



NATIONAL AGRICULTURE WEEK

MARCH 22-28



SUBMITTED PHOTO

State Senator Leising meets with PCARET members

State Senator Jean Leising (R-Oldenburg) meets with members of the Ripley County Purdue Council for Agricultural Research, Extension and Teaching (PCARET) at the Statehouse. The group discussed bills that are being heard in the Indiana General Assembly and legislation that has been filed to improve the lives of Indiana farmers and families.



WANDA ENGLISH BURNETT PHOTO

SWCD attendees gathered at South Ripley Elementary School

Seated from left: Sharen and Kenneth Thomas, Commissioner Gary Stutler and wife, Judy, and Lisa and Rob Vestal, sat together at the 70th Annual SWCD meeting. The evening proved to be entertaining and was mixed with business as Jeff Meinders and Danny Geisler were sworn in as continuing members of the SWCD Board of Supervisors. The Larry Ludwig family was named Conservation Farmers of the Year for 2019.

local Agriculture

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USDA stands up new team to better serve beginning farmers and ranchers

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) is standing up a new team of U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) staff that will lead a department-wide effort focused on serving beginning farmers and ranchers.

“More than a quarter of producers are beginning farmers,” said USDA Deputy Secretary Stephen Censky. “We need to support the next generation of agricultural producers who we will soon rely upon to grow our nation’s food and fiber.”

To institutionalize support for beginning farmers and ranchers and to build upon prior agency work, the 2018 Farm Bill directed USDA to create a national coordinator position in the agency and state-level coordinators for four of its agencies – Farm Service Agency (FSA), Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), Risk Management Agency (RMA), and Rural Development (RD).

Sarah Campbell was selected as the national coordinator to lead USDA’s efforts. A beginning farmer herself, Campbell held previous positions with USDA and has a wealth of experience working on issues impacting beginning farmers and ranchers. She recently served as acting director of customer experience for the Farm Production and Conservation Business Center, where she led the piloting of innovative, customer-centric initiatives.

In her new role, she will work closely with the state coordinators to develop goals and create plans to increase beginning farmer participation and access

to programs while coordinating nationwide efforts on beginning farmers and ranchers.

“We know starting a new farm business is extremely challenging, and we know our customers value and benefit from being able to work directly with our field employees, especially beginning farmers,” Campbell said. “These new coordinators will be a key resource at the local level and will help beginning farmers get the support they need. I look forward to working with them.”

Each state coordinator will receive training and develop tailored beginning farmer outreach plans for their state. Coordinators will help field employees better reach and serve beginning farmers and ranchers and will also be available to assist beginning farmers who need help navigating the variety of resources USDA has to offer.

More on Beginning Farmers

Twenty seven percent of farmers were categorized as new and beginning producers, with 10 years or less of experience in agriculture, according to the 2017 Census of Agriculture.

USDA offers a variety of farm loan, risk management, disaster assistance, and conservation programs to support farmers, including beginning farmers and ranchers. Additionally, a number of these programs have provisions specifically for beginning farmers, including targeted funding for loans and conservation programs as well as waivers and exemptions.



Compost is part of the circle of life in gardens

The season for fresh fruits and vegetables grown right in the backyard is upon us. Warm weather breathes life into fresh berries, tomatoes, eggplant, cucumbers, and many other delectable fruits and vegetables.

Home gardens can be supplemented with delicious finds from the supermarket or farmer’s market, including melons, corn and more.

The bounty of the garden can be made more abundant and fruitful with the addition of the right soil amendments. Compost is a key element of rich, nutritious soil. Scraps from items that have been grown in the garden can then be reused in the production of the compost that feeds that same garden. It’s a continuous circle of garden life.

Getting started with compost is relatively easy. Homeowners should choose an outdoor space near the garden but far away from

the home so that it won’t be disturbed by kids or animals. Some people opt for an open compost pile, while others choose closed bins to contain the possible smell and to camouflage the compost. A sunny spot will help the compost to develop faster, according to Good Housekeeping.

