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Augusta Country

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P.O. Box [illegible] Middlebrook, Va. 24459

In Augusta County schools...

Ag program keeps pace with changes

By BETTY JO HAMILTON

There's something fishy going on at Beverley Manor Middle School. At Stewart Middle School in Fort Defiance spring is bursting out all over. And in Stuarts Draft, middle school students are splitting hares.

It's all about agriculture — that is, the curriculum in Augusta County's three middle schools which is introducing students to the diversity of modern agriculture.

"We want to make them realize that agriculture is changing," says Gary McQuain, director of special services and vocational education for the school system in Augusta County. The curriculum, which offers the class "Agriculture Science and Technology" for all three grades on the middle school level, helps sixth-, seventh-, and eighth-grade students develop "an appreciation for agriculture and what it means to our area and the state," according to McQuain.

"We're getting them to understand that there is more to agriculture than what they traditionally think of," said the school administrator.

A visit to each of the three middle schools illustrates McQuain's point.

In Fort Defiance, Stewart Middle School agriculture instructor Sarah Bussvage — or "Ms. B" as students call her — teaches plant science in the school's two greenhouses. Although temperatures outside indicate winter is far from over, the steamy warmth of the greenhouses is the perfect environment for some practical experience in horticulture.

"Ooooo, a worm..." means one squeamish student upon encountering one of the slippery sod-busting creatures in a wheelbarrow filled with potting soil. Holding the worm gingerly between two fingers, the student shows it to her classmates.

"Emma, a worm!" Ms. B exclaims gleefully. "Go put her in my terrarium in my classroom please," she instructs the student.

On this afternoon, eighth-grade students are planting seeds in flats in preparation for a plant sale to be held in May.

"Hey guys, don't forget to put plant labels in there so we'll know what we're growing," Ms. B tells her students.

"Everything we're working on now we'll sell in May," she explains. The process of preparing for the annual plant sale is a year-long one.

"We began last May," says Stewart's ag instructor and noted that the initial phase of preparing for the plant sale falls into the category of agribusiness. Students go through seed catalogs, choose the varieties of plants they want to grow, and determine what types of plants the public will want to buy.

Some plants are started at the beginning of the school year. Geraniums grown last year provide cuttings for students to propagate more of the popular garden plant. Other plants — impatiens and Sweet Williams — are started from seeds. In addition to these, the Stewart plant sale will feature other bedding plants including coleus, cockscomb, begonias, marigolds, pansies, petunias, and daisies. For vegetable gardeners, tomato and pepper plants will be available.

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Sarah Bussvage, far left, agriculture instructor at Stewart Middle School in Fort Defiance, works with eighth-grade students Josh Shoemaker, Wes Hilbert, Kenny Hyden, Karen Crickenberger, and Christy Burke as they plant seeds in flats in preparation for a plant sale to be held in May. The horticulture project is part of the school's agriculture science and technology class. Photo by Betty Jo Hamilton

Nation's first FFA chapter was in Weyers Cave

By ASHLEY CRAUN

The Future Farmers of America was the creation of four men who didn't know their idea would grow into what is today the largest, most active, and exciting youth organization in the United States.

Harry Sanders, Henry Grossloss, Walter Newman, and E.C. McGill, all from Virginia Tech, came up with the idea to have a student organization made up of students who were taking agriculture class taught in the schools. After the passing of the Smith-Hughes Act of 1917 which allowed agriculture to be taught in schools, the men contacted schools from around Virginia to determine the interest in developing a student organization.

The first charter of the FFV was issued on April 30, 1927 to the Weyers Cave chapter with 29 eager students under the leadership of agriculture adviser Ernest B. Craun. With the success and popularity of the FFV, Sanders, Grossloss, Newman, and McGill took their ideas national and helped form the Future Farmers of America using the charter and constitution of the FFV.

The FFA has grown into an organization with 438,100 members nationwide. There are 12,000 members in Virginia with 1,000 of those belonging to the Augusta Federation. FFA chapters are found in all 50 states, Guam, Puerto Rico, and the Virgin Islands.

The FFA helps provide its members with the skills they need in the future such as leadership, public speaking abilities, self confidence, self respect, and training in the world of business which will help members excel in today's society.

FFA members across the nation observed National FFA Week February 18-25. The week's theme, "FFA — The Leadership Advantage" is an example of what the FFA stands for. FFA and agriculture education strive to provide students with the skills necessary to be successful in the world today.

The more than 1,000 Augusta County FFA members encourage you to become familiar with agriculture education and FFA. There are agriculture programs and FFA chapters in each of Augusta County's middle and high schools. These programs are busy providing students with the latest information on new and exciting careers in the fast growing industry of agriculture.

Come and see what agriculture education and the FFA are all about. It may surprise you.

Ashley Craun is an FFA member and student at Fort Defiance High School. David Shiflett, Ash's ag instructor, contributed to this article. —

Robin sighting: February 9

If I hadn't been so cold myself at the time, I would have offered him my coat.

On February 9 across four counties and the road where I was passing by on a tractor. At first I didn't realize what I was seeing but then it sank in — slowly perhaps because one's mind and senses are dulled when temperatures (with wind chill) approach the minus 30 bracket.

I thought the sighting was a fluke and that maybe the red-breasted harbinger of spring had gotten his compass out of whack. February 9, I thought, was a bit early even for the hardy variety of New England robins to be heading back north.

But then, only a few days later on February 13, I saw a whole flock of robins. Do the robins know something we don't know? But then I checked my 1995 Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries calendar which notes that robins were indeed scheduled to begin their migratory flights February 12. The fellow I saw February 9 must have started out early to avoid the traffic, I guess.

At Augusta Country we're in the process of tracking down information about legendary snowfalls which have occurred in the area. One such storm — as we have heard reported from three different and independent sources — resulted in 12-foot drifts "to the tops of the telephone poles." We are interested in any photos folks may have which show the aftermath of legendary snowstorms. Also we would like to hear some recollections of these weather occurrences. Call us or drop us a line if you have information about any of these "storms of the century."

Our snow count is at 12 now — Numbers 9 and 10 were significant and left us with about 8 inches of snow over a two-day period. Numbers 11 and 12 were run of the mill from an accumulation standpoint, but the Siberian Express which the jet stream carried through with Number 11 left us gasping for breath. Only a few more weeks though, and Winter 1995 will be over. But what we're most concerned about is getting you through March, and we have just the issue to do that.

We begin this month by profiling the agriculture program in Augusta County's middle schools and saluting the FFA program which held its national observance Feb. 19-25. Agriculture week in Virginia is ahead of us the third week in March. In addition to a variety of agriculture related events which we feature in this issue, we're visiting with a Shorts Draft man who has been honored as the Virginia Young Farmers' agribusiness person of the year for 1994.

March is also Women in History Month and we're spending some time in this issue paying tribute to women whose accomplishments are of historic significance. Locally, we'll visit with three ladies who themselves represent women in history. Elaine Smith and Gertrude Hawkins, both of Staunton, and Katherine Shirley of Rockbridge County, lead us on trips through the 20th century, each from very different perspectives. In Gertrude's case, we are treated to a photographic buffet which brings us vignettes of rural life in Augusta County from the turn of the century.

And somewhere in this issue you'll run across a giant pig and hear a chilling tale (tail) about a cold reception. The pun is intended so you'll read on this month's edition of "Down on the Farm."

Our thanks go out to those folks who have called or written to let us know about special people, places, and events in Augusta county. Some of these items have already been used, some appear in this issue, and yet others are stockpiled in our warehouse for future issues. We encourage anyone who has information which they feel is suitable for publication in Augusta Country to contact us.

We look forward to hearing your recollections of those legendary snowfalls. As one Augusta Country staff member said regarding the response we're hoping for to this request: "I'll bet we'll be snowed under."

Until next month,

Betty Jo Hamilton

Betty Jo Hamilton
Publisher and editor

Habitat for Humanity dedication

On February 19 the fifth house to be built by Staunton-Augusta-Waynesboro Habitat for Humanity was dedicated. The dwelling, located at 9 Wythe Street in Staunton will be the home of Dante and Sheila Saglnario and their daughter, Nichole. Presenting a housewarming gift of daffodils to the family is Jennifer Lindsay and Michelle George, far right. The teens are members of the Mint Spring United Methodist Church Youth Group which installed insulation in the house during its construction.

AC staff photo

Book Review

Lembke essays are elegant, lyrical

By VIRGINIA FRANCISCO

Skinny Dipping, and Other Immersions in Water, Myth, and Being Human, by Janet Lembke. New York: Lyons and Burford, 1994. $21.95

This month's Augusta Country quiz:

Skinny dipping is:

(a) the most completely sensuous experience available to humankind.

(b) a way of looking at life, shedding the habits that stifle curiosity and exploration.

(c) a summertime activity for children.

(d) the opposite of crossing the Styx.

(e) a new book by Janet Lembke.

Right. Right. Right. Right. Right. And all of the above.

Janet Lembke, a five-times-great granddaughter of Augusta country, earned fame as a nature writer far beyond her own stretch of river — the Bullpasture — through her previous books, *Dangerous Birds, River Time*, and *Looking for Eagles*. In *Skinny Dipping*, she offers 11 elegantly crafted essays, composed of prose so lyrical that it qualifies as poetry. As perceptive Augusta Country readers will have estimated, Lembke focuses on water, or perhaps *waters* — *from the Bullpasture of her childhood, through "rivers, lakes, curling breakers at the beach, backyard swimming pools," and even a fabled parched expedition on a ledge above Little Creek, to the Antarctic Southern Ocean and the legendary river Styx.*

A naturalist, Lembke gives us "the facts arising out of nature and history." A dramatist, she painstakingly assembles a cast of characters — that's CHARACTERS — from Thomas Lewis, her five-times-great-grandfather, a founder of Augusta country — that's County, to the mad swimmer of beeman cove, in his royal-blue briefs, alternating ashore with a royal blue umbrella.

But Lembke doesn't stop there. Poetlike, she sings the "primeval language" of wind and storms and rapids, of muddy creeks and roaring rivers, and of people who immerse themselves, shedding layers, testing endurance, encouraging the gods in their holy places.

Prophetlike, Lembke speaks from the perspective of the days when the gods roamed the earth, from "the archaic Greek conviction that everything is sacred in its own right," toward the perspective (or lack of perspective) of today, when "the presence of gods in the world goes unnoticed by people who do not believe in gods."

Friendlike, Lembke invites, "Come with me. Take off the old habits. Plunge in." Augusta Country readers who join her will cherish *Skinny Dipping* — readers who love the natural world, readers who are sensitive to its plight, readers who like Lembke hold fast the belief on that "the only way to arrive at the blessed, *bright Elysian fields — the only way to enter them* — is to cross the Styx. Wisdom and pain, these is no way around to comfort and delight. The final element of truth in the old accounts is that it takes a hero to get there and back again."

Virginia Francisco is a professor of theatre at Mary Baldwin College. —

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Please recycle

Miss Florine tells stories of African-American life

By SUE SIMMONS

Mrs. Frank Smith -- Miss Florine to friends and acquaintances -- has stayed pretty close to her native Staunton for most of her life. From the turn of the century to the present, she has lived through and experienced societal changes of African-American life in the United States.

STAUNTON — "I've only went to high school and I've only been as far as Selsign, Maine," Florine Smith laughed roundly at the prospect of talking about herself.

Mrs. Smith, known as "Miss Florine" to her friends and neighbors, was born in a house on Stafford Street on November 24, 1902, the oldest of Fannie and Jack Coles' seven children. The family moved to Gooch Street on Sears Hill when Florine was little.

As it was for many of Staunton's African-American families, times were not easy for the Coles family. Jack Coles raised horses and worked in stables around town while Florine's mother took in laundry to make ends meet. A lookout outside the house provided water which was boiled on a woodstove in the family's kitchen. Her mother scrubbed the clothes by hand.

"I remember at night the kitchen would be filled with clothes to dry," she recalled. "After the clothes were ironed us children took them back. I remember once I took some clothes back to a family on Beverley Street. Their little girl had a new pair of roller skates and she and I went into their basement and skated. When my mother missed me, that's where they found me, in the basement skating."

To make ends meet, the family raised hogs and kept a small garden. She also remembers that for awhile they kept chickens, but her mother gave them up when the chickens got into their garden. "Can't have a garden and chickens," Miss Florine continued.

"We always bought milk and many of our groceries at the store," she recalled. "We ate a lot of white beans and meat."

At an early age, Miss Smith began to earn money on her own and worked in a variety of jobs.

"In the morning, before school, I walked to Maple Street to carry a wood for this lady. Then I would walk to the store and buy rolls and carry it to her. She paid me 50 cents a week," Miss Florine recalled. "Then I would walk all the way from Maple Street to D. Webster Davis School on Sunnyside."

After school she walked children at affluent white families around Gypsy Hill Park earning another 50 cents a week. "A lot of girls from D. Webster Davis earned money babysitting in Gypsy Hill Park," Miss Florine remembered, adding: "My mother let me keep that 50 cents to spend on myself."

