



SMALL IN SIZE; LARGE IN OUTLOOK

Seven hundred and ninety—the number of people estimated to live in Keya Paha County. Some would say that is not a whole lot of people in a county that covers 773 square miles. According to the U.S. Census Bureau, it equates to 1.1 persons per square mile.

In Sandhills country, we understand that small in population does not mean small in importance. Springview, the county seat, has been a vital part of Farmers Ranchers Cooperative since 1992, when Farmers Ranchers Co-op and Keya Paha Cooperative merged their operations. Over the years, the cooperative has benefited from the

dedicated service by several board members and employees from the area. And now, with the recent purchase of Murphy's Propane retail business in Springview, the story of the profound impact this county has on the success of your cooperative continues.

Some of you might remember that we highlighted Keya Paha County in our February 2012 issue of *Trailhead*. After all, this county is home to Nebraska's very first wind turbines, installed in 1998, dismantled in 2007, and replaced with two new turbine-driven towers in 2011. It also supports the Sawle Mill, a Springview business that buys and mills Red Cedar grown in the Niobrara River Valley.

However, we found something else that caught our attention. One might assume that not much could be happening in an area many would call remote. Not true! Read on and you'll discover a group of people who have a progressive outlook for the future and are putting that positive outlook into action.

MANAGER'S MOMENT

By Kent Taylor
President & CEO
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Long-time board members retiring

Also, we say goodbye to Steve Bartak and Brian Williams following their years volunteering to serve on the board of directors. Many difficult decisions have passed before them, and they have done their best to strengthen Farmers Ranchers Co-op.

We thank them for their dedication and commitment. Read their reflections on page 4, and then look for an extended interview on our website, frcoop.com.

Come to Annual Meeting

You are invited to attend the Farmers Ranchers Co-op Annual Meeting on March 3. Be sure to return your ballots for the two open director seats by mail or bring them with you the night of the meeting. Maybe spring will be here by then? We can hope. ■

ANNUAL MEETING MARCH 3

ANNUAL MEETING: Tuesday, March 3

TIME: Dinner—5:30 p.m. Meeting—7 p.m.

LOCATION: Brown County Community Hall, Johnstown, NE

ENTERTAINMENT: Music By Mike and Linn Baxter—6:15-7 p.m.

KEYA PAHA ON THE MOVE: BABY STEPS AND BIG CHANGES

Interesting things happen in small towns. When Amy Johnson and her husband, Erik, moved back to her home county of Keya Paha in January 2011, little did she know that eight months later she'd be editor, owner, and publisher of the *Springview Herald*, the county newspaper. She also didn't expect to be part of a core group of volunteers—the Keya Paha Revitalization Committee—that's

working hard to keep their county a great place to live and raise a family.

The newspaper opportunity opened for Amy while playing golf at the Springview Golf Course; the involvement in revitalizing her community occurred following a town hall meeting facilitated by the Nebraska Public Power District (NPPD).

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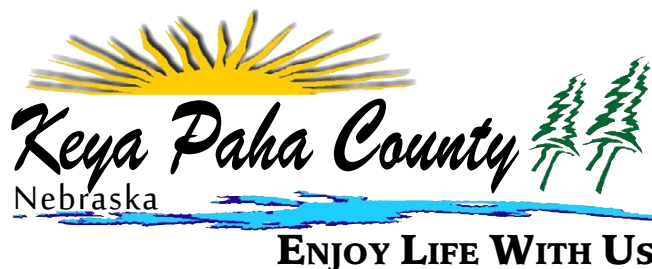
BABY STEPS AND BIG CHANGES

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"We had speakers come and we had a really good turnout," says Amy. "We talked about our strengths and weaknesses, and where can we grow and move forward." From that meeting, the Keya Paha Revitalization Committee was born. Its focus: to work on target areas identified by the meeting's participants: housing, marketing, job creation/retention, daycare/childcare, and community improvements. "We've been meeting monthly ever since," she explains.

