



Young Farmers & Ranchers Happenings

If anyone is interested in hosting a virtual tour of their farm or joining the YF&R committee, please email Heather at heatherbonanno@gmail.com.

2021 Farm Bureau FUSION Conference Will Be Virtual

As a contingency plan, AFBF staff and volunteer leaders have been working together on making arrangements to host the 2021 FUSION Conference virtually. At this time, AFBF has confirmed that the 2021 AFBF FUSION Conference will be held virtually. AFBF is looking forward to offering this event to members of the Women's Leadership, Promotion & Education, and Young Farmers & Ranchers programs. We will provide more details as they become available!

Increased Minimum Wage, Paid Family Medical Leave Program Take Effect In Massachusetts

The dawn of a new year brings with it changes for Massachusetts workers. A new minimum wage and a new paid family and medical leave program take effect on Jan. 1.

Both changes are the result of laws passed in 2018.

The minimum wage increase from \$12.75 an hour to \$13.50 is part of an incremental change toward \$15 per hour in 2023. This year, tipped employees' minimum hourly wage goes from \$4.95 to \$5.55.

Also starting Friday, a paid family and medical leave benefit will provide up to 12 weeks to bond with a newborn child or to care for a family member, 20 weeks to manage a serious personal health condition and up to 26 weeks to care for a family member who is a member of the military.



The state program is offered separately from the federal Family and Medical Leave Act and any employer-offered leave.

Benefit amounts are variable, based on an applicant's average weekly wages and the average weekly wage in the commonwealth.

Employees should give at least 30 days' notice before beginning their application for paid leave and applications can be submitted up to 60 days before leave begins, state officials said. Unplanned leave can

also be applied for retroactively.

Information about the program and how to apply is available on the state website: [Mass.Gov/PFML](https://www.mass.gov/PFML)

National Poll Shows COVID-19 Taking Heavy Toll On Farmers' Mental Health

A strong majority of farmers/farmworkers say the COVID-19 pandemic has impacted their mental health, and more than half say they are personally experiencing more mental health challenges than they were a year ago, according to a new American Farm Bureau poll.

The survey of rural adults and farmers/farmworkers explores how the pandemic has affected their mental health personally and in their communities, as well as how attitudes and experiences around mental health have changed in rural and farm communities since AFBF conducted its first rural mental health survey in 2019.

"My takeaway from this survey is that the need for support is real and we must not allow lack of access or a 'too tough to need help' mentality to stand in the way," said AFBF President Zippy Duvall. "We are stepping-up our efforts through our Farm State of Mind campaign, encouraging conversations about stress and mental health and providing free training and resources for farm and ranch families and rural communities. The pandemic added a mountain of stress to an already difficult year for farmers and they need to know that sometimes it's OK not to be OK, that people care, and that there's help and hope."



The results of the new poll clearly demonstrate that the COVID-19 pandemic is having broad-ranging impacts among rural adults and farmers/farmworkers. Key findings include:

- Two in three farmers/farmworkers (66%) say the pandemic has impacted their mental health.
- Rural adults were split on COVID-19's impact. Half of rural adults (53%) say the pandemic has impacted their mental health at least some, while 44% say it has not impacted their mental health much or at all.
- Younger rural adults were more likely than older rural adults to say the pandemic has impacted their mental health a lot.
- Farmers and farmworkers were 10% more likely than rural adults as a whole to have experienced feeling nervous, anxious or on edge during the pandemic (65% vs. 55%).
- The percentage of farmers/farmworkers who say social isolation impacts farmers' mental health increased 22% since April 2019, a significant finding given the long hours many farmers work alone.
- Half of rural adults (52%) aged 18-34 say they have thought more about their mental health during the COVID-19 pandemic, more than other age groups.
- Three in five rural adults (61%) say the COVID-19 pandemic has impacted mental health in rural communities. Farmers/farmworkers were more likely than rural adults to say COVID-19 has impacted mental health in rural communities a lot (37% vs. 22%).

The survey of 2,000 rural adults was conducted by Morning Consult in December. It also identified the main obstacles to seeking help or treatment for a mental health condition, the most trusted sources for information about mental health, impressions of the importance of mental health in rural communities and the importance of reducing stigma surrounding mental health. A presentation with additional detail on the full survey results is available [here](#).