"Most women worked as domestics," Miss Florine recalled of the lack of employment options for black women. "When you were first hired, you were only a helper." Women starting out in this line of work earned $3 a week. After gaining experience, the salary could have been raised to as much as $15, still a meager sum by any measure.

Despite the lack of many material things, life on Gooch Street was not desperate. Miss Florine remembers playing under the street light at night, singing songs, telling stories, and reciting poems. She also remembers a man who came to their house occasionally.

"He was an old man and he'd talk and tell stories that made us not afraid to go upstairs to bed," she said.

Miss Florine was seven years old when she started attending D. Webster Davis School, a segregated school that included grades 1 to 12. "All the grades shared the same school," she said. "I remember there was a little recess yard next to school."

Her teachers included T.C. Edmonds, O.J. Dirt, and Miss Jesse.

"She was mean," Miss Florine recalled with a chuckle. "My voice carries and it did even when I was little. Everyone in class talked but she could hear me over everyone else. She would punish me for talking."

School wasn't hard for Miss Florine although she recalls have trouble with algebra. "There was another school for black children in Staunton. We called it Mr. Kinney's. It sat on the corner where the Embassy is today." Miss Florine recounted of the private school run by its owner and a helper.

"I thought Mr. Kinney's was for children who didn't do well in public school. Later I realized that children from the better families went there." She added that Mr. Kinney's students went on to northern colleges and rarely returned to Staunton.

"There wasn't much work in town for black folks. Many people worked at Hot Springs or left to work in Washington, Baltimore, and New York," she said, noting that several of her brothers and sisters emigrated to northern cities for work. "My brother always said he'd rather be a lamp post on the streets of Washington than work in Staunton," Miss Florine recalled.

A lifelong member of the Allen Chapel African Methodist Episcopal (A.M.E.) Church, Miss Florine's memories include those of her church life.

"I can still remember old man Beverley Jones sitting in his usual place in the church," she recalled the grandfather of her first cousin, Kenneth Jones. "They were real strict during the church service," Miss Florine explained. "We weren't even supposed to breathe loud during the sermon." In the timeless tradition of children in church, however, they would get tickled and begin to laugh uncontrollably at nothing.

Church was one of the few places to go for pleasure. Sunday School picnics were held in nearby fields. "I wouldn't eat anyone else's food but my mother's," Miss Florine laughed, remembering her childhood pickiness. "I didn't think it was clean."

She was not so picky at Christmas time.

"Each Christmas the church had a program at which they gave each child an orange and a bag of candy in a stocking," Miss Florine recalled, adding that this was often the only thing she got for Christmas.

"I don't remember my mother ever putting up a Christmas tree at home. It was a special day but we didn't get much," she said. "My mother would cook a Sunday meal instead of Monday meal on Christmas."

The Staunton of Mrs. Smith's youth and much of her adulthood was a segregated town operating under Jim Crow, the systematic practice of segregating African-Americans.

"This place was segregated but only to a point," she commented. "It seems to me that times weren't segregated. Otherwise, you knew where to go and not to go.

"We would all go to the New theater. We had to use the side door and sit upstairs," citing one example of Jim Crow. Miss Florine remembered. "When the lights came on after the movie, everyone could see who you came with. Depending on who it was, you could be in for some teasing at school."

Miss Florine married Frank Smith when she was 18 years old. They bought a small house in Preston Hts. her husband's home, located beyond the rock quarry on Middlebrook Avenue.

Frank worked as a wholesale buyer in front of the C&O Station and Miss Florine stayed at home to raise their three children. Frank lost his job after he injured his back. The family eventually lost their home and moved back to Staunton.

After their return to the city, the Smiths went to work for Mrs. Hugh Bell (Agnes) Sproul. Miss Florine kept house and cooked at "Braeburn," the Sproul home, while her husband chauffeured Mrs. Sproul. The Smiths worked for Mrs. Sproul for over 30 years.

In 1961, Miss Florine suffered a double loss. Mrs. Sproul died and later that year Frank died.

"I lost my two pieces of bread," Miss Florine explained. Mrs. Sproul's picture sits among family pictures in Miss Florine's living room. It was after Frank's death that Miss Florine took a trip to New York and ended up in Selsign, Maine.

"I was feeling real blue and people thought I should go visit my sister in New York. She worked for a family who spent the summer in Maine. So I ended up going with her to Selsign. That's as far away as I've been from Staunton," she said.

Miss Florine continued to work for various members of the Sproul family upon her return and until her retirement.

"I'm not really retired," she laughed, explaining that Dr. and Mrs. Erskine Sproul check on her frequently. "They look out for me now."

Miss Florine's retirement has been an active one. She sang in the Allen Chapel choir and served as chairman of the Stewardess Board of the Women's Auxiliary. She eventually became a steward on the church board.

In addition to her church activities, Miss Florine played an active role at the Effie Ann Johnson Nursery School as a member of the school's board. Mrs. Smith's son, Frank Smith, Jr. makes his home in Charleston, S.C. Her daughter Gladys Virginia Perry of Staunton taught third grade at Ware Elementary School.

Miss Florine has six grandchildren and five great grandchildren, with another one on the way. Her granddaughter Londrianne Jackson Pendleton was the first black social worker in Staunton.

"I was born poor," Miss Florine states matter-of-factly. "But I came from decent people. I never acted trashy and I never had a jail record, although I may get one tomorrow," she laughed. "I have more than my parents had, and I consider myself middle class. I can go anywhere I want, buy what I want. I'm not looked down on. I'm a full citizen of this country."

For a 91-year-old woman who only graduated high school and never went any farther from Staunton than Selsign, Maine, Miss Florine has a world's worth of stories to tell. —

Mrs. Frank "Miss Florine" Smith of Staunton surrounded by photographs of family and friends

Photo by Sue Simmons

Students learn agriculture is more than cows and plows

Continued from page 1

The process of learning about horticulture is a gradual one. In sixth grade, students spend six weeks studying plant science. Their projects include making terrariums out of plastic soft drink bottles and planting seeds to take home.

"Sixth graders experiment to learn about different needs of plants," says Ms. B.

In seventh grade, students have 18 weeks of horticulture education. They buy a house plant, research it, and learn how to care for it. They also study the development of plants by observing the growth of beans planted from seeds.

By the time middle school students reach eighth grade, they are ready to put some of their agriculture knowledge to use. Eighth-grade students have a half-year of classroom instruction and spend the last half of their year working in the greenhouse.

"They have to care for the plants, water them, and make sure nothing dries out," says Ms. B describing some of the students' responsibilities. The agribusiness aspect of greenhouse operations surfaces again just prior to and during the plant sale.

"A couple weeks before we start I have them go out and check prices," Ms. B says explaining the marketing angle of the students' horticulture endeavors. During the sale, students work in the greenhouses answering customers' questions about plants and making sales. Having students gain practical experience in greenhouse operations is an ideal way to offer instruction, according to Ms. B.

"I'd almost put money on the fact that they enjoy being out here more than they do sitting in a classroom. The goal is not just to learn how something happens but to see it," she says. "It will lead to a good career — either the brain work or the physical work."

A total of 133 students are enrolled in Stewart's agriculture science and technology class. Of those, 108 seventh and eighth graders are members of the school's FFA chapter.

"The majority of the horticulture students are in FFA," says Ms. B, who serves as chapter advisor. "You can really see them gaining in their sense of responsibility and they begin to show a little bit more maturity," she explains of students who join the FFA program and participate in its contests and activities.

Kenny Hyder, FFA president at Stewart, noted that he enjoys agriculture instruction and being an FFA member.

"I was in ag class and heard things about FFA when I was in the sixth grade," he said. After joining the group, Kenny said he began participating in dairy judging, ag mechanics, and attended a leadership camp in Smithfield last summer. Vice president Josh Shoemaker also attended the FFA leadership camp.

A trend in the area's population is evident among students enrolled in the school's ag program.

"There are maybe 10 kids in the eighth grade that actually live on farms. There are a lot that work on them," said Ms. B.

Kenny noted that he works on his uncle's farm in Port Republic and where he helps to plant and harvest crops. He also has farm animals for which he provides care. Other students, however, have agriculture pursuits on a smaller scale.

"We used to have a flower bed until I ran over it with a four-wheeler," noted Josh.

At Beverley Manor Middle School, plant life takes on a bit of a twist. While the school has a greenhouse similar to Stewart's, growing plants is achieved without soil. Beverley Manor's aquaponics project is a futuristic demonstration of how food production may eventually be accomplished.

The project -- dubbed "Lett—uce—Fish," -- combines the production of farm-raised fish and lettuce.

"Basically we're raising two different living things in one water system," explains BMMS ag instructor Sally Weaver. The self-contained system includes a 180-gallon fish tank, water cress filtration system, and series of gutters in which lettuce grows in blocks of rock wool.

"This is the first of its kind to be set up this large," points out Ms. Weaver. Because of this, Beverley Manor's aquaponics project is truly experimental.

"It's been fun to watch," said Ms. Weaver. "The cleaning process has taken a lot more time than we had expected. We've kind of been guinea pigs this time. I'm looking forward to next year and having all the problems worked out."

BMMS students began their project in September with the introduction of 83 Tilapia Avrea, a warm water fish, to the aquaponics fish tank. Most of these fingerlings were less than an inch long to begin with and now measure about 6 to 7 inches. The project is one which not only demonstrates food production, but also the process of natural water filtration and purification.

Water from the fish tank flows by gravity into a tray seeded with water cress. Roots of the cress remove sediment and waste from the water which moves on to a series of vinyl gutters. It is here that lettuce production takes place as the water drains through the gutters and is absorbed by blocks of rock wool containing lettuce seed. Purified excess water drains back into the fish tank where it is aerated by air which is pumped into the tank.

The fish are fed a flaked fish food, but also eat lettuce which is harvested once a week. The system cost $2,000 to set up with half of that funded by a grant from the Valley Education Alliance and the other half by the BMMS FFA chapter, according to Ms. Weaver.

"The purpose is to show kids there are different methods of farming other than the traditional ways," she says of her school's aquaponics project. "It shows the different phases of agriculture — it's not all just cows and plows any more."

Ms. Weaver explained that she begins her instruction of middle school students by teaching all of her classes about agriculture.

"I teach how this is part of agriculture," she noted of the aquaponics project. "It shows students that you can have successful agriculture enterprises in small areas. Most of the kids do not come from farms. This is a way they can see you don't have to raise cows or chickens to be part of agriculture."

More than 120 students at BMMS are enrolled in agriculture science and technology course. The school's FFA chapter includes 129 members, according to Ms. Weaver who serves as chapter adviser.

"The FFA program helps students to learn leadership qualities

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Lett--uce--Fish is the aquaponics project under way at Beverley Manor Middle School. Ag instructor Sally Weaver, second from left, holds two Tilapia Avrea, the warm water fish being grown in the 180-gallon fish tank. A water cress filtration system, foreground, purifies the water which drains through guttering, right, where lettuce grows in blocks of rock wool. BMMS students are responsible for cleaning and maintaining the system. Jeremy Maddox, far left, Carrie Hetzer, Colby Irvine, and Felicia Gutshall are FFA members at BMMS.

Photo by Betty Jo Hamilton

Josh Shoemaker, a student and FFA member at Stewart Middle School in Fort Defiance, waters geraniums which the students use for propagation.

Photo by Betty Jo Hamilton

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and to become responsible and mature," she said. "It gives them a sense of responsibility and citizenship and those are abilities they can use in other areas."

Jeremy Maddox, an assistant officer in the BMMS FFA chapter and an eighth-grader, noted that the leadership aspect of FFA is important to him.

"It helps you to get ready for a job and teaches you how to cooperate with other people," he said. Jeremy said he hopes to put his agriculture education to practical use one day. His career goals are to "own a ranch and be a bull rider."

FFA member Carrie Heizer, also an eighth grader, noted that the school's aquaponics project is an excellent example of some things which are very basic to agriculture.

"I've learned a lot about it — raising the lettuce grow," she said. "It doesn't have any dirt or anything — it just grows."

Rebecca Crawford, vice president of the BMMS FFA chapter, [illegible] hopes to be an agriculture instructor one day and noted that her middle school agriculture experience has been valuable.

"It's a good way to test how things work," she said referring to the BMMS aquaponics project. "It's interesting to work with." Her participation in FFA was spurred by her interest in agriculture and [illegible] which the organization sponsors. The group's emphasis on leadership and citizenship are also important to her.

"[FFA] gets you ready for the real world," she said.

Garland King, agriculture instructor and FFA chapter advisor at Stuarts Draft Middle School, was among those — as was Ms. Weaver — who were involved in the initial writing of the middle school agriculture curriculum for the state of Virginia.

At Stuarts Draft, King will have "somewhere in the neighborhood of 430 students" come through the agriculture science and technology program. A particular area of emphasis of the Draft program is small animal care, and King is using rabbits as instructional tools.

"The kids learn how to handle, care for, and feed them," he said. Students may choose to keep rabbits for pets or may want to begin a meat rabbit project. The small animal care instruction also includes [illegible] about dog and cat care.