The next step is to start gathering the scraps and materials that will go into the compost. Better Homes and Gardens suggests keeping a bucket or bin in the kitchen to accumulate kitchen scraps. Here are some kitchen-related items that can go into the compost material:

- Eggshells
- Fruit peels
- Vegetable peels & scraps
- Coffee grounds
- Shredded newspaper

In addition to these materials, grass and plant clippings, dry leaves, bark chips, straw, and sawdust from untreated wood can

go into the pile. Avoid diseased plants, anything with animal fats, dairy products, and pet feces.

A low-maintenance pile has an equal amount of brown and green plant matter in the compost plus moisture to keep the bacteria growing and eating at the right rate. Aerating the compost occasionally, or turning the bin when possible, will allow the compost to blend and work together. Compost will take a few months to form completely, says the Planet Natural

Research Center. The finished product will resemble a dark, crumbly soil that smells like fresh earth.

Compost will not only add nutrients to garden soil, but also it can help insulate plants and may prevent some weed growth. It is a good idea to start a compost pile as a free source of nutrition for plants and a method to reduce food waste in an environmentally sound way.

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8 garden tools for beginners

The right tool for the job is essential to working safely and efficiently. This is as true in the workplace as it is in the garden.

Novice gardeners may not know where to begin in regards to which tools they need. The following are eight items that can serve as a solid foundation for beginning gardeners.

1. Gloves: Your hands will be working hard, so it pays to protect them from calluses, blisters, splinters, insects, and dirt. Look for water-resistant gloves that are also breathable.

2. Hand pruners: Hand pruners are essential for cutting branches, cleaning up shrubs, dead-heading flowers, and various other tasks. Choose ergonomic, no-slip handles that will make work easier. Rust-resistant, nonstick blades also are handy.

3. Wheelbarrow: A wheelbarrow can transport gear to garden beds or tote dirt, leaves, rocks, and other materials around the landscape. A good wheelbarrow is strong but light enough to maneuver when full.

4. Loppers: Long-handled loppers will fit the bill for thick branches. The long handles provide leverage to cut through branches an inch or more in diameter.

5. Hand trowel: A hand trowel is a handy tool that lets you dig holes or unearth weeds. While shopping for a trowel, consider getting a hand-held garden fork, which can aerate soil and cut through roots.

6. Hose/watering can: Keeping gardens hydrated is part of ensuring their health. That makes a hose and a watering can two invaluable tools to have around. Invest in a lightweight, expandable hose if storage space is at a premium. An adjustable nozzle will enable you to customize the water flow as needed. A watering can is an easy way to tote water to hard-to-reach pots and containers.

7. Garden kneeler: Gardeners often bend and kneel while working in the soil. That puts pressure on the back and knees. A comfortable garden kneeler with memory foam or one made from shock-absorbing material can reduce aches and pains.

8. Garden hoe: Garden hoes till soil, remove weeds and perform many other tasks. A garden hoe can be used along with a full-sized shovel, trowel and garden rake.

This list is just the tip of the garden tool iceberg. Visit a garden center and speak with a professional about other tools that can be added to the mix.



How to bring beneficial bees back

Bees, birds and butterflies play integral roles in pollinating many of the crops humans rely on for sustenance. The National Pollinator Garden Network, through the National Wildlife Federation, recently launched the Million Pollinator Garden Challenge, an effort to increase the amount of nectar and pollen food sources as the organization aims to reverse the alarming decline of pollinators such as honey bees, native bees and monarch butterflies.

Many people are afraid of bees because of their propensity to sting. Unlike their wasp and yellow-jacket cousins, honeybees and bumblebees are much more docile and content to hop from bloom to bloom without paying humans any mind. The only time such bees may resort to stinging is if someone inadvertently steps on them.

Bees are beneficial for yards. Gardener's Supply Company says one out of every three bites of food humans take depends on a pollinator. That's because about 150 crops grown in the United States depend on pollina-

tors. Even though there are 4,000 species of native or wild bees in the continental United States, many populations are in decline. According to the Pollinator Partnership, various areas of North America have lost more than 50 percent of their managed honeybee colonies in the past 10 years.

Bringing these important pollinators back will take a little work, but it is possible.

- Plants that offer cover can be attractive to bees that desire a respite from the sun and heat. Coleus and other ground cover offerings can be handy.
- Offer water in shallow dishes, as even bees need a cool drink to stay hydrated.
- Bees like various plants, so plant more than one species. Some plants that bees

tend to like include alyssum, aster, geranium, bee balm, poppies, and clover.

