



Ag News

Meeker accepting nominations for Farm Family of Year

The Farm Family Recognition Program has existed for over 30 years and honors farm families from throughout Minnesota for their contributions to the agriculture industry and their local communities.

This program exists through the continued support of and coordination by University of Minnesota Extension, the College of Food, Agricultural, and Natural Resource Sciences, the College of Veterinary Medicine, the Minnesota Agricultural Experiment Station and Farmfest.

Each year, a family from Meeker County is recognized as Farm Family of the Year, along with families from all of Minnesota's 87 counties. To select the families, nominations are solicited from the agribusinesses in the community. The nominations are then forwarded to the selection committees who select the new farm family.

Please nominate an individual or family, using the criteria below. The Farm Family of the Year should:

- Be Minnesota food producers actively involved in agricultural production with one or more agricultural enter-

prises. Beyond the usual agricultural endeavors, please also include these production areas for consideration: potato, vegetable, fruits, berries, aquaculture, agriforestry, and renewable energy supplies; or

- Have made significant short-term progress and/or innovative contributions with their agricultural endeavors. For example, consider producers who are relatively new to this country, someone who has developed an innovative method for a particular environmental problem, adopted a rotational grazing system, added alternative or value-added crops, etc.

All nominees should also have demonstrated a commitment to enhancing and supporting the fields of agriculture and production; have some involvement in their communities and/or related organizations; and not have been previously recognized by the farm family program.

Recipients will be recognized during the state-wide Farmfest awards program.

Please utilize the nomination form - <https://z.umn.edu/meekerfarmfamily20> - to nominate a farm family by Friday, April 3.

Extension cancels in-person events until Tuesday, March 31

The University of Minnesota Extension Service has cancelled in-person programs statewide beginning Monday, March 16, to help reduce the number of Minnesota settings in which potential spread of COVID-19 could occur. The cancellation is effective through Tuesday, March 31. Extension leaders will re-evaluate plans for future programs at that time.

The Extension announcement applies to all in-person programs and meetings, whether they are offered on a county, regional, or statewide basis. Extension's online programs will take place as scheduled, and some in-person events may be moved online.

Extension is the research, outreach, and education arm of the university. Earlier this

week, the university announced that for-credit coursework on all five University of Minnesota campuses will be delivered through alternative instruction beginning next week.

The Extension cancellation includes a variety of areas including: Minnesota 4-H and related youth development programs; Extension master gardeners and Extension master naturalists; nutrition programs offered via SNAP-Ed, the expanded food and nutrition education program, and cooking matters; educational workshops and programs in agriculture, natural resources, food safety, and community vitality and development; and programs conducted through the regional sustainable development partnerships.

FFA

Parliamentary procedure qualifies for state...



The Eden Valley-Watkins FFA parliamentary procedure team qualified recently for the state FFA convention by placing third in the regional contest. Team members include (front) Kaitlyn Mathies, Carly Meierhofer, Jenifer Kipf, and Adrienne Lipinski; and (back) Tate Brovold and Jonathon Gathje.

Submitted Photo

COVID-19

Arvig announces free internet for students during COVID-19

Monday, March 16: Arvig announced they are offering an Education Assistance Program for families with a student in the K-12 system or for college students to receive free internet service, so their education can continue via e-learning methodologies in the event schools remain closed for COVID-19.

"Keeping people connected to the world has always been our mission," said David Arvig, vice president and chief operating officer at Arvig. "We signed the Federal Communications Commission's pledge to Keep America Connected during the coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak across the country, and we are committed to doing what we can to help families."

The Arvig Education Assistance Program: is available to families who live in the Arvig service area and currently do not have any internet service at their residence; provides any internet speed available free-of-charge, including wi-fi service if needed; ensures service will remain free until the 2019-20 school year concludes unless the customer calls to disconnect their service and returns the equipment; will prioritize service installations for customers considered low-income who qualify for this program; and is available where Arvig can deliver 5 Mbps of speed or higher. To qualify for free service, the participant must be a new customer, have no bad debt with Arvig, and sign up for paperless statements. Go online to www.arvig.com via online chat or by call 1-888-992-7844 and ask about it.

Vibrant offering first three months free for students

Friday, March 20: Meeker Cooperative wants to help students continue their education through this time of crisis. To help families stay connected with the fastest Internet speeds, Meeker Coop, with its new Vibrant broadband, has developed a new program called "VIBRANT-U Education Scholarship" where offering the first three months of service free, with free standard installation.

"Meeker Cooperative has been servicing the rural community for 85 years with electricity. Our next commitment is servicing our rural communities with high-speed Internet access using the most current technologies available," said Meeker Cooperative CEO Tim Mergen. "This also means we step up in times of need. We are offering our VIBRANT-U Education Scholarship program to help families with students forced to continue their learning from home."