"We teach them how to pick out a puppy and choose a good cat," King said. "The majority of students don't have cattle or sheep or hogs, but most of them do have an animal to care for. The number of kids coming from farms has decreased, but the interest is still there. We need to give them something that will interest them."

Small animal care soon will be taking on new dimensions at Stuarts Draft. Two rabbits — a Siamese lop doe and a black and white lop buck — are [illegible] additions to Draft's ag program.

"The kids are responsible for them — feeding, watering, and cleaning out the manure pans," King said. Within the next few weeks, the rabbits will reach breeding age and students have already started the process of making genetic predictions of what offspring will look like.

Cory Abshire, a seventh grade student at Stuarts Draft Middle School and president of his class' FFA chapter, says the agriculture curriculum covers a particular area of interest for him.

"I just like animals and raising plants," he said. Cory may consider a career as a game warden, a vocation which he says will require that he "know about animals." In FFA Cory is beginning to learn about judging cattle, which he says will help him select a steer to exhibit in the annual Market Animal Show.

King pointed out that agriculture is "in the process of change." Agriculture as a science is the emerging trend, according to the middle school teacher, and he said ag instruction must address this trend.

"Agriculture is changing and we need to change along with it," King said. "Each student that comes through here should have his hands on a microscope."

Biotechnology, genetics, and plant and animal science are fields which will offer job opportunities in agriculture, according to McQuain.

"Our goal is to expose every middle school student to agriculture," he said. "The students are coming into high school stronger as freshmen. They get a lot of exposure to agriculture, and I think that's very positive. The technology is so advanced that students have got to have a better feel for mathematics and language arts. We've been able to maintain a very strong ag program, and it will continue to be stronger. We're building on that."

Even though the schools' existing agriculture programs are strong, McQuain noted that the curriculum will be adapted to changes which affect agriculture.

"We don't want to close the door on opportunities," he said. "We can't stay stagnant. We need to change and make our program more viable." The school system is in the process of evaluating a joint effort with Virginia Tech which would permit Augusta County students to earn college credits in high school which could be applied to Tech's two-year agriculture associates' technician program.

McQuain says the FFA program in the county schools enhances the agriculture curriculum. Students involved in FFA activities are "usually kids who juggle an awful lot," noted McQuain. "It's part of the work ethic that's so important here in Augusta County."

"FFA provides the first exposure to any type of leadership training. It gives the students a chance to compete and be involved in civic activities," he said.

Whether in fish farming, plant science, or animal care, the agriculture curriculum in Augusta County schools is keeping pace with the rapidly changing world of modern agriculture. According to McQuain, keeping students interested, involved, and active in agriculture and the community is where FFA comes into play.

"It's a real leadership builder," McQuain said of FFA. "It brings it all together." —

The Tilapia Avrea used in the BMMS aquaponics project began as one-inch fingerlings. The fish were purchased in September and have grown to about 7 inches in length.

Photo by Betty Jo Hamilton

Cory Abshire, a seventh-grade student at Stuarts Draft Middle School and a member of its FFA chapter, holds the Siamese lop doe which is one of two rabbits the students study in their agriculture and technology class.

Photo by Betty Jo Hamilton

Garland King, center, ag instructor at Stuarts Draft Middle School, works with a group of sixth-grade students in one of his agriculture science and technology classes. Students are exposed to a variety of topics which range from tool identification to the proper use of safety glasses — a practice which at least one student has yet to master.

Photo by Betty Jo Hamilton

Minister's wife recalls life of hardships and blessings

By DEBORAH SENSABAUGH

ROCKBRIDGE COUNTY — Katherine Shiley has a lifetime of rich memories.

Like the patchwork quilt in her bedroom, they connect in bright patterns and flowing colors — growing up in rural West Virginia, marrying a young minister, raising a family, struggling through moves to remote rural pastorates, praying for the finances to continue. And it all began with a young girl's dream that the years have not tarnished.

"I always had a feeling there was something special about being a minister's wife. I thought I'd like to be one," the bright senior citizen admits.

When she got the thought of how she might like her life to go, Mrs. Shiley was a romantic young girl growing up on a small farm in Durbin, W.Va. Church was a big part of that rural lifestyle.

"We always went to church; my mother saw to that," Mrs. Shiley remembers. "We had to walk. There weren't many cars then." Worship was nearby, at a Methodist Church, although the family belonged to the Church of the Brethren, which was too far away to walk.

And while Mrs. Shiley didn't know it then, God seemingly had read the desires of her heart and began shaping her life early for her later role as a Methodist minister's wife. She and her siblings did not always have life easy. They often walked the few miles to the little country school, even during the harsh West Virginia winters.

"We had an old horse. Four of us would climb on him and ride to school. Then we'd tie up the rein and he'd go back home. Then someone would come for us in the afternoon," she says.

Mrs. Shiley firmly believes her country school education was a valuable experience. "It was a much more personal education. I think we had it better. They stressed writing, penmanship, and the kids all helped one another," she says. The school's eight grades under one roof contained about 20 students.

After eighth grade there, she went to the city to take her test and finished first in the county. After that, she helped at home and also went to neighboring houses to tend the sick or help new mothers.

In the remote area, the young people welcomed any opportunity to socialize, so when a young minister from Winchester came to conduct a revival, the community was enthused. Mrs. Shiley even accepted a dinner invitation which included the young minister.

"I didn't know he was single," the woman admits. The two struck up a friendship, and the young Rev. Hugh Shiley asked Katherine to stay and go to church with him.

"I did, and that's how I met my husband," Mrs. Shiley relates.

"I think people ought to get involved in church. We have let down too many bars. Too many things aren't held sacred any longer. The way things are going is just not good for this country and it bothers me."

Katherine Shiley

When she was 25, in 1938, she became the minister's wife, and embarked on a real adventure.

The couple settled down in their first parsonage, at Minnehaha Springs, W.Va., but with the three branches of Methodism combining in 1939, their settling down was short-lived. They soon began a round of moving and relocating.

"Our first parsonage was completely furnished. We even had dishes, linens, and mops. So I thought all parsonages were furnished," Mrs. Shiley says.

Imagine her surprise upon arrival at the new parsonage in Farmington, W.Va.

"I'll never forget the sound of the house when we opened the door and went in. It was totally empty — no window shades, no carpet, no furniture, only a rusty old bedstead with no springs. We had no money, having just had to buy a car to replace our worn out one. We didn't know anyone, and there was no welcoming committee. We even had trouble finding the key to get in!"

The Shileys received a salary of $600 per year, and a previous charge still owed them $600 so they were left short. Plus, the price of the Plymouth coupe they had purchased was $680.

"I wanted to go home," Mrs. Shiley remembers when faced with her new challenges. "I was about to throw in the towel, but Hugh had a special calling to the ministry so I tried to put up with things and not discourage him. He had six churches there and had to preach three times every Sunday."

The Shileys shopped at a secondhand store in Fairmont, W.Va., and came home with a few furniture items. "And I had a sewing machine. Things from my hope chest and a few dishes I had gotten at a shower. Hugh had his books and a pillow he had at college. We tacked quilts over the windows, and while we were out, someone came in and left another pillow," the minister's wife recalls.

Surprisingly enough, Mrs. Shiley believes ministry was easier in those days.

"There was no television or ball games or sports to disrupt people's Sunday activities," she explains. "Today there are so many conflicts with everyone's time. We had nine young people's groups and lots of children in the churches. The work was a blessing then."

The couple's first son was born in that sparsely furnished parsonage, with Mrs. Shiley ill during the entire pregnancy. The new baby was followed closely by a new assignment.

"The next parsonage was right on a coal and shale dump. We had a coal stove in the kitchen and a fireplace in the living room. My hands were always black with the coal dust and in winter when the wind blew, the carpet rose off the floor. We used books to brace the doors shut and had to carry water up the hill," Mrs. Shiley remembers.

Their next parsonage, in a rural area near Green Sulphur Springs, W.Va., was a nice house with a water pump near the back door. With a sigh of relief Mrs. Shiley settled into her new home.

The next year the family moved to Swan, W.Va., with six busy churches. "You can put up with anything if you have good supervision in the churches," the woman says.

Next they were off to Romney, W.Va., where the charge had five churches and a parsonage with a "bath, furnace, and everything." In the middle of orchard country, the parishioners brought the minister's family all kinds of fruit, and every summer a camp meeting kept the spiritual community lively and interested.

Three years later, the Shileys were off to Aurora, W.Va., where the parsonage was being extensively renovated.

"I don't know how I managed. We had a lot of evangelists and missionaries to stay. The walls were torn out, and the workmen were pulling down new floors. But somehow we got through it, and I still laugh about it," Mrs. Shiley says.

Later, when a four-church charge in Monterey opened up, the Shileys jumped at the chance to move to Virginia. They spent four years there before moving to Lexington to the Wesley Chapel charge with three active churches. Next was a stint at Mountain View near Vinton, then to a larger church near Thaxton in Bedford County.

After four years at Thaxton, the Shileys decided they wanted a house all their own in which to retire. But by the time the house was finished in 1972, Rev. Shiley's health had begun to deteriorate. Strokes and a massive heart attack left him in need of constant care so in 1983 the couple moved to Rockbridge County to a mobile home near their son, Dan, and his wife, Brenda. "I didn't want to move to a trailer," Mrs. Shiley admits. "But now I love it."

Rev. Shiley died in 1984 leaving the farm girl from Durbin a life rich with memories and two hands which are still busy.

"I always have something in my hands," she says, sharing her crocheted afghans and hand-stitched heirloom quilts. Beside her sofa are scrapbooks in which she has gathered mementos of her husband's life to share with his grandchildren.

And yes, she has seen plenty of changes in the world since 1913.

"I think people ought to get involved in church. We have let down too many bars. Too many things aren't held sacred any longer. The way things are going is just not good for this country and it bothers me," she says.

Three years ago Mrs. Shiley had a heart attack but she just keeps right on going.

"The doctor told me the Lord has something more for me to do. My life has been blessed. I know God has touched me or I wouldn't be here. I enjoy life, and my children and grandchildren. I'm having a ball!" —

Augusta FCE holds achievement program

AC staff report

STUARTS DRAFT — The Family Community Education Association honored its members February 2 in an achievement program held at Calvary United Methodist Church.

The occasion was also one which gave the 45 FCE members present to learn about an agency which offers services to senior citizens in the area.

Jackie Mabe, volunteer coordinator of Valley Program for Aging Services, was keynote speaker for the event. She gave a detailed report of VPAS' operations. Her program was front and center of what the group strives to achieve in communities which have FCE clubs.

"Basically what we do is try to educate other people in the community about things we have learned and are still learning," said Augusta County FCE president Helen Stogdale of Mt. Sidney. She explained that the FCE association emphasizes the importance of good nutrition and promotes literacy. The group donates books to local libraries and members volunteer their time in school libraries.

In her report to the group, Mrs. Stogdale noted that FCE clubs undertake a variety of community service projects throughout the year and play an active role in supporting the county's 4-H program. FCE members are also trained in fair judging and participate in this at fairs in neighboring counties.

Achievement awards presented at the FCE program included both club and individual honors.

Receiving blue awards for meeting their clubs' goals and objectives were New Hope, Avis, and Centerville. Red awards were presented to Green Run, Lee Manor, and Spottswood clubs.

Individuals recognized for FCE membership were Mary V. Crone, Catherine M. Crickenberger, Evelyn G. LaPorte, and Lucille Moses — all 30-year honorees. Forty-year award recipients were Betty G. Ott, Thelma M. Fauber, Mary K. Weaver, Ann M. Wright, Mary Jane Shaver, Edna G. Fauber, Marie G. Blackwell, Azile H. Harris, Catherine Burton, George Anna Fravel, and Nellie Lou Flora.

Certificates were presented to FCE members who completed a fair judging workshop. These individuals were Thelma and Carl Fauber, Helen and Leonard Swortzel, Mary Crone, Evelyn Miller, Eleanor Willey, Katherine Harmon, Linda Howdyshell, Wilhelmina Cosby, and Janet Thomas.

A special project of FCE members during 1994 was participation in a reading program. Catherine Crickenberger and Mary Critzer were honored for having read 200 books each. Mary Jane Shaver read 150 books and Linda Howdyshell read 100 books.

Others recognized for reading and the number of books they read were Betty Randolph, 75; Mary K. Weaver, 70; Ann Wright, 65; Helen Braudworth, 35; Grace Hobbs, 35; Helen Stogdale, 30; Gladys White, 25; Nellie Lou Flora, 20; Judy Crone and Mildred Dunsmore, 12 each; Katherine Harmon, 10; Julia Arndt, 10; Alma Scott, six; and Mary Crone and Rosalie Vickers, five each.

Officers nominated and elected at the achievement program were Mrs. Stogdale, president; Mary Glenn Davis, vice president; Johnnie Bailey, recording secretary; Katherine Harmon, corresponding secretary; and Betty Ott, treasurer.

