



# BEGINNING NEWS and NOTES

A MONTHLY NEWSLETTER SUPPLEMENT OF THE CENTER  
FOR RURAL AFFAIRS' BEGINNING FARMER SUSTAINABLE  
AGRICULTURE PROJECT

by Wyatt Fraas and Marty Kleinschmit

FEBRUARY 1995

## CASE STUDY UPDATES:

(We have been following 12 families in their quest to be farmers)

**Steve and Vivi Freudenburg** are participating in the NSAS sponsored Mentor Program. They want ideas for remodeling their structurally sound, but "obsolete", buildings to better suit present day needs.

**Hoss and Shelly Hammond** plan to add a bathroom and playroom to their dairy barn this year. This addition will make it easier for Hoss to care for the kids when Shelly's job keeps her from the farm at chore time.

**Pat and Julie Steffen** are the proud parents of a new baby girl, Elizabeth Christine, who joined their family on January 25.

**Scott Urwiler** is planning to renovate and extend the present shelter belt on his farm to improve and increase the calving area for his beef cow herd.

**Kevin and Sophie Ryan** are looking for a well mannered Jersey milk cow to provide milk for their family and increase animal diversity on their farm.

**Doug Dittman** plans to expand his dairy herd this spring by purchasing another calf and have Elsie, his yearling Brown Swiss heifer, bred to produce a calf next year.

## OUR SYMPATHY

"To help as many people as possible", seemed to be the goal of Loretta Kohles of Bloomfield, NE, who was killed in a January car accident. The Kohles' were profiled in the September issue of the Beginning Farmer Newsletter.

## FARMERS FOR THE NEXT CENTURY

The 2nd National Conference for Beginning Farmers is scheduled for February 24-25, at Columbia, Missouri. Some of the topics include: established farmers helping beginning farmers, alternative crops and marketing, low cost hog and cattle production, alternative crop and livestock marketing, and record keeping and business planning for beginning farmers. Make reservations now. Last year's conference sold out early. Contact person is Cathy Erickson at (515) 993-4889, or write her at 2510 River Bye Road, Adel, Iowa 50003.

## CONTROLLING RUN-OFF THE OLD FASHIONED WAY

Ag engineers from Virginia Polytech and State University of Blacksburg, Virginia, compared the effectiveness of straw mulch with two commercial synthetic polymers and a product called Hydroseed (commonly used to establish new lawns) to control runoff from exposed soil. The soil plots were covered with a variety of the above combinations, then drenched at various rates using a rainfall simulator. At all levels of rainfall the plots covered with straw showed the least amount of water runoff, and less erosion of sediment, nitrogen and phosphorous. Nature's way still seems to work best.

### **INCREASE MARGINS; NOT ACRES**

With profit margins of less than 10%, compared to 35% in 1950, (not counting government payments) it may appear the only solution is to increase sales to satisfy living expenses. (Is this why average farm size is increasing?) But Iowa State Economist, Michael Duffy, says, "You need to farm smarter, not harder. You have to farm based on what you've got". Purchasing inputs to boost net farm income may be like borrowing yourself out of debt.

### **MILES PER KWH**

The efficiency of electric powered vehicles has increased from 35 miles to over 200 miles per kilowatt hour (KWH) in the last 6 years according to Nancy Hazard of the Northeast Sustainable Energy Association (NESEA). Vehicles using lead batteries have increased efficiency from 35 to 142 miles per kilowatt hour (a record held by a modified Fiat converted by a Bolton, Connecticut high school class). Load bearing vehicles like pickups and trucks are not likely to be powered by electricity soon, but many one-person cars can be replaced by these energy efficient vehicles. Can you live with a vehicle costing 4-12 cents to travel 142 miles?

### **TURNING UP THE HEAT**

Beef producers who use first calf heifers to increase their cow herd often have problems getting these cattle re-bred to coincide with the rest of the herd. IANR (Institute of Agriculture and Natural Resources) researchers use fence line exposure to shorten this re-breeding time. Separating the bulls from the cows with only a fence gives opportunity for nuzzling and other close contact which seems to stimulate cycling. The close proximity of the bulls within 30 days of calving caused the young cows to come into "heat" 2 weeks earlier, resulting in a more uniform calving period.

### **THE HURT DOESN'T ALWAYS SHOW**

Parents sometimes use negative encouragement to persuade a child to respond. Phrases like, "Your not a baby, are you?" don't do much to build a child's self esteem. Kim Bushaw, Parent Line program specialist with North Dakota State University, warns that verbal abuse like name calling or belittling can cause invisible scars so you can't see if the hurt has healed. Young children think of themselves as independent, but need lots of love and support. Positive parent encouragement and compassion fosters cooperation and understanding, and gives the child the support needed to want to please. A parent's approval is a child's greatest reward.

### **THE END IS NEAR!**

The beginning of the end is here for the Beginning Farmer Project as final interviews and data collection is underway. The staff will be busy compiling, editing and publishing the results of the three year project. However, we will expand our efforts in sustainable ag education for beginning farmers with statewide activities under the Nebraska IMPACT Project. Call us for more information.

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