- When planting, include some native species.
- Brush piles, dry grasses and dead woods offer nesting areas for bees.
- The Gardener's Supply Company also says that bees find blue, purple and yellow flowers most appealing. Opt for more of these hues when planning gardens.
- Above all, avoid using pesticides in the yard. Even organic ones can be toxic to bees and other pollinators, and they may contribute to colony collapse disorder.

With these techniques in mind, homeowners can attract more bees to their yards and gardens, which can benefit bees and humans alike.

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What can and cannot be composted

Avid gardeners know that compost can add vital nutrients to soil used in gardens, container plants and lawns. The fact that compost is so versatile and nutrient-dense may not even be its most admirable quality. Made from items used in and around the house, compost costs just about nothing to produce.

The raw materials that make up compost come from organic waste. These can be disposables from the garden and kitchen, as well as other areas around the house. According to the United States Environmental Protection Agency, yard trimmings and food scraps add up to 20 to 30 percent of the municipal solid waste in the United States. Turning waste into compost not only helps the landscape, but also the planet.

Compost is relatively easy to make, and there are scores of materials that can be put into compost. But it is just as essential to know

which ingredients cannot be used in compost.

Okay for compost

Most organic materials, or items that were once living, can be used in compost. Plant-based items used in cooking, such as potato peelings, carrot skins, banana peels, cocoa hulls, coffee grounds and filters, corn cobs, apple cores, egg shells, fruit peels, kelp, and nut shells, can be added to compost.

Other items from around the house, like unused kitty litter, hair, shredded newspapers and cardboard, leaves, flowers, paper, pine needles, ashes, and sawdust, can be successfully added to compost. Stick to items that are not treated heavily with chemicals.

Should not be used in compost

Inorganic and non-biodegradable materials cannot go into compost. These are items like plastic, glass, aluminum foil, and metal. Pressure-treated lumber,

although a natural material, is treated with preservatives and often pesticides that can be harmful if they leech into the garden.

The small-gardening resource Balcony Garden Web indicates coated or glossy printed papers, such as those from catalogs, magazines, wrapping paper, marketing materials, and business cards, should not be added to compost piles because of the chemicals and inks used in these pages.

Planet Natural Research Center says to avoid pet droppings from dogs and cats. Animal products like bones, butter, milk, fish skins, and meat, may decompose and start to smell foul. Maggots, parasites, pathogens, and other microorganisms can form in the compost. These materials also may attract flies and scavenger animals. Plus, they decompose very slowly.

Any personal hygiene products should be avoided because they are tainted by human fluids and that can pose a health risk.

While weeds are not harmful in compost piles, there is the risk that seeds can germinate and then infiltrate garden beds when the compost is used. The same can be said for tomato plants and some other hardy fruits and vegetables.

Compost is a winner in the garden and around the landscape. Learning which ingredients can and can't be added to compost piles is useful for any gardener.



Addressing agriculture health and safety issues

By State Sen. Jean Leising (R-Oldenburg)

With the 2020 legislative session completed, I am pleased to have authored two bills that will have a positive impact on agriculture and rural residents living in Indiana.

Regulations for the agriculture industry

To address ongoing debates surrounding herbicide and pesticide regulations, the General Assembly passed Senate Enrolled Act 438. SEA 438 aligns state herbicide and pesticide regulations with federal regulations, removes daily fines for the misuse of herbicides and pesticides, and establishes a working group to review existing guidelines and civil penalties imposed by the state chemist.

Medical coverage for Indiana farmers

With volatile incomes

and rising health care costs, many Indiana farmers do not have basic health coverage. To improve the health and well-being of farmers, the General Assembly passed Senate Enrolled Act 184. SEA 184 will allow nonprofit agricultural organizations to provide medical coverage to their members.

In 2017, Indiana farmers cultivated more than 15 million acres and contributed more than \$31.2 billion to our state's economy. It is vital that we continue to ad-

dress the agriculture industry's most pressing issues. As chair of the Senate Committee on Agriculture, I will continue to advocate for policies that advance farming in our state and protect the health and well-being of our farmers.

If you have any questions, comments or concerns regarding this or other topics, contact me by email at Senator.Leising@iga.in.gov or by phone at 800-382-9467.





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