The FCE association will be holding a craft day March 13 at the American Legion Hall on Cedar Green Road near Beverley Manor Elementary School. For information or to register for the craft day, call the Augusta County Extension Office at 245-5710. —

M. CRONE

E. LaPORTE

L. MOSES

B. OTT

T. FAUBER

A. WRIGHT

M. BLACKWELL J. CRITZER

Stuarts Draft man is Virginia Young Farmers' top agribusiness person

By BETTY JO HAMILTON

STUARTS DRAFT — Jon Almarode almost has an office.

"How about that? It's hard to believe," he says of the 8'x 8-foot cubicle which is slowly beginning to look like office space. Jon has only just recently moved his agribusiness — Draft Feed and Supply — to it's new location on U.S. 340 south of Stuarts Draft's Main Street stoplight. It is a move which is indicative of why the Virginia Young Farmers selected Jon to receive the group's award as the state's top agribusiness person for 1994.

"I might even find somewhere to put it up in here," Jon says motioning from the plaque signifying his recent accolade to the bare walls of his "almost-office." He was also named the agribusiness person of 1994 by Northern Area Young Farmers. It was that honor which propelled him into competition for the state award.

"Wow, an office!" exclaims a customer leaning into the doorway of Jon's "almost-office." Although he is spending considerable time at the business' new location overseeing construction, Jon probably won't be around the facility much once everything is in place. Servicing his customers in the field is the aspect of his agribusiness in which Jon says he feels most comfortable.

"Calling on farmers and troubleshooting" is how Jon describes his work as a feed company representative. Draft Feed and Supply is affiliated with Purina Mills, the largest feed company in the United States.

"You're only as good as who's behind you. I don't want to be ashamed of anything I sell," Jon says of the company which he represents. His job is one of "proving and selling the value" of the feed products which he offers to customers.

"You're messing with their livelihood," the feed store owner says of approaching farmers and trying to convince them to change whatever type of feed they're using in their operations. "You have to be able to show what it costs to produce that pound of milk or that pound of meat."

Although Jon is now in the business of servicing agriculture operations, his background is strictly farm-based.

"I've always been in agriculture one way or the other," he says. Working summers and after school on his uncles' dairy and beef cattle farm near Shenandoah, Jon learned early on how farmers struggle to rise above their bottom line.

"I know what they're up against, and I can't look them in the eye and try to sell them a high dollar feed if I can't tell them it will help them increase their production," he says. "Anything associated with agriculture is going to be tough. Farmers are the biggest gamblers there are."

In fact it may even have been some of that "gambling farmer" bravado which enabled Jon to start his own agribusiness.

Following high school graduation, the Stuarts Draft native went to work at a local feed mill. Over the succeeding 10 years he was employed at three different mills.

"I worked at three feed mills in 10 years and saw the good and the bad in all of them," he said. Finally he was prepared to take the plunge and strike out on his own.

"We stuck our necks out and started real small," he says of the feed store business which he and his wife, Jan, opened three years ago. The original facility was 1,100 square feet of space which included the use of three trailers for storage. In order to keep enough feed on hand to supply customers' needs, Jon had to be creative in finding locations to store his products.

"I used all my neighbors barns and my barns. I was moving stuff at night to yell the next day," he said describing his early years in the feed business. The hard work paid off, however, and in just three years Draft Feed and Supply each week moves six times the volume of feed it did when it first opened.

The facility which now houses the business is almost four times the size of the original location. The new 4,800 square-foot warehouse — which includes Jon's "almost-office" — has eliminated the need to use trailers for storage and will enable Jon to keep plenty of products on hand to meet customer demand.

"I think we're done real well in three years — just my wife and I. If we pay for this (the new warehouse) we'll be doing real good," Jon says of the growth his business has experienced.

Three other employees round out the staff at Draft Feed and Supply. Jon's sister, Karen Hunter, is the business' bookkeeper. H.C. Wise runs the store which Jon recently opened in Lexington and Dee Hutchison drives delivery trucks.

Looking ahead, Jon has his sights set on more growth for his agribusiness. He hopes to add garden and landscape supplies to the store's complete line of feed products which run the gamut from dairy cattle to chinchillas. And the new warehouse at Draft Feed and Supply isn't the only sign of progress for the up and coming agribusiness.

"We even broke down and bought a fax machine," Jon says. "I don't know what it is but everybody kept asking us if we had one so we bought one."

As Draft Feed and Supply has grown and changed so has the area's agriculture, notes Jon. The Stuarts Draft area, once primarily agriculture, has become more of a residential area. But even folks who live off the farm have a need for feed supplies, according to Jon.

"I've seen it change from agriculture to residential," he says. "Everybody has backyard animals and they need something for pets and the whole lot." But the farm customers will always hold a special place.

"We lost six dairy farms this past year," Jon says, describing the changing face of agriculture in the Stuarts Draft area. What he hears from local farmers is reflective of the challenges which farmers everywhere face.

"They're not able to get a decent return for what they put out. Farmers are the only ones in the chain that can't pass on the expense. They take their cattle to the sale and have to take whatever they can get," Jon says. "Farmers need a break even point, and they should be rewarded for anything above average. But it's not there, and it won't be there. I guess we all like to dream, though."

Jon is in the business of selling feed to farmers but says his primary goal is to provide them with service.

"It all gets down to what the customer wants," he says. "Agriculture is getting tougher and tougher. You just can't afford to have anybody dissatisfied."

The Virginia Young Farmer's agribusiness person of the year has some pretty simple yet complicated goals for his family operation.

"We want to keep growing and make a living," Jon says.

The key to success for any business enterprise is readily apparent, according to the Draft agribusinessman.

"You've got to find your niche," he says. "I think we've found ours." —

Jon Almarode of Stuarts Draft pauses for a few minutes in the new warehouse for his agribusiness, Draft Feed and Supply. Jon was named the top agribusiness person in the state for 1994 by the Virginia Young Farmers.

Photo by Betty Jo Hamilton

Forage Short Course in March

VERONA — A Forage Short Course will be held March 17 from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. at the Augusta County Government Center.

Dr. Dale Wolf, Extension agronomist from Virginia Tech, will conduct the course during which participants will learn the fundamental principles of how forages grow. Instead of a recipe to solve individual forage problems, participants will gain in-depth knowledge to arrive at solutions to solve forage problems.

The topics will be presented in greater depth than typical information provided in "how to" talks given at most winter meetings.

Topics will include:

•How photosynthesis and respiration work in cool-season and warm-season plants.

•How leaf area influences root growth and regrowth of grazable forage.

•How and where non-structural carbohydrates (energy reserves) are stored and utilized.

•How plants prepare for and survive cold weather in winter.

•Stages of plant maturity as related to forage quality.

•How fertilization and lime decisions will also be included.

The program will provide an excellent opportunity for persons interested in learning about the grass growth process as it relates to forage management and problem solving.

There is a $10 registration fee required which must be paid by March 1. Fees may be sent to Dale Wolf, Crop & Soil Environmental Sciences Department, 424 Smyth Hall, Blacksburg, Va. 24061-0403. For information about the Forage Short Course call the Augusta County Extension Office at 245-5705. —

Agriculture booming in Va.

GROWING BETTER EVERYDAY

In Partnership with Nature

RICHMOND — Agriculture in Virginia today is big business. By many accounts, it is Virginia's biggest business, a highly diverse, $22 billion-plus industry that incorporates more than 250 commodities. And the person who makes it all possible is the Virginia farmer.

Virginia farmers are diversified with poultry and eggs accounting for 30 percent; field crops, fruits, and vegetables, 27 percent; meat animals, 20 percent; dairy, 13 percent; nursery and floriculture, six percent; with the remainder spread over such enterprises as forest, tobacco, sod and aquaculture, peanuts, honey, and sheep.

Virginia's 10 leading farm income-producing enterprises in 1993 were broilers, cattle, milk, tobacco, turkeys, hogs, soybeans, eggs, peanuts, and hay.

If farm statistics were distributed evenly over all of the Commonwealth, here's what a typical Virginia farmer and farm would look like based on 1992 figures:

•He or she is approximately 56 years old.

•Their farm covers 281 acres and is worth an average of $302,000.

•After production expenses, net income is $12,000, including government payments.

•Farm machinery and equipment are worth approximately $31,000.

•An acre of farm land is worth approximately $1,338 compared with $1,295 a year ago.

•Expenses run approximately $122 per day, seven days a week.

•He or she generates $56,500 in gross farm income, with government payments accounting for only 2 percent of this total. Most of that income is spent in Virginia to cover production expenses which are almost $44,500.

•Total farm gross income amounts to $2.43 billion.

•A Virginia farmer creates about five off-farm private enterprise jobs in the state.

•One farmer feeds 129 people, 97 in the U.S. and 32 abroad.

•More than 254,000 jobs in the state are directly attributed to agriculture with another 164,000 indirectly attributed. This includes jobs such as farmers, farm hands, pesticide applicators, veterinarians, truck drivers who transport agricultural commodities, food and beverage processors, tobacco manufacturers, biologists and other scientists, people who work in marketing, laboratory technicians, manufacturers of agricultural chemicals, machinery and equipment dealers, agricultural lenders, and many more.

•The top 10 farm-producing counties in Virginia are Rockingham, Augusta, Accomack, Pittsylvania, Southampton, Prince William, Shenandoah, Wilkes, Franklin, and Amelia.

A family of four in America eats about 5,000 pounds of food each year. In 1993, Americans ate — per capita — 64 pounds of beef, veal, and lamb; 50 pounds of pork; 53 pounds of poultry; 17 pounds of fish and shellfish; 19.5 dozen eggs; 264 pounds of fruit; and 102 pounds of vegetables. All of this is produced on fewer acres of land, thanks to modern technology.

Today one acre of land in the U.S. — about the size of a football field — can produce 42,000 pounds of strawberries or 24,000 pounds of navel oranges or 11,000 heads of lettuce or 25,400 pounds of potatoes or 8,900 pounds of sweet corn or 640 pounds of cotton.

This article was provided by the Virginia Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services. —

Fescue update, trailer use round out horse seminar topics

By DEBORAH SENSABAUGH

VERONA — Amyotonia and fescue update and watering systems were among topics presented at the Augusta County Horse Seminar held Dec. 17 at the Augusta County Government Center.

The program was coordinated by Virginia Cooperative Extension Service in Augusta County under the direction of Agent Rick Heidel.

Dennis J. Blodgett, an associate professor of toxicology at the VA-MD Regional College of Veterinary Medicine in Blacksburg, lectured on mycotoxin and fescue update. Heidel presented information about safe loading, hauling, and trailer maintenance.

Fescue fungus update

In his session, Blodgett tackled the issue of tall fescue fungus. The fungus, which also causes the fescue to be resistant to insect damage, produces ergot mycotoxin or ergovaline. This toxin affects hormones produced by pregnant mares about to foal. This may cause abortions, a prolonged gestation, dystocia or foaling problems, agalactia or lack of antibody-containing colostrum milk necessary to provide new foals immunity, a thickened placenta smothering the foal just after birth, and weak or stillborn foals with feathered hooves and elongated bodies.

The only real antidote, according to Blodgett, is to prevent the problem by removing the mares from all possibility of contact with fescue at least one month, and preferably two months prior to foaling.

If a recently delivered mare is suspected to have the toxin in her system, injected hormones can cause her to produce milk within days but the valuable colostrum is not produced with nearly always fatal results to the foal.

Experiments have been conducted to produce a strain of endophyte (fungus) that does not produce sufficient ergovaline to cause problems, but an existing fescue stand nearby will eventually crowd out fescue-free and fungus-free stands of grass, Blodgett said.

He also talked about moldy corn poisoning which is one of the most deadly toxins for horses. With five or six farms having a problem with the fatalities it costs every year, horse owners tend to be aware of the symptoms of sudden death or bizarre maniacal behavior caused by brain necrosis from a low dosage over a long period of time. Higher doses show up with liver problems first with 30 percent of exposed horses contracting the poisoning and most of these dying. Feed companies do not screen for the toxin.

He talked also about clover slobber factor, vomitoxin from scabby grain, and aflatoxin from corn damaged by insects.

Trailering sessions

Heidel's trailering sessions were full of practical information concerning both the vehicle and trailer and the animals to be hauled in the trailer.

His talk emphasized safety in maintenance, especially with tires, floor, running gear, brakes, stress cracks, leaks, and hitch safety.

He also talked about hauling practice before actually attempting to haul a horse, and Division of Motor Vehicles legal requirements for different weight limits on trailers and trucks.

In loading and hauling horses, Heidel emphasized trailer configurations, along with plenty of training at home to prepare the young horse for its first trailer ride. Road comfort tips for horses were also included on the Extension agent's agenda. —

Horse deaths blamed on moldy corn poisoning

RICHMOND — Animal health officials from the Virginia Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services have traced the death of 18 horses in Virginia to moldy corn poisoning.

Although the moldy corn was originally thought to be isolated in southeastern Virginia and eastern North Carolina, another case was confirmed recently in James City County. VDACS animal health officials are currently working to trace the source of the corn connected with the latest equine death.

The source of the corn has been traced to a commercial dealer in northeastern North Carolina.

"We suggest that horse owners who purchase corn from local sources in southeastern Virginia or northeastern North Carolina have the grain tested," said VDACS spokesperson Elaine Lidholm.