The VIBRANT-U Education Scholarship programs offers three free months of the essential package of 25 Mbps download with 3 Mbps upload service. Standard installation is also free. This is any fixed wireless system or the direct fiber to the home (up to 800 feet from one of Meeker's fiber-optic splice points). A three-year service commitment is required.

Dollar General seeking to hire amidst COVID-19 demand

Monday, March 23: As the heightened demand for household essentials offered by Dollar General stores continues across the country amid COVID-19 concerns, the company plans to nearly double its normal hiring rate and add up to 50,000 employees by the end of April as it continues to diligently work to support customers' needs. "We are proud to serve as one of America's essential retailers, and we believe our customers are relying on us now more than ever to provide an affordable, convenient retail option," said Kathy Reardon, Dollar General's senior vice president and chief people officer. "The Dollar General family continues to do its part in helping our customers and neighbors during these unprecedented times. We invite individuals looking to start or grow a career, as well as for those whose job may be temporarily impacted by COVID-19, to apply for opportunities to help further our mission of serving others."

While Dollar General currently anticipates the majority of these roles to be temporary, the company has a strong track record of career growth and anticipates providing long-term career growth opportunities to some of these new employees. In the past five years alone, Dollar General has added approximately 35,000 net new jobs to the American economy, growing its workforce from 105,000 employees in February 2015 to more than 143,000 current employees.

Dollar General currently operates more than 16,300 stores in 45 states, and approximately 75 percent of the American population is within five miles of a Dollar General. The company has area stores in Belgrade, Eden Valley, Paynesville, and Richmond. Dollar General is also asking for high-risk and senior customers to be allowed to shop the first hour of every day - 8 to 9 a.m. in Eden Valley and Paynesville.

CentraCare offering video visits for chronic conditions

Friday, March 20: To ensure that patients with chronic conditions get the care they need during the COVID-19 outbreak, CentraCare is now offering video visits. This action benefits patients with chronic conditions such as diabetes, heart disease, or cancer.

Patients with current appointments will be contacted to change their in-person appointments to video visits. "Patients with chronic conditions may also be at a higher risk for COVID-19. With a video visit, we can help patients manage their condition in the safest way possible, by staying at home," said George Morris, M.D., vice president of performance excellence.

Patients will continue to meet with their regular provider. Video visits are available to patients of all CentraCare locations. CentraCare has dedicated additional staff to help patients learn how to use the technology. At this time, video visits are being scheduled for patients with chronic conditions who need to be seen in the next few weeks.

State parks remain open, but visitor centers are closed

Thursday, March 19: Minnesota's public lands remain open, but the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources has closed some buildings.

What's Open - State parks, state forests, recreation areas, and other public lands remain open. The following facilities will remain open at state parks: outdoor areas, campgrounds, camper cabins, yurts, remote campsites, overnight lodging facilities, and some group centers; and highway rest areas at Grand Portage, Gooseberry Falls, and Tettegouche.

What's Closed - Park offices, visitor centers, nature stores, trail centers, indoor interpretive exhibits, and enclosed picnic shelters. Most park bathrooms with running water are still closed for the season and will remain closed; any seasonal bathrooms already open will stay open.

Postponed Events - all safety education training, including firearms safety training; deer open houses; and elk input meetings in northwest Minnesota.

Canceled Events - All naturalist programs and public events at state parks are canceled until further notice.

Online and Phone Options - we urge the public to do business with us by phone, email, or online. Here are your options: buy or renew licenses online; make or change camping and lodging reservations online or by phone at 866-857-2757; call your local DNR office; use email or phone (888-646-6367) to request information from the DNR Information Center.

Questions? - Contact the DNR Information Center at 651-296-6157 or 888-MINN-DNR (646-6367). Email the center at dnr@state.mn.us. Hours are 8 a.m. to 6 p.m. Mondays to Fridays and 8 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. Saturdays.

Stearns County parks and trails remain open for use

Thursday, March 19: Stearns County parks and recreational trails provide a space for people to practice social distancing while benefiting physically, mentally, and emotionally.

- All parks and trails will remain open for public use.

- All visitors to Quarry Park in Waite Park are asked to use the self-serve paybox (cash or check only) to purchase your parking pass. The self-serve paybox is located at the entrance to the park. You can purchase your annual parking pass online at www.co.stearns.mn.us/Recreation/BuyQuarryParkPermit.

- All programs, meetings, events, and volunteer opportunities are either postponed or cancelled through Friday, April 3. No new reservations or event applications will be accepted through Thursday, April 30. Stearns County is accepting reservations and event applications that will occur after Friday, May 1.

- All restroom facilities will remain open. The Stearns County Parks Department has increased cleaning efforts in addition to regular maintenance activities and have implemented best practices to help prevent the spread of viruses.

- All park/trail maps and comment boxes have been removed. Park and trail maps are posted on the informational kiosks for viewing only. Park and trail users are encouraged to utilize online maps from Avenza Maps, a free app.

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