Taking steps to make a difference

The group has been doing more than meeting. In fact, their list of accomplishments is impressive. They helped obtain a grant for a new recycling trailer. Their marketing committee developed a Facebook page (facebook.com/kpnebraska) right before the Niobrara Valley wildfire of 2012. "We suddenly had hundreds of likes on that page because the gal doing it was sharing information and pictures that people wanted to see," says Amy. "It's been a great resource." That same committee developed a Keya Paha County logo/brand (see above) and a brochure touting the area's resources and attractions that is distributed throughout central Nebraska.



When word got out that daycare/childcare was needed, a native from Ainsworth responded by opening a preschool. Events like the Soup Contest and Santa Day, 4th of July Backyard Barbecue Cookoff, pitch tournaments, and shop-local promotions are supported by the committee and provide ways to come together as community. The list goes on.

According to Amy, the NPPD representative who facilitated the original town hall meeting came back about 1 ½ years later to see what the committee had done at that point. "She told us we should be really proud of what we had accomplished," recalls Amy. "She said, 'Don't forget, those little things you do should be celebrated.'"

Amy calls those 'little things' baby steps, but she doesn't discount their importance. "We don't have a chamber of commerce or a rotary club, so even though we're taking baby steps to get to a big solution, people here are accepting the steps we're making. Every little bit counts." ■

CALVING SEASON SOON UNDERWAY

By Donna Jones, Springview Branch Manager, djones@frcoop.com

As Manager of the Springview Feed Store, as well as being a resident of Keya Paha County, I'm proud to call this area home. And at Farmers Ranchers, we're committed to serving the farmers and ranchers in the area.

That service begins with selling products that contribute to our ranching customers' needs. Right now, as you prepare for calving season, we have products that can help get those calves off to a good start. Take our Chelated Breeder mineral from Alltech®. It utilizes organic forms of key trace minerals that are more readily absorbed, utilized, and retained in the body. The zinc, copper, cobalt, and manganese support animal development, bone formation, hoof health, and the

immune system. And its extra vitamin packet helps prepare the cow for calving, cleaning, and preparing for rebreeding.

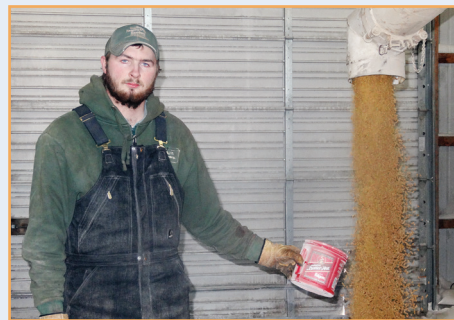
Add Bio-Mos® to the Chelated Breeder and your livestock get another boost. Bio-Mos feeds the GI tract and plays a critical role in animal nutrition and production. It helps keep your calves healthy and reduces scours.

Looking for extra protein to help your cattle get through the season's cold temps? Additional cake or higher protein hay can help. There is also our Land O'Lakes® RangeLand Protein Tub. It's a convenient and effective way to give your cattle the energy they need.

The Farmers Ranchers Springview store is also your headquarters for

calving needs, including vaccines, colostrum, and tags.

Our hours are weekdays, 8 a.m. to 6 p.m. and Saturdays, 8 a.m. to 1 p.m. Stop in or give us a call at 402-497-2020. ■



Springview feed deliveryman Ed Kirsch is getting feed mix ready for a customer. Ed, who hails from the Burton area, has been working at the Springview location since last spring. Long-time driver George Mizner still helps out when needed.

NEW FACILITY READY FOR MEADOWS

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



We're pleased to announce that the new dry facility at the Ainsworth Agronomy Center is up and running in time for the spring meadow fertilization season. Just give me (402-760-1291), Jeff Dolberg (402-760-1509), or Mark Ewert (402-760-2568) a

call and we'll get it scheduled and done.

When it comes to fertilizing your corn and soybeans this growing season, plan to see our new Case IH Titan™ 4530 Variable-Rate Technology (VRT) Spreader in action. The VRT replaces our old dry machine and is a top-of-the line piece of equipment. We'll be able to apply three different products at the same time with the 4530. This VRT spreader will work in conjunction with our WinField R7® Tool that gives variable-rate prescriptions for crop nutrient applications.