The disease comes from high levels of a toxin which is produced by certain types of mold that grow naturally on corn.

Symptoms of the disease in horses include apathy, drowsiness, blindness, staggering, and death. —

Ripples, wrinkles, and cold cabooses

Down on the farm

By Betty Jo Hamilton

Down on the farm we're thinking about ripples and wrinkles. We're also thinking about cold cabooses and we'll get to that a little later but first we want to spend some time talking about ripples and wrinkles.

Ripples are temporary but may vary in magnitude. Drop a pebble into a pond of water, it goes "kerplop," and then ripples spread out from the point of impact. The greater the initial impact, the greater the magnitude and duration of the ripples.

Wrinkles may be temporary or permanent. Thinking of wrinkles almost surely brings to mind the aging process. One look in a mirror and we see wrinkles — which are permanent no matter what those moisturizing cream commercials will lead us to believe — that we're sure were never there before.

Temporary wrinkles are those which crop up and can be smoothed out with some minor adjustments. A wrinkled bedspread, for instance, can be smoothed out if someone becomes fastidious and chooses to tidy things up a bit.

Whatever their cause, ripples and wrinkles cause us to put out some extra effort to compensate for their effect on our everyday routines. And compensating for ripples and wrinkles is what has taken up a good chunk of our time down on the farm during the past month.

Of course winter is upon us. There's nothing new about this. It does roll around every year and, after the past two winters, we felt we were pretty well seasoned at being able to deal with the occasional blizzard or ice storm.

This winter -- regardless of our preparedness — has been wrinkled by the absence of my father from the work force here on the farm. Surgery and hospitalization in early January has him confined to home for the most part and has left us a bit short-handed.

Under normal conditions — that is when everything is going smoothly — lacking my father's daily contributions to our effort on the farm might require some minor adjustments to the work routine. I'm not sure there's any such thing as "normal conditions" on the farm though, and having my father on the sidelines is anything but normal.

If something could happen it has. First the silo unloader broke. Two cows have prolapsed. One cow lost a calf on one of those horribly cold nights. The ewes have been lambing in unprecedented numbers — 11 sets of triplets and still counting. The weather took a wicked turn and sent us reeling. Needless to say we've spent a lot of time smoothing out ripples and wrinkles.

But there is a God who watches over farmers. A God who sends angels in where others fear to tread. It has only been with the assistance of some of these angels whereby I have managed to survive on the farm in recent days.

Farmers, for the most part, are fiercely independent. Farmers acknowledge each other's independence -- never daring to suggest to a neighbor that their particular style of farming might be flawed. But despite the apparent independence of farmers, each knows how precarious the other's position is. Every farmer today walks a tight rope and the least bit off balance one becomes can cause disaster.

When it became known that my father was going into the hospital, neighbors began to call in and offer their assistance. They knew, as we know, that a farm operation already stretched thin due to a small work force would be jeopardized even more with the absence of my father. And he had barely recovered from the effects of anesthesia when I was being hit by the first ripples caused by his hospitalization.

That was when the silo unloader broke. Not to fear. A whole host of angels showed up to get the thing running again. They gave a major portion of their time over a three-day period to convince the thing to work the way it should.

When cattle needed to be moved from one farm to another, angels pitched in to assist in the process.

When the first cow prolapsed, angels helped me out by loaning me a cattle trailer and helping me transport the animal to the veterinarian -- actually the cow prolapsed and then reprolapsed. That's the first time in my memory I've known that to happen. This falls into the category of wrinkles which never occur unless you've convinced yourself it's impossible for them to occur.

On one particular Sunday, angels came looking for me when they knew something was wrong.

It was the Sunday of the blizzard which never materialized. Actually, what we ended up getting was a blizzard minus the snow.

On the Thursday before the temperature peaked near 50 degrees. In less than 72 hours, with wind chill, early morning temperatures plummeted to the minus 30 level. That's an 80-degree change in the temperature, and let me tell you there are no decent words to describe how one feels trying to work outside when the thermometer says "0" and the wind is howling like a banshee. Correction. Let's make that swirling, hissing, gnashing like a banshee.

Sunday morning found me attempting to go about my chores, keep from freezing to death, and not really having much success at either. In trying to feed from a silage wagon, I had broken a shear pin on the power take-off shaft. As I was working on the wagon, I noticed that cattle in pasture across the road had broken through the idea of a fence which normally contains them and were strolling up and down the state highway.

I was resigned to putting up with the chaos at hand, only being able to deal with one problem at a time anyway. Unfortunately I was making no headway in dealing with even one of the many problems I faced this morning.

Cattle were out in the road. The silage wagon was broken. I fixed it. It broke again. It was getting colder and colder. Things were going downhill fast and in a big way. As I worked on the silage wagon I would look up every once in a while to see what the cattle out in the road were doing. Eventually an angel came along.

A neighbor passed by and encountered the straying cattle. He put them back in the pasture and then came looking for me because he knew the cattle wouldn't be wandering around in the road if something wasn't wrong somewhere else. He also knew my father was not able to be out and about. He assumed correctly that I was in over my head — quite literally — when he found me headfirst in the silage wagon trying to dig frozen silage away from the wagon's auger. The neighbor helped me get the thing working and told me what to do to keep it from breaking again.

Late that same afternoon, the cattle got the itch to hit the road again, and -- yet again -- a neighbor found them out and put them back where they belonged. Normally the idea of a fence would be enough to hold the cattle but when it gets extremely cold and they start to get hungry, it's difficult for cattle to conceptualize a fence between them and the hay fed to cattle in the field across the road.

But yet another neighbor came by and helped me put up some barbed wire, which made the fence a bit more of a reality to the cattle.

"It's almost too cold to be doing this," my neighbor said. I agreed. The wind and cold pushed us along and we had the fence in a better state of repair in a short time.

Two particular angels — my brother-in-law and uncle — have been called on quite often to get me out of jams. Daily feeding chores have been accomplished only with the help of my brother-in-law, and my uncle has filled in when needed. Despite my stumbling amid wrinkles, my brother-in-law somehow manages to keep me on track.

After four days of working in the subzero weather, I began to whimper and whine about the horrid conditions. My brother-in-law exhorted me to accomplish the

Continued at top of page 11

Aren't gates heavy enough without the addition of 40 pounds of ice? Just another one of those little inconveniences caused by near-blizzard conditions down on the farm.

AC staff photo

Sending special thanks

Our thanks and appreciation go out to all of our family members, neighbors, and friends. Your prayers, thoughts, calls, cards, and good deeds have helped us in so many ways. We are deeply grateful to each of you.

Joe and Nellie Hamilton

Continued from page 16

daily tasks of feeding and caring for the farm animals.

"Get out there!" he said one morning as the wind howled around us. "It'll make a man out of you!"

That's what I'm afraid of," I replied, having already noticed that the cold weather was causing me to lose my usual ladylike charm.

And the cold caboose? It's a delicate subject, in more ways than one, but one which bears noting.

I didn't realize anything was wrong until I sat down to eat supper late one evening. Seated for only a few moments, I sensed immediate discomfort. I stood up and repositioned myself then sat back down. Again the sensation struck me of something being not quite right. Again I stood and restrained myself. Finally I had to admit that my southbound end was causing me considerable pain.

I don't remember what it happened during the course of those cold days and nights. I'm suspecting it was sometime during those hours which I spent with my rear pointed skyward while I was digging out the silage wagon auger. I can't even understand how it happened, since there were four layers of clothing protecting my backside from the rawness of nature. I can remember being cold all the way through to the insides of my bones. I had bundled up, but somehow that bamboo of cold and wind found it's way directly to my backside and just about froze it off.

Frostbite is definitely something which should be avoided. I'm usually pretty careful about my feet, hands, and face in trying to protect them from the cold. Now I've learned that one must take special precautions to protect one's caboose from extremely cold conditions.

For the most part farmers go about their daily chores and may not even notice neighbors busy in their own endeavors. We are watching out for one another though, and it's a relief to know that angels will come swooping in as an answer to an unspoken prayer. It's part of being a farmer -- going about an ordinary routine with the undergirding belief that everything, no matter how dire the circumstance, will work itself out. Usually it does with some angels help.

Now mind you, these aren't your stereotypical angels of the winged cherub variety. You wouldn't even suspect that they might be angels, and you'd probably look right past them if you were not searching for angels.

You might be fooled by these angels' appearance -- their beards and insulated coveralls, their plaid flannel shirts and faded dungarees, their gum boots caked with mud, their camouflage caps with ear flaps pulled down tight, their countenances ruddy and rugged, their cheeks and gums pained by a pinch of snuff. No, these aren't your typical angels. But they are angels, nonetheless. And that's what makes them so special.

Ripples, wrinkles, and cold cabooses — some of them temporary, some of them permanent — have kept us moving this past month down on the farm. And on those occasions when we were just hardy moving, we're particularly thankful that some angels came along to get us going again. These are angels who have truly earned their wings. —

One wrinkle encountered in recent days was the malfunction of the silage wagon. An angel found me in over my head in this instance and then helped me get going again. Unfortunately it wasn't until much later that I realized the silage wagon wasn't the only thing which had been affected by the cold weather. Working for hours with one's south end pointing directly into the winds of a Siberian Express is a good way to end up with a cold caboose.

AC staff photo

Sheep shearing school in April

A shearing school for beginners will be held at the Shenandoah Valley Experiment Station in Steeles Tavern April 26-27.

The school is designed to teach beginning shearers proper shearing technique as well as proper care and maintenance of shearing equipment. On the first evening of the school, an informal session on sheep management and marketing will be held for producers. The only charge for the school is a $20 non-refundable pre-registration fee.

The pre-registration deadline for the school is March 31. A maximum of 20 participants will be accepted. If you would like more information or a pre-registration form, contact the Augusta County Extension Office at 703/ 245-5750. —

Sheep producers to meet March 1

VERONA - The Augusta County Sheep and Wool Producers will hold their annual meeting at 7 p.m. March 1 at the Extension office. The meeting will include a presentation about using livestock guardian dogs to protect sheep from coyote predation. —

Corn producers thinking ahead to spring

AC staff report

MIDDLEBROOK — January seemed a long way from spring planting season but it was a good time to begin thinking about the all-important annual chore.

Mycogen seed company representative Lacy Buchanan of Middlebrook hosted area farmers at a seed corn dinner January 24 at the Middlebrook Community Center. Bill Burton, Mycogen representative, explained his company's work in the area of seed corn production.

Burton encouraged farmers to join with the company in putting out test plots. The practice enables Mycogen to "get hybrids out and see what they'll do in your environment," Burton said. "We need to find out what will work over here."

"What Mycogen looks to do for the future is get specific," he said, noting that seed corn hybrids for grain and silage are being developed. The company is also working on a leaf hopper resistant strain of alfalfa. Known as "built in insect resistance," Burton explained that alfalfa seed will have insect resistance in the leaf.

"This is the direction the seed industry is going to take," he said, noting that the company is currently marketing two seed corn hybrids which are resistant to corn borer.

Jim Phillips of S.L. Hess and Sons in Harrisonburg, spoke to the farmers about the services Hess offers farmers. The company deals in fertilizer and agricultural chemicals which Phillips described as "all lines of crop protection and wet and dry fertilizer." The company has fertilizer machines for over-the-top application and offers farmers soil and tissue testing. A new service this year will be a test for soil compaction.

Bryan Wheelhorse, an Alfagraze distributor, explained a little bit about the forage which his company sells. Alfagraze is a special strain of alfalfa which was developed at the University of Georgia. It may be used for hay or pasture, Wheelhorse said.

Greg Rumsey, a Ciba crop protection representative, provided farmers with some insights on weed control. He encouraged farmers to pursue "different strategies" for weed controls and to ask themselves the question, "What can we do to make sure corn wins?"

He explained that when corn is in competition with weeds its growth can be altered. Weeds like fanhs quester, pigweed, Johnson grass, Burmuda grass, dogbane, foxtail, fall panicum, and velvetleaf may cause growth problems in corn fields. Different groups of weeds — grasses, broadleaf, and perennials — need to be controlled in different ways.

"There are a lot of different ways we can go and it's going to depend on what's out in the field," he said.

Showing farmers the size of a corn plant, Rumsey noted how the presence of weeds affects yields. He referred to a study conducted by Iowa State University which reveals that in the 4- to 5-inch corn plant at 10-19 days of growth the ear size has already been established. At 21-30 days when the plant is 6 to 9 inches high, the number of rows of corn per ear is determined. When the plant is 24 to 52 inches tall and between 49 and 60 days of growth, the number of kernels per row per ear is established. Due to these growth patterns, farmers need to begin their weed control programs early.

"The best option is to get everything as early as you can," Rumsey said. He explained that the half life of pre-emergent herbicides gives long-lasting weed control. —

Mycogen Plant Sciences representative Bill Burton reviews his company's literature with seed corn salesman Lacy Buchanan of Middlebrook. Buchanan sponsored an educational program for area corn producers January 24.

Photo by Betty Jo Hamilton

Augusta, Rockingham announce state-graded calf sales

AC staff report

The Augusta Feeder Calf Association and Rockingham Livestock Sales have announced their upcoming state-graded calf sales.

