

Moltke woman receive \$10K grant to grow chestnut trees

by Peter Jakey
Managing Editor

A Moltke Township woman will receive a \$10,255 grant to see if chestnuts can be grown in northeast Michigan. Abby Johnson, a mother of four, who was raised on a farm south of Lansing, will

chestnuts, it could be a really viable cropping alternative for people... Traverse City is the cherry capital of Michigan. It would be awesome for Rogers City to be the chestnut capital of Michigan."

Johnson said Michigan State University has been

that is more cold hardy. We have confidence that this is going to work," said Johnson. Because of the terrain, Johnson believes cold air is going to roll off the hills, avoiding extremely low temperatures. During the last couple of years, the coldest temperature experienced was -19 degrees Fahrenheit during the season of 2013-14. Anything colder than that could be a problem, said Johnson. The trees will be planted in mid- to late September.

"It will be a Japanese-European hybrid and it will be a grafted tree, much the way an apple tree is grafted," she said.

It is going to be five years before the trees are producing nuts and a decade to get up to full production. That takes cropland out of the mix; however, Johnson will be working in conjunction with Brege Farms to plant forage crops between the rows of chestnut trees. The trees will be planted 30 feet apart.

"A chestnut tree can live several hundred years," she added. "Once we plant it, and it is established, it should be wonderful, unlike peaches, cherries and apples, where you have to continually replant the trees."

Johnson has a MSU bachelor's degree in biosystems engineering. This grant was awarded as part of NCR-SARE's Farmer Rancher Grant Program, which is a competitive grants program for farmers and ranchers who want to explore sustainable solutions to problems through on-farm research, demonstration and education projects.

The focus for each of the NCR-SARE grant programs is on research and education. Funding considerations are based on how well the applicant presents the problem being addressed, the project's relevance to sustainable agriculture in the 12-state north central region, and how well it aligns with NCR-SARE's goals, among other factors specific to each grant program.



ABBY JOHNSON of Rogers City received a grant that will enable her to plant more than 200 chestnut trees at her farm in Moltke Township. (Photo by Peter Jakey)

be planting 215 chestnut trees on three acres in a field that would make Julie Andrews spin and sing.

The area of the township is visually appealing, but Johnson will be given the opportunity to see if the topography in this corner of the state can make eatable chestnuts a viable crop. Johnson will receive the funding from North Central Region Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education Program (NCR-SARE) for the project. Johnson worked with James DeDecker, Michigan State University (MSU) Extension educator developing the proposal.

"We thought of this as a great opportunity for a specialty crop to be tested in Moltke," said Johnson. "We think we have a unique micro-climate here and I think it could be really great for our whole area."

"If it works well to grow

working on chestnuts for the last 20 years. There have been people growing them for two decades.

"We had the pleasure of having one of those lead people, who have led the initiative and have been involved with the chestnuts since the beginning, on the site here," she said. Johnson said the goal is test it out and provide some key information and data to people interested in growing chestnuts.

"Currently, we import 10 million tons of chestnuts. It's a big import crop, and right now in the United States, we produce 10,000 tons," said Johnson. "There is really a great opportunity to offset those imports." Chestnuts are being shipped from Italy and Turkey. "It is a Mediterranean tree. It likes a more of a mild to temperate climate; however, MSU has been working to develop this chestnut and we are working with a variety



CREWS HAVE been cleaning up contaminated area in downtown Posen. All the soil should be removed.

Clean up of contaminated area in the village Posen

by Peter Jakey
Managing Editor

The village of Posen is the site of a contamination cleanup.

Crews have been working since April 18, but expect to have all the impacted soils removed by the end of the week.

A downstate firm started the process of removing contaminated soil at the site of the former gasoline service station known as Vince's Sunoco, along Michigan Avenue. Large steel sheeting pieces were driven into the ground to prevent cave-ins and protect workers.

The company is removing soil as deep as 14-feet. The cost is expected to be about \$150,000.

AKT Peerless Environmental Services of Farmington is a contractor for the Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ).

"That site had fuel tanks in the area between the building and Michigan Avenue," said project manager Drew Shoaff. "The fuel tanks leaked gasoline years ago."

While the tanks were removed years ago, a pipeline impacted soil, said Shoaff.

The DEQ is working about the problem. The village put in a system in the area. "The agency gated the site," said Shoaff. "They found the contamination concentrations that require removal of groundwater in the area."

The village is located less than a mile to the west of the area whose company is cleaning up. The sites in for the 1980s. "That was the force behind the attention of the DEQ."

"We nominated to get refined petroleum resources," said environmental attorney Pelc. "As sites need attention, they have a liable or We are able to address the problem."

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