Thinking seed—from peas to corn

Farmers Ranchers Co-op's seed warehouse is filling with seed for the upcoming growing season. We have forage seed available, including a good supply of pea and oat mix. We also carry medium red clover and alsike clover, a wide range of corn and soybean varieties, as well as other seeds. Check in with Mark or Jeff to discuss your needs. ■



Robbie Ashcraft will be operating the new Case IH Titan 4530 VRT Spreader this season.

CO-OP PURCHASES MURPHY PROPANE

By Wes Luther, Department Manager wluther@frcoop.com

Farmers Ranchers Co-op is pleased to be serving more customers in the Keya Paha County territory after purchasing Murphy's Propane retail delivery business in Springview. The family business, delivering to approximately 400 customers in north central Nebraska and south central South Dakota, was sold in October



2014 as they were ready for retirement.

We have been working diligently over the past few months to efficiently integrate the new customer base into our existing route system. As a result, delivery out of our Valentine location is taking care of new customers west of Springview, while our truck out of Ainsworth is

delivering to those customers east and south of Springview.

Propane: a different story from 2014

Unlike last year, when shortages of propane and railcars, plus the frigid temps, drove the heating fuel's price to over \$4, we've seen prices drop this year. It's not unusual for those customers who contracted at a higher price to question their decision. It's important to remember, however, that for contracting to be most effective, it generally has to be practiced over a period of time and not just for one year. It's very difficult to hit the good years and miss the bad ones. The highs and lows tend to balance each other. For example, customers who contracted the last two years may be short a dime this year, but they got more than a dime price break last year.

For any questions about your propane delivery or pricing, give us a call at 402-387-1220 or 800-233-6627. We're here to serve you. ■



INSIDE

KEYA PAHA ON THE MOVE

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RETIRING DIRECTORS: LOVING EVERY MINUTE

Two board members of Farmers Ranchers Cooperative are hanging up their director hats. Steve Bartak, Long Pine farmer, and Brian Williams, Ainsworth rancher, will be retiring at the Annual Meeting in March.

Steve leaves the board after serving three concurrent three-year terms. Brian served from 1993 to 2008, returning for one term in 2012. He also served as an associate director in the 1980s.

Their years of service may not be exactly the same, but their reasons for leaving at this time are in sync. “We both decided we had been on for quite a while,” explains Steve. “We have young people right now who are interested in running and who are very good. It seems appropriate to give someone else an opportunity.”

The decision to retire became easier knowing that the cooperative is in good financial condition. “The co-op is doing well,” says Brian. “We’ve had record years the past three years.” Both men are quick to credit Farmers Ranchers employees. “I can say with 100% certainty that our financial strength is due to the employees of our co-op,” Steve insists. “Kent, his management team, and all of the other employees who bring their talents to work every day...they’ve taken ownership of the co-op and just do a good job for us.”

In addition, Brian points to families who have been Farmers Ranchers patrons—some over generations. “The loyalty of patrons has continued over the years,” he says. “It’s what has helped make this cooperative successful.”



Steve Bartak

As they depart as a co-op director, the two reflect on the future of ag cooperatives and Farmers Ranchers. “More than anything, I see change,” forecasts Brian. Changes, he says, include the advancement of technology and the continued merging of smaller cooperatives into larger entities. That’s certainly not a new phenomenon. The Ainsworth-based co-op has been approached numerous times by larger cooperatives while both men served on the board.

“We’ve considered some things,” admits Steve, “but ultimately we’ve decided that our financial strength allows us to control our own destiny.”

The co-op may reach a point down the road where it becomes advantageous because of efficiency of size to join with someone else, but it’s not something that will be forced on us, and it’s not something I see on the horizon.”

In the meantime, Brian and Steve are reflecting on the friendships they’ve built with others with whom they’ve served—along with the information and knowledge they’ve accumulated over the years. “I’ve gained more than I’ve given, and that’s an honest-to-goodness appraisal of my time,” says Steve. “I was very proud and honored to serve.”

Brian concludes, “I’ve always felt that when we sat in the board room, we had the best interest of the co-op at heart. Farmers Ranchers has had a tremendous board. I’ve loved every minute of it.”

Read an extended interview with Steve and Brian. Go to www.frcoop.com. ■



Brian Williams