In addition to a sale which was held in February, Marty Lalley, Augusta Feeder Calf Association president, said other sales will be held in April, August, and November, months which are traditionally the strongest for the feeder calf market.

Sales will be held April 11, August 8, and November 7 for calf producers who want to take advantage of the association's special marketing system. Calves for the sales are state-graded and commingled according to type and size. The system allows producers with small numbers of calves to mix their calves with those of other producers thereby offering larger lots for sale to feedlot buyers and backgrounders.

All sales are held at Staunton Union Stockyard on New Hope Road in Staunton and begin at 5:30 p.m. at the conclusion of the regular Tuesday sale. Cattle must be delivered to the stockyard between 8 a.m. and noon on sale day. The association requires that calves weigh at least 300 pounds and be of beef breeding. If or destructive cattle will not be accepted.

Calves may be consigned to these sales or information about sales may be obtained by contacting the Augusta County Extension Office at 245-5781.

State-graded sales in Rockingham County will be held at Rockingham Livestock Sales in Harrisonburg on U.S. 11 south.

Sales will be held in Rockingham on March 9, 16, 27, April 3, 13, 20, May 11, and June 8. The April 3 sale is for Holstein steers and the March 27 sale is for yearling steers. The remainder of these sales are calf yearling sales for steers and heifers.

Cattle for these sales must be delivered to the yard before noon on sale days. Auctioning of livestock begins in the evening but times vary depending on the sale date. The sales are held in cooperation with the Virginia Cattlemen's Association and the Rockingham Feeder Calf Association.

For information or to register cattle in the Rockingham County sales, call Rockingham Livestock Sales at 434-8705. —

Christmas lasts a little longer for McKinley farmer

By BETTY JO HAMILTON

McKINLEY — Christmas didn't last very long for Floyd Arehart. But then again, it has.

At 3:30 a.m. on December 26 a neighbor awakened Arehart to tell him that the majority of his winter store of hay was on fire. The blaze which the neighbor reported was burning three stacks of round bales which Arehart had covered on one corner of his 90-acre McKinley farm.

Volunteer firefighters from Middlebrook and Walkers Creek were at the farm until late that night tending the blaze. Unable to put out the fire, they could only allow the 800-pound bales — all 135 of them — to burn themselves out.

Losing the hay to fire was disappointing to Arehart, but even more disheartening was the knowledge that the blaze had been purposely set, according to firefighters who responded to the scene.

"It had to be set,' Arehart remarked, stating that he didn't know why anyone would want to destroy the hay.

"I never thought about anybody burning it. I don't know why anyone would do it. I'm putting it on a grudge but it might be somebody from 100 miles away," he said.

With 75 percent of his orchard grass-alfalfa hay crop destroyed and no insurance to cover the loss, Arehart faced a winter during which he would need feed for 30 cows and 30 yearling steers and heifers. Even though he has been short of feed, the McKinley farmer hasn't missed feeding his cattle a single day yet. Farming neighbors have been dipping into their winter feed supplies to help Arehart get his cattle through the winter.

"Neighbors have given me some silage. I'm going and getting some and that's helping me stretch out my hay," he said. Other neighbors in the area have been taking Arehart hay to feed.

"It's just the goodness out of them," he says describing his neighbors' desire to help him through the winter. "They had more than they needed and said for me to come get it. It's just good will."

The "good will" of his neighbors is nothing new to Arehart. In October 1993 he underwent quadruple bypass heart surgery at a Richmond hospital.

"The doctor wanted to do the surgery the next day (after they found the heart blockages) and I told him I had to come back home and get things straight," Arehart recalled. "He let me come home but told me I couldn't do anything." The "retired" McKinley farmer returned home long enough to enlist the help of neighbor Dennie Clement who took over Arehart's farm operation during his six-month convalescence from open heart surgery.

"I couldn't do it without Dennie," he said of the neighbor *who continues to assist with the farm chores.*

Looking ahead to spring, Arehart said he hopes to get his cattle through on the feed he has available. One stack of bales remains unopened and he hopes to hold this until the first of March. He has some square bales of hay stored in his barn which he is using for feed now.

"This year you can get by with less — up until a week ago. When it gets cold you have to feed them more," he said.

"If I have to I'll sell my calves," he said describing one option open to him if his feed supply runs short. But if the weather cooperates and with the continued generosity of his neighbors, that may not be necessary.

Although Arehart's "peace on earth" was cut short this past Christmas, he's finding that the "good will" of his neighbors may help him carry his cattle into spring. —

Floyd Arehart feeds yearling calves on his farm near McKinley. Christmas was cut short for the farmer when arsonists burnt 75 percent of his winter store of hay. Neighbors have been helping Arehart by sharing with him from their hay supplies.

Photo by Betty Jo Hamilton

Dairy "hot topics" warm up Expo

By LOIS R. SKEEN

FISHERSVILLE — Two featured speakers braved snow, ice, and cold temperatures to deliver their "hot topics" for the dairy segment of the Shenandoah Valley Ag Expo held February 15 at Augusta Expoland.

In addition to the "hot topics," representatives of the agriculture industry converged on Expo for the day-long event which also featured a trade show. The Shenandoah Valley Ag Expo is an annual event which is coordinated by Virginia Cooperative Extension Service.

In the day's first "hot topic," Linda Borcher of Elanco Animal Health provided dairy producers with tips about how to raise healthier replacement heifers more economically by adding an ionophore such as Rumensin to feed rations.

An ionophore is a feed additive which, when added to the ration, results in faster weight gain and improved feed efficiency. Many people think of Rumensin as a medical additive in the feedlot for beef cattle, but it has a real value for dairy replacements as well, according to the research Ms. Borcher presented.

There are three major advantages to adding an ionophore to the heifer ration, Ms. Borcher explained. One advantage is the faster weight gain which results in heifers reaching the optimum breeding weight of 725-800 pounds at an earlier age. These heifers can begin to produce milk by 24 months of age, providing a quicker return than heifers calving later.

Research results were presented showing an increase in average daily gain of .14-.20 pounds per head per day when Rumensin was fed. In order to maximize milk production, first lactation heifers should weigh at least 1,300 pounds at calving. This weight can be achieved more easily with a faster rate of gain.

Ms. Borcher pointed out that feed efficiency also increases by 5-10 percent when an ionophore is in the ration. With fewer pounds of grain required per pound of gain, feed costs are reduced.

The third advantage of an ionophore is coccidia control. Coccidia are parasitic protozoa that can be ingested by calves and end up in the intestines where they attack the intestinal walls. Ms. Borcher showed research results that fecestool chemicle decreases in cattle deaths due to coccidiosis after Rumensin was added to the mineral mix.

"The main benefit for the younger animals is control of coccidia. The increases in average daily gain and improved feed efficiency are seen in older heifers after the rumen begins to function," Ms. Borcher explained.

The recommended rate for feeding Rumensin is about 20 grams per ton, and the cost runs about 2 cents per head per day. Ms. Borcher stated that the information she presented was based on results of research trials with Rumensin, an ionophore with which she is most familiar since it is an Elanco product. She mentioned other feed additives for anti-coccidial use such as Deccox, Bovatec, and Corid.

Bennett Cassell, Extension dairy scientist from Virginia Tech, spoke to the group about sire selection.

The first point he made was that genetics do, indeed, make a difference. How much progress in dairy cattle performance is due to genetics? Cassell quoted results of a breeding trial done at Virginia Tech that began in 1968.

Two groups of cattle were compared over 26 years. The control group was bred to a group of young sires available in 1968 for the entire period. The other group was bred to a group of bulls selected for high milk yield. Other than this difference, the cows were treated with exactly the same management factors. After 26 years, the control group herd averaged 15,800 pounds of milk and the other group averaged 20,636 pounds, signifying a 5,000-pound advancement in milk production due to genetic differences in the study.

Cassell made a case for using artificial insemination instead of pasture breeding with a herd bull. Artificial insemination permits the producer to utilize semen of progeny tested bulls, which gives information about the performance of their daughters. This takes some of the guesswork out of sire selection, since you have an indication of how a bull's daughters will perform.

Cassell further noted that today much better bulls are available

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Notes from the Va.-N.C. Shepherds' Symposium

EDITOR'S NOTE: The following information was gathered at the Va.-N.C. Shepherds' Symposium held Dec. 2-3 in Blacksburg.

AC staff report

Ram selection

Presenter: Dave Notter, VPI, Dept. of Animal and Poultry Science

For fall lambing, select a breed of ram which exhibits some breeding activity in summer months.

Purebred rams work better in spring breeding.

Wherever breeding conditions are less than ideal, use a crossbred ram.

Tests of spring breeding comparing Dorset and Suffolk showed that one of Dorset rams yielded twice the pregnancy rate of Suffolk rams. Tests of fall breeding showed there was no difference in the pregnancy rate of the two breeds.

Ram management

Presenter: Steve Umberger, VPI, Dept. of Animal and Poultry Science

Rams determine the overall quality of lamb crop.

Ram management is just as important as ewe management.

The average cost of a quality ram is $300. Used with 30 ewes over a three-year period the cost breaks down to $3.33 per ewe/year. With a 150 percent lamb crop, this translates into an expense of $2.22 per lamb/year.

Six weeks before breeding, strobe some rams. On a 1-5 basis, rams should score 3+ or 4, based on fat cover and condition through middle.

Ram spends very little time eating during breeding season and can lose 30 percent of their body weight during this time.

Rams should be managed for heat stress. They should be sheared and have access to shade.

All rams should undergo an annual breeding soundness examination including feet and leg soundness, foot rot detection, and a scrotal exam.

Major causes of ram mortality are nutrition, internal parasites, and fighting.

Nutrition - Rams not getting enough feed energy; 50 days prior to breeding season begin feeding 2.5 lbs. corn/day to increase weight by 30 percent.

Internal parasites - Worm rams on same schedule as ewes.

Fighting - Use caution when introducing new rams. Place in small pens with existing rams. This limits the area they have to fight and hurt each other.

Ram:ewe ratio — 1 ram lamb to 25 ewes; 1 mature ram to 45 ewes.

Don't mix mature rams with ram lambs. Mature rams will dominate lambs.

Obtain rams from reputable breeders.

Foot rot control in sheep

Presenter: Kevin Pifer, Va-Md. Regional College of Vet Medicine, VPI

Indications of footrot — lameness, unwilling to walk, kneeling, loss of weight.

Hoof wall or sole is undermined - hoof separates from feet.

Development of disease promoted by warm, wet weather; injury to skin between toes, overgrown hooves - all these result in infection between toes.

In the spring, feet get wet, never really have a chance to dry off.

Bacteria in diet causes foot rot.

Foot rot transmission: Sources - purchases, pasture, trucks, building, manure.

Treatment: Foot trimming — once or twice a year, more frequently in infected flocks; remove all affected tissue, disinfect instruments with chlorox or iodine between animals.

Tools - hoof knife or hoof trimmer (preferred); start at ball of foot and move forward.

Foot bath or foot soaks: Preferred foot bath — 10 percent solution of zinc sulfate, sheep stand in bath for minimum of 30 minutes.

Vaccination for foot rot — two shots, 4 to 6 weeks apart and prior to wet season; not 100 percent effective (65 to 80 percent effective). Disadvantages: expensive, abscesses at injection sites, not completely effective. There are 22 strains of foot rot bacteria and only 10 of these strains are included in vaccine.

Topical treatments for foot rot: Zinc sulfate 10 percent; Copper sulfate 10 percent; copper sulfate in pine tar; oxytet in alcohol, penicillin in alcohol.

Antibiotics - Procaine penicillin; oxytet; long-acting penicillin.

Additional - test flock medications, antibiotic in feed or water; chlortetracycline

Getting rid of foot rot: Tag sheep, separate infected from non-infected — examine lame sheep, separate — requires adequate fencing; cull chronically affected animals, consider genetics.

Clean pasture - no sheep on it for minimum of two weeks.

Prevention - Avoid buying animals from infected flocks. Avoid using facilities for two weeks, use "clean" vehicles, trim and thin feet, quarantine new arrivals for 30 days.

Mineral supplements

Presenter: Don Ely, University of Kentucky, Dept. of Animal Sciences

Macrominerals: Sodium, chlorine, calcium, phosphorous, magnesium, potassium, sulfur

Too much or too little may affect level of others.

Microminerals: Iodine, iron, copper, molybdenum, manganese, zinc, selenium, fluoride

Excessive levels of microminerals are toxic.

Salt - maintains osmotic function, regulates acid/base balance, controls water metabolism in tissue.

Symptoms of deficiency - Sheep chew wood, lick dirt, eat toxic plants, decrease growth, increase water intake.

Salt - rule of thumb - 1 lb./head/month; free choice or .5 to 1 percent of daily ration if feeding.

Salt supplements - white salt, iodized salt, trace mineral salt, - put loose salt in covered feeder. Sheep will not use block salt.

Calcium and phosphorous - important in skeletal system, nerves are stimulated and absorption is dependent on presence of Vitamin D. Calcium deficiency causes tetany and urinary calculi. Phosphorous deficiency causes slow growth, poor appetite, infertilities, and listlessness.

