

Vittone Farms accommodates 10,000+ plants within one expertly organized shipping container. This production method is commonly referred to as container farming. Jeff's container includes a nursery for seedlings and vertical growing channels for mature plants. The plants are irrigated with a nutrient-rich solution which eliminates the need for soil.



Upon harvest, the container's yield is equivalent to that of two and a half acres of conventionally raised row crops. Even more astonishingly, with the exception of seeding, transplant and harvest, Jeff and his team monitor and manage the operation from an app on their smart phones, with which they can adjust irrigation, temperature, lighting and more.

Currently, Jeff grows a variety of leafy greens in his container, including kale, romaine, arugula, radishes, micro-greens and more, which he sells directly to customers on-site and supplies to local lakefront establishments.

The Bedford County-based facility employs state-of-the-art technology that greatly reduces the uncertainty and costly guess-work that plague traditional farmers. The threat of environmental factors, such as destructive weather, soil exhaustion and pest damage, is all but alleviated with Vittone Farms' indoor hydroponic system.

Additionally, the system lends attractive soil and water conservation benefits. The shipping container only requires five gallons of water per day to effectively hydrate the plants, and naturally, given the limited space the system requires, there are major benefits regarding land conservation, too.

Although hydroponic farming negates many of the challenges experienced by traditional producers, it isn't all (artificial) sunshine and rainbows. Jeff admits the sharp learning curve he experienced while getting his system up and running was an early hurdle, although the mechanical experience he gained while serving the US Air Force as an aircraft mechanic provided him with the skill set to navigate these challenges.

In addition to the hydroponic operation, Vittone Farms established and hosts the Smith Mountain Lake (SML) Farmers' Market as another channel to feed and serve the community. In addition to his own produce, Jeff works with local vendors to market other locally-grown goods to part-time and full-time lake residents and visitors.

What is next for the small container farm by the lake? Future expansion plans include an on-site farm store and a greenhouse facility to accommodate bushy and viney crops, such as tomatoes, peppers, eggplant and more.



FROM DREAM TO REALITY

The Trezise Family's Journey into Agriculture



Nestled in the mountains of Allegany County, Maryland, lies 187 acres of rolling hills, where Kevin Trezise and his family are just starting out on their agricultural journey. Kevin is not your average farmer however, and his budding love for the land is only getting started now that he has taken the leap into retirement.

About 10 years ago, the Trezises became interested in buying some land. The timing was never right, but the family dreamed of owning the land that ran behind their home, right up against the backyard. It is a diverse property, with wetlands, woods, fields and riverfront, which made it even more desirable in their eyes. Five years ago, the property went into foreclosure but the family unfortunately missed their opportunity.

That all changed in January 2020, when Kevin's wife, René, and son, Bryce, were away on a trip visiting friends. Trying to burn some time, Kevin decided to take a drive with his most trusted sidekick — their dog Daisy. Kevin and Daisy came across a 'for sale' sign on the very same property that they had been watching for years. He could hardly believe his eyes, and immediately texted René out of excitement, "René, that land's for sale again!" Her instant reply was simply to go get it.

As a longtime friend of F.J. Grady, Farm Credit Regional Sales and Lending Manager, Kevin knew just the guy to call. F.J. put Kevin in touch with Romney loan officer, Andy Cumberland, and the ball began to roll. A few short months later, with the help and persistent pursuit from Kevin's mother Nancy, a realtor, the property was theirs! All that was left was to give it a name.

They pondered the land and the qualities that made it unique, but nothing stuck. The family thought back on what made the property special and was reminded of how Daisy would sit in their backyard and watch over all the land that lay beyond. Daisy had sadly passed away just before they were able to call the land their own, but they reflected on how happy she was staring out over her domain. In that memory, they found their inspiration and decided that it was and always will be Daisy's Domain. A perfect tribute to a loyal friend.

After purchasing the property, Kevin was ready to hit the ground running. He had big ideas and wanted to get Christmas trees in the ground right away. As goes with anything, if you fail to plan, you can plan to fail, so Bryce stepped in to corral some of those ideas into a more defined plan of action. After taking the time to set a plan, get the proper equipment, clear some trails and get the overgrowth under control, they planted 600 Christmas trees in tidy rows. As Christmas trees are a long-term investment, taking about 6-8 years to grow to maturity, they decided to diversify and started processing maple syrup this past winter and added grapevines a short while later.