AFBF will host a session at its 2021 Virtual Convention titled Farm State of Mind - Responding to the Challenges of Rural Mental Health on Tues., Jan. 12 at 11 a.m. Eastern time. The session will feature diverse perspectives on the issue of rural mental health and highlight Farm Bureau's efforts to respond to this key moment in agriculture. Visit <https://annualconvention.fb.org/> to register for the convention and view this session.

If you or someone you know is struggling emotionally or has concerns about their mental health, visit the Farm State of Mind website at farmstateofmind.org where you can find crisis hotlines, treatment locators, tips for helping someone in emotional pain, ways to start a conversation and resources for managing stress, anxiety or depression.

Farm Bureau Partners With Feeding America On #StillFarming Campaign



The American Farm Bureau Federation is launching a new effort to address food insecurity while celebrating the strength of the U.S. food supply and commitment of America's farmers and ranchers to keep it strong. The #StillFarming campaign, which began on social media, is now expanding to a merchandise line that will benefit food banks and agricultural education.

The COVID-19 pandemic shutdowns in March 2020 caused disruptions to the food supply chain, resulting in empty grocery shelves in parts of the country. When alarmed Americans

resorted to panic purchasing, AFBF created the #StillFarming social media campaign to build public confidence in farmers' and ranchers' ability to produce food and reassure consumers of the strength of the U.S. food supply.

#StillFarming has reached nearly 100 million people across the digital landscape, building confidence in the U.S. food supply and trust in farmers and ranchers by sharing the challenges they are overcoming to feed America and the world.

Building on its popularity and recognizing the dramatic increase in hunger in America brought on by the pandemic, AFBF created #StillFarming to Feed America [T-shirts](#) and committed to donating all profits. Half will be donated to Feeding America, the country's largest hunger relief organization, and half of the profits will go to the American Farm Bureau Foundation for Agriculture.

"Despite all the uncertainty brought on by the pandemic, there's never been a question that America's farmers and ranchers would continue supplying healthy, affordable food and it was important for us to assure the public of that," said AFBF President Zippy Duvall. "The success of #StillFarming is a credit to Farm Bureau members across the country who took it and ran with it. It has been inspiring to see their stories from across the country and I'm pleased to build on the campaign to help address hunger through our partnership with Feeding America."

AFBF first partnered with Feeding America in April, coauthoring a letter to USDA calling for a federal program to help deliver farm-fresh products to food banks facing unprecedented demand. At the time, many farmers had no destination for their products due to restaurant and food service closures. The letter and subsequent meetings with USDA contributed to the formation of the Farmers to Families Food Box Program.

The new partnership between AFBF and Feeding America also builds on a long history of partnerships between county and state Farm Bureaus and Feeding America's local and regional food banks. Since the pandemic began, state and county Farm Bureaus across the country have donated \$5.4 million and 1.4 million pounds of food to local food banks, food pantries and pandemic relief programs. According to Feeding America, 1 in 9 Americans are affected by hunger in the pandemic. This includes 2.2 million rural households.

"COVID-19 presented a perfect storm of increased demand, declines in food donations and overall disruptions to the charitable food system. Food banks across the country are working hard to support their neighbors in need," said Katie Fitzgerald, Executive Vice President and Chief Operating Officer at Feeding America. "We are grateful to AFBF for their commitment to fighting hunger and for providing everyone with the opportunity to give back."

The pandemic also increased consumer curiosity about how food is produced. Giving the public a window into agriculture and how food is grown is part of the mission of the American Farm Bureau Foundation for Agriculture. Recognizing that #StillFarming helped tell agriculture's story, it's fitting that profits from #StillFarming to Feed America T-shirts will further that cause.

"The Foundation is honored to be a partner with AFBF on this program," AFB Foundation Executive Director Daniel Meloy said. "Funds received through the #StillFarming T-shirts will help us continue to reach kids all across America and help educate them on where their food comes from."

The T-shirts are being sold through AFBF's online shop at [FB.org/StillFarming](https://fb.org/StillFarming) and will be available through June.

Virtual Ag Trivia Night!