Calcium:Phosphorous ratio - Feed a roughage high in calcium — alfalfa is best.

Phosphorous source - Not in roughage, in grains. Grains are an excellent source of phosphorous.

Calcium supplements - ground limestone, steamed bone meal, dicalcium phosphate, monocalcium phosphate — or balance roughage and grain.

Lactating ewes fed primarily legume forage may need phosphorous supplement.

Copper - Aids in hemoglobin formation (red blood cell)

Feed sources - distilled grains, soybean meal

Supplement - copper sulfate, copper oxide, copper needles

The difference between copper requirement and toxicity is very narrow.

Feed trace mineral salt specifically manufactured for sheep.

Selenium deficiency causes white muscle disease.

There is a fine line between selenium deficiency and toxicity. To prevent selenium deficiency, make sure sheep have an adequate source of selenium — supplement salt mixture or injections. Provide trace mineral salt with selenium year round.

Keep it simple - know why you feed what you do, use such skills — depend on common feed stuffs.

Controlling coyote predation

Presenter: John Houben, wildlife biologist, USDA/APHIS, Animal Damage Control

Probably will have to change some things you do in order to survive. Coyote is not going to go away. Coyote problem is not a reason to go out of business.

Typical coyote predation - no/one difference between coyote and dog predation.

Coyote predation: Punctured or chipped jawbones, one or two dead sheep and the rest could care less. 75-80 percent of the time there are wounds on neck and death is due to suffocation.

Typical feeding pattern - enter body cavity at lower end of ribs behind front leg, sometimes through abdomen. Coyotes don't spook sheep in the same count as dogs.

Less typical predation - nose grab, tail stripping, decapitation.

Important post management is "the only way you're really going to win."

IPM - any or all practical methods that effectively resolve wildlife damage problems while minimizing detrimental effects.

IPM: Practical and effective, saving more sheep than losing me. Non-lethal methods: Exclusion, cultural methods, frightening.

Cultural methods - pasture selection, change lambing season, shed lambing, remove carrion.

Exclusion - night penning, resistant fences.

Fencing - most effective non-lethal method.

Frightening agents - most easily and most effectively implemented.

Guarding dogs - extremely effective; Donkeys, llamas, electronic guard may also be used. Each guardian animal has a number of advantages and disadvantages. Dogs should be well-bred and properly raised. Llamas, donkeys eat what sheep eat, use individually to prevent buddying up; can be excessively aggressive with sheep. Donkeys and llamas must be gelded to be used as guardians. Donkeys, llamas have a longer lifespan than dogs.

Electronic alarm - short term, stop gap, intermittent strobe light and siren blast.

Livestock protection collars - not currently approved for use in Virginia but soon to be.

Traps and snares to eliminate problem coyotes - labor intensive and still criminal. —

•Dairy

Continued from page 13

though A.I. with very little increase in the cost of using them. Each year more bulls are being progeny tested, but the number entering A.I. service is the same, so they are a more heavily selected group. Semen prices are one of the rare things that have denied inflation. Cassell compared the price of semen of bulls used in Virginia as averaging about $11.50 in 1982 and about $13 in 1994, an increase of only $1.50 over 12 years.

Outlining what he called the "basic rules" for making the most genetic progress in the fastest manner, Cassell advised keeping semen inventory small. Buy only enough to last six months until the next sire summary, and be willing to change the bulls you use quickly after you get new information and new sires from which to choose. He stressed the importance of choosing a few top bulls and using them heavily rather than using a few units from many different bulls. This allows these bulls to have a greater impact in your herd.

So now that we're convinced to use A.I. bulls and have learned how to use them for the most genetic gain, how do we decide which bulls to choose? The indexes.

Cassell explained indexes have been formulated which consider several traits weighted in proportions that result in the most economic gain. He considers these indexes much better selection tools than choosing for just one trait, such as milk production. The two indexes he discussed were Total Performance Index (TPI), which considers protein, fat, type, and udder composite scores. This index has more emphasis on type, and may be more useful to breeders who merchandise or show cattle. The commercial breeder should use Net Merit, which was formulated in January 1994 by USDA, and considers MPPS, (milk-fat-protein dollars), productive life (a measure of longevity), and somatic cell score.

Once the bulls have been selected, do not spend hours worrying about which one gets bred to which bull. Cassell emphasized that the decision to use a particular bull is far more important to the herd's genetic progress than how it is used within the herd.

Lois Skeen is editor of Southeastern Holstein News which serves member dairy producers in six southeastern states. Her family raises Holstein heifers on their farm in Mt. Sidney. —

Spotswood Lad

Litter runt became biggest pig in the world

By NANCY SORRELLS

From the picture, it's easy to tell that it was a big pig. But until you realize that it is standing on the back of a truck and filling the whole bed, it's hard to judge just how big Spotswood Lad really was.

The famed porker from the Valley was, by some accounts, the biggest pig in the world in the late 1920s and early 1930s. At his biggest, he weighed in at 1,495 pounds, stood 4 feet 2 inches tall and was 9 feet 8 inches long from his snout to his tail. But even before he expanded to global proportions, he was recognized in 1929 as "the biggest pig in Rockbridge," while only weighing in at 1,100 pounds, standing 4 feet in height and measuring 7 feet, 10 inches in length according to the local newspaper.

No one would have guessed that Spotswood Lad would expand to such gargantuan proportions, remembered the son of Len McCray, the farmer who bought the pig back in the 1920s.

"Dad always told me that when he got him home, he couldn't get him to eat for days and he thought he was going to die," L.B. McCray remembered. "Dad thought the pig was going to starve to death, so he opened the gate to the pen and let him out on the farm to eat whatever he wanted. He started eating grass and from that time on never quit eating!"

L.B.'s father had ordered the purebred Poland China from somewhere in Rockingham County. The little pig, the runt of the litter, was shipped by train from Rockingham when he was weaning age, about 6-8 weeks old. The elder McCray traveled from his farm on Walkers Creek to the depot in Spotswood, hence the pig's name, to pick up the porker which was destined to become McCray's breeding boar.

Poland Chinas are rather large pigs anyway, the breed having been developed in the mid-west in the 1830s for lard production. Since the production of vegetable shortening after World War II, the use of this breed has shifted toward meaty carcasses, but Poland Chinas no longer enjoy the popularity they once did. Average females for the black and white, short-legged, hip-eared breed can tip the scales at 400 to 600 pounds and males average 600-800 pounds.

By all measurements then, Spotswood Lad more than outdid his counterparts in the breed book. Once the little runt started eating, he never stopped. "Dad said he would eat a 5 gallon bucket of feed, plus 15 ears of corn at one time," L.B. said.

As a youngster about 9 years old, L.B. was very impressed with the size of his dad's hog. "He was HUGE, but he was real tame. I remember my mother warning us about going in the pen with the big pig, though."

For all his size, Spotswood Lad never produced any offspring that approached his proportions although he was a good breeder. Apparently none of his offspring ever topped the scales at more than a mere 600 pounds. Eventually the hog became too large for breeding purposes, but there was another calling for this prodigious pig — he went into show business.

Len McCray and his nephew, H. Graham McCray, custom designed a show stall on the back of a Model A truck. A special platform was built to go alongside the truck bed and a canvas was wrapped around the truck racks so that only paying gawkers could look at the pig. People could pay a dime, walk up the steps to the platform, and see Spotswood Lad on the truck bed. When they were finished looking, they could leave by steps along the front of the truck.

"He filled up that whole truck, he really did. I remember Dad telling me that one man wanted to see the pig and had trouble convincing his wife to pay the money because she thought it must be a hoax. They got up on the platform and she fainted dead away and had to be carried down!" remembers L.B.

A postcard kept by the McCray family reveals that Spotswood Lad -- the biggest pig in the world during his time -- weighed 1,495 pounds, stood 4 ft., 2 in. tall, and was 9 ft., 8 in. long.

Postcard courtesy L.B. McCray

> "I remember Dad telling me that one man wanted to see the pig and had trouble convincing his wife to pay the money because she thought it must be a hoax. They got up on the platform and she fainted dead away and had to be carried down!"
>
> L.B. McCray

The popular porker hit the agriculture fair circuit in western Virginia for about two years and the fame of Spotswood Lad spread far and wide. Ripley's Believe it or Not featured a blurb about the hog, calling it the biggest pig in the world, and a hog farming senator from Illinois traveled to the farm intent on buying the boar.

"The senator wanted to give some cash and a note for the rest," L.B. recalled. "Dad didn't trust that arrangement and the deal never went through."

Even the Smithsonian Institute contacted the McCrays, requesting the opportunity to examine the carcass if the pig ever passed on.

"People would come to the house on weekends, just drive out there to see him. If Mom and Dad weren't here, us kids would try to get a dime out of the visitors," L.B. recalled with a chuckle. "A lot of people came to the farm just to talk to Dad about him and ask about what he ate. He was quite a conversation piece."

In the end, it was Spotswood Lad's size and the fact that he was a pig that became his undoing. Pigs don't adjust well to heat and bigger animals naturally suffer even more in the summer than do smaller ones.

It was a hot day in August when Spotswood Lad was loaded on the Model A truckbed and taken to the Winchester fair. "Dad couldn't go along because of farm chores, but he warned them to keep the pig in the shade and give him plenty of water. I guess the heat was just too much for him," L.B. recalled. At the age of six, Spotswood Lad expired of heat exhaustion.

Remembering his promise to the Smithsonian, when Len McCray received the call about his pig's death, he asked the promoters to pack the pig in ice for the trip home. By the time the truck arrived back at Walkers Creek, though, the ice had melted and Len took his famous hog up on the farm and buried him.

That was more than 60 years ago, but L.B. will never forget the big pig and the fame that he brought to Len McCray and the family farm situated on the Augusta County-Rockbridge line.

"I wonder what the farm on that pig would have weighed?" he mused. "He was something else. Dad always wondered what caused him to grow so." —

Sheep numbers down; checkoff in making

RICHMOND — The number of sheep and lambs on Virginia farms dropped for the fifth consecutive year, according to the latest inventory report released by the Virginia Agricultural Statistics Service.

Based on a Jan. 1 survey, sheep were estimated at 95,000 head, down from last year's record low of 97,000 head.

According to Robert T. Bass, state statistician with the Virginia Agricultural Statistics Service, sheep producers have been troubled by the swing in the market price for both lambs and wool in recent years. Also, heavy losses from predators — dogs and coyotes — have discouraged many producers.

The Virginia Farm Bureau Federation is supporting legislation to allow sheep producers to vote on a checkoff program.

"A checkoff for sheep producers may help promote the industry and build it back up," said VFBF Director Archie Bailey of Washington County. Bailey serves on the American Farm Bureau Federation Sheep and Goat Advisory Committee.

Under a checkoff program, such as those currently used by other commodity groups such as beef, dairy, eggs, and corn, a small fee is levied for every profit dollar generated by producers. This money is put into a fund which is used for advertising and promoting the industry.

The American Sheep Industry Association met recently in Washington and discussed a sheep checkoff program. The checkoff proposal is 7 cents per pound for domestic and imported lamb, 2 cents per pound on domestic grease wool, and 2 cents per pound on imported wool top and wool textiles. —

Yesterday once more

Staunton woman's diaries cover six decades

By NANCY SORRELLS

STAUNTON -- It was January 1, 1932 and 31-year-old Gertrude Hawkins picked up her brand-spanking new 200-page Jumbo composition book. The tan ledger with its drawing of an elephant on the cover and lined pages inside was going to be her diary, a record of her farm work.

"Jan. 1, 1932. Rain. Up home."

That was it — plain and simple — the weather and the events of the day. In the 63 years since that entry, Gertrude has continued to record life around her in those spare, terse phrases. As the seasons have turned and turned again, the straightforward entries have continued — the birth of her son, the death of her husband, the digging of potatoes, the planting of dahlias.

"I don't know why I started it, but it was a big help down on the farm," she explained. When she began her record she was still a newlywed, having married Roy Hawkins on April 25, 1931. Gertrude and Roy moved to his parents' farm near Mt. Sidney, and the couple soon settled into the business of helping run the family farm.

"I started keeping the diary when we moved to the farm. You see, we didn't plant things each year at the same time, and it was a help to know when we planted from one year to the next."

Perhaps there has always been something in Gertrude's nature compelling her to record things around her. Even before she began her diary, she was preserving the past with a camera. The pictures she snapped around her childhood homes in Middlebrook and Mint Spring, and then later in the Mt. Sidney and Spring Hill area, speak of a time that no longer exists. A time when women wore bonnets, and men tended the farm with horse-drawn equipment.

"I had a Kodak at that time and I took lots of pictures," Gertrude recalls. "I paid two and a half dollars for it and it's just as good now as the day I got it. Only you can't get film for it anymore. I bought it at the Highland Drug Store down on the corner (in Staunton)."

Between the Kodak and the diary, Gertrude has recorded a forgotten time in rural Augusta County. The diary entries have always been straight and to-the-point, crop plantings and harvests, number of eggs gathered, washing, ironing, canning, marriages, deaths and community events. The snapshots also freeze everyday events: kids throwing snowballs, new automobiles, hooking the hayrack and harvesting the crops.

