



Former Case warehouse houses lettuce, tilapia farm. Page 1D.
 • Meat CSA offers profitable alternative. Page 6B.
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WEDNESDAY, MARCH 2, 2011



The Country Today

"The Newspaper That Cares About Rural Life"

Volume 34, Number 6
32 Pages, 4 Sections

www.thecountrytoday.com

★ ★ ★ \$1



Pancakes offer options to please any palate.

2B



Jefferson County farm specializes in fresh rainbow trout.

1C

Gardening: Spring is almost here — get tips on what to plant and when.

5B

Rural groups weigh in on state budget

By Megan Parker

Assistant Editor

Though Gov. Scott Walker's budget repair bill hasn't necessarily been viewed as an agricultural issue, Darin Von Ruden said he worries about possible ramifications for farmers.

Von Ruden, a Westby dairy farmer and president of the Wisconsin Farmers Union, said his organization supports public

unions and wants to see them hang onto their collective bargaining rights.

"The number of dairy farmers we have (in WFU), if you look through the whole big picture of things, if the labor unions start going out, is there a possibility that the coop-



Von Ruden

erative effort could be affected too by the same concept?" he said. "Groups of people working together for the betterment of all — that's basically what unions are trying to do is make sure that workers are treated equally and fairly. The cooperative movement, which started back in the '30s, is the same concept."

Von Ruden said the organization also is concerned about proposed changes to Medicare and Badger-

Care in the budget repair bill.

BadgerCare provides insurance to many farmers who can't otherwise get insurance, he said.

The Farmers Union also will look at what changes are in Walker's state budget proposal, including regarding the Working Lands Initiative, UW-Extension and townships, Von Ruden said.

See **BUDGET**, Page 2A ▶

RC&D fighting loss of funding

By Sara Bredesen

Regional Editor

The National Association of RC&D Councils is urging its members to pressure legislators after the U.S. House of Representatives voted Feb. 19 to zero out RC&D funding for the remainder of fiscal year 2011 and all of 2012.

This is not the first time in its 49-year history that the Resource Conservation and Development program has had to fight to retain funding, but it is the first time funding has been eliminated in the middle of a fiscal year, according to the association.

See **FUNDING**, Page 5A ▶



Photo by Shane Opatz

Eau Claire Farm Show ready to roll

Rob Newman, a sales representative at Nortrax in Eau Claire, worked his way down from a John Deere front-end loader Monday during set-up for the Greater Eau Claire Farm Show. The show will be open from 9 a.m. to 3:30 p.m. Tuesday, March 1, and Wednesday, March 2, at the Eau Claire Indoor Sports Center off Highway 37. Parking and admission are free.

Annual organic conference sets participation record

Expert: Event's popularity reflects growing interest in farming method

By Danielle Endvick

Regional Editor

LA CROSSE — Nearly 3,000 people traveled to La Crosse last weekend for the 22nd annual Organic Farming Conference.

The record number of participants was a far cry from the 90 attendees at the first conference, said Faye Jones, executive director of the Midwest Organic and Sustainable Education Service, which organizes the event.

Attendees came from 30 states and several countries, including England and Thailand, Jones said.

"This is part of the food revolution — it's sweeping the country," she said. "People really care about their food."

The event featured more than 150 exhibitors and 70 workshops on organic top-

ics, many of which were led by farmers, Jones said.

Michael Sligh, founding chairman of the National Organic Standards Board and director of the Sustainable Agriculture Program at Rural Advancement Foundation International-USA, said strong attendance at the conference

reflects a growing interest in organics nationwide.

With more than \$22 billion in annual sales, the U.S. organic food market is the largest in the world, Sligh said.

"It continues to grow at a brisk rate even in a down economy," he said.

The U.S. Department of Agriculture estimates that in the last decade the nation's organic food retail sales increased 23 percent annually, five times faster than food sales in general. Sligh said he believes

For more information about the Midwest Organic and Sustainable Education Service, visit www.mosesorganic.org.

organic agriculture has been successful because it is farmer-driven and based on common sense. The sector also promotes an entrepreneurial spirit, he said.

"This has taken off against all odds," Sligh said. "It is indeed a real success story."

GMOs a concern

The 2012 Farm Bill will present new agendas for the organic community to pursue, Sligh said.

Contamination of crops by genetically modified organisms — such as the recently approved Roundup Ready alfalfa — is one topic the agriculture industry must address, he said.

"How do we prevent GMOs from hurting organic farmers?" he said. "This is a technology that cannot and does not stay put."

See **ORGANIC**, Page 2A ▶

Gone grapes

Wisconsin native to coordinate state's grape marketing

By Danielle Endvick

Regional Editor

Becky Rochester has traveled the world working at wineries and studying

grape production, but her newest venture, serving as grape marketing coordinator for the Wisconsin Grape Growers Association, is bringing her back to the Midwest.

Rochester began the position, which is funded through a specialty-crops grant, in January.

A La Crosse native, Rochester attended Viterbo University before moving to California in 2002.

In 2004, she was hired as assistant wine club manager at Bargetto Winery in Soquel, Calif.

"During that time I got to do a lot of differ-

ent things — marketing, direct-to-consumer advertising, events, compliance, and I worked in the cellar and did harvest," Rochester said.

Her experiences inspired her parents in Wisconsin to plant their vineyard in 2006. The family's R Little Vineyard in Stoddard has grown to 3½ acres of cold-climate grapes.

Rochester also worked in marketing or as a cellar hand at wineries in Marlborough, New Zealand; Victoria and Tasmania, Australia; and California.

"I just kind of continued for about a year and a half to do various winery work around the world," Rochester said. "You gotta see the world, and if you can work and do it, why not?"

When she returned to the U.S., her experience landed her a position as seasonal viticulturist in the Russian River Appellation in California.

See **GRAPES**, Page 2A ▶



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