The Promotion and Education Committee and Dr. Weston Brown are hosting a virtual trivia

night! Come test your knowledge of agriculture...from the comfort of your own home!

Date: Jan. 27, 2021

Time: 7 p.m.

Location: Online by clicking here

There will be 4 rounds of 10 question each, all relating to agriculture. The live video will start at 6:45 p.m. to give everyone a chance to get situated.

We're going to start asking questions at 7:00 p.m. There will be a link to a google form that will be the answer sheet. The questions will be read aloud and presented on the screen, and you can answer on the google doc. At the end of the round, submit the sheet and it will be graded. Once you submit your answer sheet, click "Submit a new response" at the bottom of the page, and a new answer sheet will be generated for the next round. Dr. Brown will be keeping track of points and will announce the standings between each round, and the winners at the end.



Please keep team names the same each round!

A computer would be the best way to participate in this event!

We look forward to seeing you there!

Meg Gennings Re-Appointed To AFBF Issues Advisory Committee



Massachusetts Farm Bureau Federation (MFBF) is pleased to announce that Meg Gennings from Amherst has been re-appointed by American Farm Bureau Federation (AFBF) President Zippy Duvall to AFBF's animal care advisory committee.

AFBF's advisory committees play an important role in the organization's policy implementation and development. Committee members make contributions to AFBF's mission, from participating in advocacy fly-ins and doing media interviews to helping the organization development comments on proposed regulations and providing input into the resolutions process.

"We are pleased Meg was re-appointed to this issue advisory committee for American Farm Bureau Federation," said MFBF President Mark Amato. "She has grown into an excellent leader as part of our organization and is an excellent communicator. Meg will assist in building the communications bridge between AFBF and our state. I look forward to hearing the information she brings back."

Gennings works at UMass in the animal science department, where she assists with the day-to-day management of the university's livestock. She previously worked as the livestock manager of Lilac Hedge Farm in Rutland.

She has been involved in the Worcester County Farm Bureau board of directors; chairs the statewide promotion and education committee; and serves on the equine and young farmers and ranchers (YF&R) committees. She also is involved in the Nunoa Project, which helps camelids in Peru and the United States, and volunteers at Bureau of Land Management Wild Horse and Burro adoption events in the Northeast.

Gennings holds a Bachelor of Science in animal science and pre-veterinary medicine from the University of Massachusetts and a Master of Science in agricultural and extension education from North Carolina State University.

She was re-appointed in January 2021 and will serve a two-year term.

Congratulations, Meg!

USDA Seeks Members For Committee On Urban Agriculture

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) is seeking members for a new advisory committee on urban agriculture, part of a broader effort to focus on the needs of urban farmers. The 12-person committee will advise the Secretary of Agriculture on the development of policies and outreach relating to urban, indoor, and other emerging agricultural production practices as well as identify any barriers to urban agriculture.



"We are looking forward to a robust group of nominees to serve on this important new advisory committee," said Bill Northey, USDA's Under Secretary for Farm Production and Conservation. "This group will underscore USDA's commitment to all segments of agriculture and has the potential to support innovative ways to increase local food production in urban environments."

USDA is seeking nominations for individuals representing a broad spectrum of expertise, including:

- Four agricultural producers (two agricultural producers in an urban area or urban cluster and two agricultural producers who use innovative technology).
- Two representatives from an institution of higher education or extension program.
- One representative of a nonprofit organization, which may include a public health, environmental or community organization.
- One representative of business and economic development, which may include a business development entity, a chamber of commerce, a city government or a planning organization.
- One individual with supply chain experience, which may include a food aggregator, wholesale food distributor, food hub or an individual who has direct-to-consumer market experience.
- One individual from a financing entity.
- Two individuals with related experience or expertise in urban, indoor and other emerging agriculture production practices, as determined by the Secretary.

Any interested person or organization may nominate qualified individuals for membership. Self-nominations are also welcome.

Nominations should include a cover letter, resume and a background form. Nomination

packages must be submitted by mail or email by March 5, 2021. They should be addressed to Ronald Harris, Designated Federal Officer, Director of Outreach and Partnerships, Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), Department of Agriculture, 1400 Independence Avenue, S.W., Room 6006-S, Washington, D.C. 20250, or emailed to Ronald.Harris@usda.gov.