By next year, Kevin and Bryce will finish their planting of 1,200 grapevines, producing





minimally pinot gris and pinot noir variety grapes. “With grapes, you can basically do three things. You can sell them, you can have someone else process wine and bottle it, or you can make your own. Knowing us, there’s just no way we can’t not make our own!” While not quite ready to hit the shelves yet, they are experimenting with different vinification techniques and continuing to gather more information. Kevin and Bryce even have a challenge between the two of them of who can make the best bottle of wine this fall with \$100 on the line.

One of the key elements of their success to date has been talking to as many other growers and resources as possible. “Everything we’re doing, we’re doing for the first time,” says Kevin. “We’re 60 years old and just getting into this, so we’re talking to as many people as we can. Everybody has relevant information and experience and they’ve all been so gracious and willing to share. There’s not a problem that we’ve

had that other people haven’t faced themselves.”

They’ve leaned on the Department of Natural Resources (DNR), Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), USDA Forest Service, Maryland Grape Growers Association, local farmers and more, reaching out and taking advantage of all the resources available. The Trezises acknowledge that there is an immense learning curve, but are dedicated to doing right by the land over time. “It’s all about the stewardship of the property, it’s the long game. You can do so much, but you can’t do it all now,” Kevin says. In recognition of the family’s commitment to the land, Daisy’s Domain recently received certification from the American Tree Farm System.

It’s clear that their strength as a family plays a major role as well. Their loan officer, Andy, notes, “With these guys, it’s family first and business second, but they all work together. Each one of them is involved and they have the same

vision. Their relationship is incredible.” René added that they all bring different skill sets to the table. “Bryce is a meticulous planner who excels at managing the data and materials necessary for the job, Kevin leads on plan execution, and I bring the marketing and communication skills that help pull it all together.”

Kevin and René acknowledge the importance of generational properties. They are grateful to be able to begin building something with their son, who is an equal owner in the operation. Kevin notes, “Getting started with all this, it gives us purpose. It gives me purpose.” As far as the future goes, the family is taking things one year at a time. With the help of Farm Credit financing, they have just completed building a barn where they plan to store their equipment and will process their wine in the future. The Trezise family looks forward to continuing to learn more about the agricultural community for years to come.



BUSINESS PLANNING AND MENTAL HEALTH

Published in The Ag Globe Trotter by Dr. Dave Kohl August 6, 2021



Dr. Dave Kohl
PROFESSOR EMERITUS, VIRGINIA TECH

Throughout the decades, I have worked very closely with our good friends to the north. Speeches, seminars, collaborative research and consultation with the Royal Bank of Canada (RBC), Farm Management Canada, Farm Credit Canada and other groups have been a highlight for me as an educator.

An outstanding study by Farm Management Canada was just released linking the relationship of farm business management practices to farmers' and ranchers' mental health. They provided permission to share some of the highlights of the study, which is a must read for thought leaders of the agriculture industry. The results were based on a nationwide survey of 1,735 Canadian farmers and 14 focus groups with 113 participants. This was followed by 72 one-on-one interviews with farmers and industry representatives. Some of the highlights may be critical perspectives for crucial conversations as we go throughout the summer.

Twenty-one percent of the farms and ranches in the study indicated that they follow a business plan, while 48% stated that they never or rarely follow a business plan. These results are similar to the surveys conducted each year at The Executive Program for Agricultural Producers (TEPAP) sponsored by Texas A&M University.

The results found that following a written farm business plan contributed to having peace of mind and more effectively coping with the threats, challenges and opportunities in agriculture. However, the results clearly stated that a business plan does not eliminate stress.

Respondents indicated that a business plan allowed them to focus and monitor financials, production and marketing plans. The study pointed

out that business plans are not set in concrete and need to be adjusted as the business economics, weather or other events throw curveballs.

The study also found that three out of four Canadian producers were moderately or highly stressed. Workload pressures, lack of time, financial pressures and unpredictable events were the major causes of stress. Women were twice as likely to report higher stress levels along with younger producers that are growing their operations.

The study found that risk management teams and proactive planning were guiding principles in terms of bridging business management and supporting positive mental health. Risk management teams are used by many in the agriculture industry. Team members may include advisors such as lenders, crop or livestock consultants, family members and peers that can help reduce pressure and aid in decision making. Planning is not predicting the future; planning is for identifying possible outcomes. The producers indicated that business planning was critical for communications with lenders, but also for family members, partners, suppliers and community members.

In future columns, we will discuss more results that are important in monitoring the balance, mindset and environment when it seems like we have a surprise around every corner.





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