The 2018 Farm Bill established the Office of Urban Agriculture and Innovative Production and directed USDA to form this advisory committee as well as make other advancements related to urban agriculture. It is led by the NRCS and works in partnership with numerous USDA agencies that support urban agriculture. Its mission is to encourage and promote urban, indoor and other emerging agricultural practices, including community composting and food waste reduction. More information is available in this notice on the Federal Register or at farmers.gov/urban. Additional assistance is available Ask.USDA.Gov or by calling (202) 720-2791.

All USDA Service Centers are open for business, including those that restrict in-person visits or require appointments. All Service Center visitors wishing to conduct business with Farm Service Agency, NRCS or any other Service Center agency should call ahead and schedule an appointment. Service Centers that are open for appointments will pre-screen visitors based on health concerns or recent travel, and visitors must adhere to social distancing guidelines. Visitors are also required to wear a face covering during their appointment. Our program delivery staff will continue to work with our producers by phone, email and using online tools. More information can be found at farmers.gov/coronavirus.

8th Biennial Harvest New England Agricultural Marketing Conference & Trade Show Set for February 24th - 25th



Conference Will be Held Virtually in 2021:
Registration is Now Open!

The [8th biennial Harvest New England Agricultural Marketing Conference and Trade Show](#) which draws hundreds of farmers and farm industry members to idea-laden workshops and hear motivational speakers from across the region, will be held virtually for the first time. Mark your calendars now for February 24th and 25th and join your regional agriculturists for two half days of workshops!

This year's conference theme is Diversifying for Agri-Businesses: Strategies for Weathering the Storms. Kicking off the educational workshops on

Wednesday, February 24th at 8:45 am is conference keynote speaker and seventh generation farmer and author, Forrest Pritchard from Berryville Virginia. His talk, entitled Lessons from 2020, Opportunities for 2021, will examine what the past year taught us not only about our operations, our markets and marketing, but most importantly, ourselves, and how farmers can use these lessons to sustainably pivot into 2021 and beyond.

Five additional workshops will follow on Wednesday and Thursday. These workshops will include farmers and experts from across the region, with a focus on product and market diversification. Information about all of the workshop, including workshop descriptions and speaker biographies, can be found at www.harvestnewengland.org.

Harvest New England is also developing a New England Farmers Market Mangers Seminar to be held in conjunction with the conference. More details will be announced soon.

Registration is now open, and in 2021, the conference will be offered at no cost to attendees. Harvest New England recognizes that this year has been unprecedented for producers in many ways, and feels strongly that now more than ever, it's important to provide agricultural businesses throughout the Northeast with the tools to remain viable, cultivate innovators, and foster the next generation of farmers.

Harvest New England (HNE) is a cooperative marketing program created by New England's state departments of agriculture in 1992. It has sponsored this regional conference since 2007. For more information, visit www.harvestnewengland.org.

COVID-19 Vaccines and Ag Workers

By: Brad Mitchell, MFBF Deputy Executive Director

When COVID-19 hit Massachusetts, farmers and farm workers were designated as essential workers. Unfortunately, despite the efforts of the Massachusetts Farm Bureau Federation (MFBF) and several legislators, they did not receive the same kind of support that other essential workers received - most notably access to free testing. Where grocery baggers had the opportunity to be tested at state facilities free of charge, this was not widely offered to farmers or farm workers. Testing has since become widely available, but early in the pandemic, access to testing for farmworkers was a major concern in the agricultural community.

Thankfully, the Commonwealth appears to have recognized the need to keep farmers and farm workers healthy. In December 2020, Governor Baker's administration rolled out their preliminary timeline for administering vaccines. Agriculture is listed in Phase 2 of the vaccine plan along with other essential workers. Phase 1 is limited to first responders and those at highest risk. At this time, Massachusetts expects to begin administering vaccine to those in Phase 2 between mid-February and mid-April.

The timing is still preliminary as there are yet many unknowns concerning vaccine supply, who will be able to administer it, etc. MFBF is in touch with state officials and will let you know more information is made available. Please watch for more information.

Brad Mitchell
MFBF Deputy Executive Director
brad@mfbf.net



THE COMMONWEALTH OF MASSACHUSETTS
EXECUTIVE OFFICE OF ENERGY AND ENVIRONMENTAL AFFAIRS



Department of Agricultural Resources
251 Causeway Street, Suite 500, Boston, MA 02114
617-626-1700 fax: 617-626-1850 www.mass.gov/agr



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TO: Pesticide Industry/Stakeholders
FROM: Taryn LaScola-Miner, Director Crop and Pest Services Division
DATE: 12/11/20
REGARDING: Online Pesticide Exams

The Massachusetts Department of Agricultural Resources, Pesticide Program ("Department") is pleased to announce that it will be providing pesticide exams online. The online exam will allow for applicants to take the pesticide exam any time of day and any day of the week, giving industry much more flexibility than the "in-person" or "paper and pencil" exams. The Department has ensured that the online exam maintains the integrity and security of the exam with its security measures which include recording the exam session and monitoring for any cheating behaviors during the session. Through these security measures, the Department will be able to ensure that:

- The individual taking the exam is the same individual that has signed up for the exam
- Applicants are not allowed to "leave" the once the exam has started
- Exams are closed-book—meaning applicants cannot use notes or other study materials
- Exam questions are secure and cannot be "stolen"
- Applicants are NOT receiving assistance from any other party while taking their exams

OVERVIEW OF PROCESS

Individuals signing up to take the exam will do so using the current EEA ePLACE Portal where they will register for the exam and pay the registration fee. Applicants will then be sent several emails from EIPAS confirming the registration and online payment via the EEA ePLACE Portal. Additional emails will also be sent from Everblue, host of the online exam and will provide links to facilitate the exam.

When the applicant is ready to take the exam, using the link provided in an email received while registering, they begin the process of creating an account in Everblue which is the company that hosts the online exam. Upon creating an account in Everblue, an additional fee will be required. Before taking the exam the Department **strongly** recommends reviewing any guidance documents that it has provided so that the applicant is prepared and familiar with all the notifications and procedures of the new online exam process. **Please note that the online test does not work with mobile devices; such as, smartphones or tablets** but requires the following:

- A laptop or desktop computer or Chromebook with camera that the applicant can move around for a 360-degree view (this can be camera embedded in a laptop or a webcam used on the PC)
- A quiet room where the applicant can take the exam alone without being disturbed. A valid government issued photo positive I.D. (e.g. state driver's license or passport) that can be displayed to the computer's camera.

Farm Bureau University: Board Leadership Lessons on Your Laptop

Farmers and ranchers know better than most that learning isn't exclusive to classrooms or meeting venues. With that in mind, the American Farm Bureau Federation's learning and development team created Farm Bureau University, an interactive online experience that allows Farm Bureau members to learn where and when they want.

Farm Bureau University's latest offering, Farm Bureau Board Essentials, was designed to help county Farm Bureau board members lead strong, effective organizations that meet members' needs on all levels. The program provides resources and training for county board members in five essential pathways: Being a Board Member; Governance; Planning; Policy Development & Advocacy; and the Membership Cycle.

For example, through Farm Bureau Board Essentials, a new county board member can get the fundamentals-like budget building basics or how to draft an action-oriented agenda-from the online training so when he or she meets with field staff, fellow Farm Bureau members or a retiring board member, they can get right down to the important issues at hand.

Regardless of the topic, in each pathway, the learner will experience:

- A two-minute kickoff video
- A 10-question pre-assessment
- Two or more 10-minute e-learning primers
- Two or more 10-minute e-learning skill builders
- An application toolkit with downloadable resources
- A 10-question post-assessment
- Booster activities to refresh learning

Although Board Essentials was created by AFBF, between Board Essentials and Farm Bureau Builder, another FB University program, more than 50 state Farm Bureau staff members have provided valuable feedback to shape the content.

To start your journey on the five essential pathways of Farm Bureau Board Essentials, go to <https://university.fb.org/>. New users will need to register for a free account using member code "mafb."

To learn more about MFBF's YF&R programs and upcoming events visit mfbf.net

Don't forget to find us on [Facebook](#) and invite your family and friends to follow us!

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