It was another era, Gertrude recalls of growing up in southern Augusta County. She was born in August of 1901 on a little farm between Middlebrook and Greenville, a daughter of Martha Ellen and John Edward Hicks. One of six children — three boys and three girls — Gertrude tells of how it was not unusual for the kids to walk six miles or more to get where they wanted to be. On Sundays, the family attended St. John's Reformed United Church of Christ, and the children all walked.

"We would carry our Sunday shoes and either go barefoot or wear our old shoes when we were walking," she said.

Today, Gertrude is the oldest member of St. John's, and she speaks of the church with pride and a sense of history. One of the oldest churches in the area, the congregation now holds services in its third church structure. Gertrude can remember the second building, and the day it burned. "I remember when St. John's burned," she said. "I was at the Ellingers when we got the word that St. John's had burned."

At 93, Gertrude still takes part in church activities and attends every Sunday "whenever it's fit weather."

As a child, Gertrude remembers her family moving several times back and forth between Middlebrook and Mint Spring to adjust to her father's job as mail-carrier for the area. The Hicks children knew all the people in the community and especially knew which families were the first to get automobiles.

"We didn't think we'd ever get a car. We didn't get one until we were at Mint Spring," Gertrude recollects. The children's schooling was also split between the areas. Gertrude went to Mint Spring and then went for a year of high school in Staunton before finishing at Middlebrook. While attending school in Staunton, she often took the train into town to school.

While in Middlebrook, the family resided in an 11-room house that became sort of a community gathering place. Basketball was a big sport back then, and every little community had a boys and a girls team. "The teams would come to Middlebrook to play basketball and then stay at our house for the night," she said. In addition, the community doctor, Dr. Hyde, boarded at the Hicks home and kept his office there for 18 months.

"Middlebrook has changed so now," Gertrude said with a sigh. "The people and the houses are different. It doesn't have the stores. There was Swortzels, he was more groceries than anything else, but you could also get hats there. He had a place in the store where you would go up the steps to the hat place. Everybody wore hats back then."

After her graduation, Gertrude became a school teacher, first full-time and then later as a substitute. She spent several summers in Harrisonburg getting additional training at the Harrisonburg Normal School (now James Madison University).

Her full-time school assignments included Mt. Tabor, Mt. Pisgah and Mint Spring. Mt. Tabor was her first school. "It was just a one-room school with 32 pupils. There was one beginner and five children from the same family," she said.

She spent three years at Mint Spring. Although the schoolhouse is no longer standing, she remembers exactly where it was located. "Right where Dr. (Lynn) Moore's office is now," she said.

Mt. Pisgah is where she met her husband, Roy Hawkins, and after their marriage she settled down to being a farm wife and substitute teaching. In 1933, their son, Ray Franklin, was born.

That was when the diary entries began accompanying the photographs, but most of Gertrude's time was spent being a farm wife. "I can tell you, you never get through. There was always something to do," Gertrude recalled of her years at Mt. Sidney.

She made her own clothes, canned, tended the garden, raised Ray Franklin, made quilts and crocheted and even tended a boarder home.

"I raised chickens for a man in Staunton. We built the chicken house and could raise 500 chickens at a time. I'd have to get up at 2 o'clock in the morning to see if they were all right. The man furnished the feed in sacks and we got it across the street in Staunton from the train station."

The Hawkins family farm is just a memory now, but it is preserved through Gertrude's camera and diary pages. The 200-page composition book was filled years ago, and these days Gertrude works her way through five-year diaries. She still records the weather and important events of the day, it's just something she has been doing most of her life.

"I try to most always do it," Gertrude said of making her daily entries. "I do it at night lots of time. I don't know why, but I just keep doing it. It really was a big help when we were living on the farm. It helped a lot, I know that." —

Day by day, page by page, Gertrude Hawkins of Staunton has recorded the everyday events of life on the farm, in the schoolhouse, and in the communities where she has lived.

Gertrude Hawkins of Staunton has kept a daily diary since Jan. 1, 1931. Here she holds the Jumbo composition book which she used for her first diary.

Photo by Nancy Sorrells

Among the photos in Gertrude Hawkins' collection is this one of her on horseback at the "Whitesell" home near Mt. Sidney where she boarded while teaching at Mt. Pisgah school. It was taken in 1924.

This photo, which Gertrude labeled "Sisters," is of "Aunt Mag" Kelly, left, and "Grandma" Mary Holtz. The picture was taken in the backyard of the 11-room house in Middlebrook where the Holtz family lived.

Gertrude and her husband, Roy Hawkins, both on tractor, at the Hawkins farm near Mt. Sidney. The photo was taken in June 1931.

Roy Hawkins at the Hawkins farm preparing to sow seeds with a horse-drawn drill. The Hawkins farm was about four miles from Mt. Sidney.

In this 1939 photo, Roy Hawkins, left, and an unidentified man stand with two of Roy's horses. "He loved horses," Gertrude said of her husband. "He had so many horses he didn't know what to do."

Gertrude milking a cow at the Holtz farm — now Lynn and Eloise Moore's — in Mint Spring. The photo was taken in 1917 when Gertrude was 16 years old.

The Holtz house, far left, in Middlebrook taken in 1924. Lester and Judy Hughes live in the house now.

The Holtz family preparing apples for apple butter boiling in 1918. Gertrude is second from left in background. "Papa" Holtz is at left. "Papa liked to cook. Papa generally got breakfast on Sunday morning," recalled Gertrude. This photo was taken at the Holtz farmhouse in Mint Spring which is now the home of Lynn and Eloise Moore.

"Papa" Holtz photographed in 1927 on the street outside the Holtz family home in Middlebrook.

Country Crossroads

Winter storm warning

Hank and Irma
By
Lee Ann Heizer

"A 40 percent chance of snow is predicted for the Valley tomorrow," advises the meteorologist on the six o'clock evening news.

"Did you hear that Irma? Snow's coming tomorrow!" squeals Hanks in alarm.

"Well, it's only a 40 percent chance," Irma calmly responds. "I can't see too much and it's getting worked up over less than even chances."

"You know how those weather reports are," snaps Hank. "If they say there's going to be a winter storm we get nothing and if they say there's a 40 percent chance of snow we'll get a blizzard. Remember the Blizzard of '93?"

"As I remember it Hank, the blizzard of the century was predicted days in advance and everyone got well prepared and excited in," corrects Irma.

"Maybe so," concedes Hank. "But it must have been the forecast of the century as well if they were right once in a hundred years. Basically you can't trust meteorologists. You just have to depend on your instincts and basic survival skills when it comes to winter weather."

With the words "basic survival skills" echoing in her ears Irma turns up the volume on "Wheel of Fortune" and turns her mind to solving the puzzle. Out of the corner of her eye she observes that Hank is deep in thought.

The next morning when their clock radio comes on at 5:45 a.m. a weather report confirms that a two to three inch snowfall is predicted for the area. The snow should start sometime after midnight. Hank looks upright in bed, throws his feet to the floor and climbs out of the warm pulling on his pants as he goes. Irma catches another forty winks but is awakened by the sound of Hank's work boots as they beat a frenzied tempo across the kitchen floor and out the back door.

For the next two hours Hank shuttles to and fro in his beat up pick-up feeding hay and silage to cattle. Hank can only get up to speeds of 35 mph in this patterrap relic, but today it appears that he may be reaching speeds nearing 38 mph. As Irma catches a glimpse at the intensity of expression on Hank's face a thought suddenly explodes in her brain. Hank has survived the blizzard of the century. He is preparing for the blizzard of the year! The dragging out of the laughs and spoilers to a stop in driveway. Moments later Hank bursts into the house and excitingly questions, "Irma, do you have everything you need?"

Caught a bit off guard by his sensitive concern Irma haltingly responds, "I, uh, I guess I have everything I need, but frankly there are a lot of things I want. I want a new pair of brown shoes and a new rug for the living room."

"That's not what I mean," explodes Hank. "Do you have everything you need for the blizzard?"

"What do you mean, blizzard?" posts Irma, miffed that Hank's new sensitivity is motivated by meteorology only. "The report on the radio said to expect only three or four inches."

"Otha and Buddy down at the Feed and Seed said they heard the weather from Harrisonburg and it calls for 6 to 8 inches," warns Hank. "And old Mr. Hayden says his legs are hurting just like they did before the '93 blizzard. Looks like it's gonna be a big one!" Hank concludes triumphantly. "You'd better get to town Irma," Hank directs, "and get everything we need — food, medicine, and don't forget to fill the car up with gas. We've got to get prepared!"

"Why would we need a full tank of gas?" queries Irma. "If we have a blizzard, I don't think we'll be traveling by car. Maybe I should look into a dogsled and a team of huskies while I'm in town," laughs Irma.

"If the blizzard gets the electric lines down and we lose power we can sit in the car and stay warm," answers Hank belligerently. "When you're cold and don't have a warm car to sit in don't say I didn't warn you!"

Although Irma's pantry is well stocked she observes the glint in Hank's eye and remembers that when he was shut in during the blizzard of '93 he was ravenously hungry. After his hourly patrol through the house staring out the windows at the downward swirling snow and upward piling drifts he generally made a stop in the kitchen to devour whatever food he could lay hands on. As junk food began to diminish near the end of that blizzard Irma began to fear that he might eat her. Her one hope was that if she had enough chocolate syrup she might possibly dribble it over the snow drifts and trick Hank into eating his way out of the house. She makes a

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A good reason to hope for snow

Saying grace
By
Roy Howard

One good thing about the snow is the return of the birds to our feeders. There are other benefits, of course. Water for the soil, no school for the kids, sledding, skiing, and a peculiar beauty that comes with winter; these are all good things, only it's hard to appreciate them when you are shoveling your walks or slipping all the way to the mailbox.

We haven't had much snow this winter (yet), at least not in comparison to last year or the "Blizzard of the century" before that. Like well-trained animals, we've learned to be suspicious of mild winters. There is a lurking superstition that we are not lucky enough (or good enough) to escape the wrath of winter. When the forecasters say we will get 10 inches, we will at least 3 more and prepare for the worst.

Standing in the check-out line behind 12 adults and three infants babies, all loaded with supplies to withstand the coming catastrophe, I began to wonder if the weather service was in some kind of conspiracy with local merchants. Shovels, batteries and ice-melt have been slow moving items. People around here greeted the recent near miss with jaw-dropping disbelief. Some were actually disappointed when they awoke to gaze upon two inches instead of three feet, but not farmers, or transportation workers, or anyone else who has to work regardless of the weather.

Even though it is almost 60 degrees and sunny as I write, most folks are still waiting for winter's other foot to drop. When the snow did come a month ago, the biggest excitement around the house was the sight of birds on our feeders. It's a selfish, silly reason to welcome the snowfall, but I missed the birds. In October we hung our freshly-cleaned feeders at carefully chosen sites around the house. Santa Claus came in December with a new bird book and another bird-feeder (even he was fooled by the mild winter), but the feeders were still full.

Where are the birds? I asked pacing around the house. They are enjoying themselves, came the reply. Be patient. Wait until the snow covers the ground. Over the past 12 months we had spotted 68 different species of birds around our hill. A year ago we had a rare visit from a Common Redpoll at our feeder. Now we had no visitors and I was going crazy. My mind began to play tricks on me.

I asked my wife: do you suppose this is evidence of an ecological disaster? I've read of the slowly decline of song birds around the world. Has some plague been visited upon our hill? Do you think the birds are avoiding us because of the cats and dog? My wife, used to such periodic fits of irrationality, calmly assured me that things were all right. Wait until snow covers the ground.

In desperation, I called Yoko Lever, our local bird expert. Do you have any birds? I asked with alarm. No, she assured me, it's the same all over. Bird-watchers are having a hard time. Mild winter, no snow, no birds at the feeders. Be patient. (No birds, I should add, is inaccurate. Tufted Titmice and Carolina Chickadees are constant friends. We have other regulars, too, It's a disservice not to count them.)

A day or two after the snow they began to visit. The familiar cries of did you see that? and look who's on the feeder filled our house. White-throated sparrows came the first day, along with the finches gold, purple, and house. Juncos arrived and other sparrows, too. A Red-Bellied Woodpecker came from the woods to nibble suet cakes. Downy, Hairy and Pileated Woodpeckers don't visit our feeders but they are nearby. A White-Breasted Nuthatch showed up and a Cardinal, too.

We've had no rare visitors yet, but all the regulars returning has been a welcome sight at our house. I take these sightings and the sense of delight they bring as reason enough to give thanks for the natural world. Nothing spectacular, only the visit of ordinary creatures who nevertheless evoke pleasure in those who take the time to appreciate them.

It reminds of the lines by Joyce Kilmer about something so ordinary as a tree.

"I think that I shall never see a poem as lovely as a tree. Poems are made by fools like me, but only God can make a tree."

The return of the birds to the feeders is really no big deal. No more than an old tree is a big deal. It's an ordinary thing that occurs day after day. Yet, like the trees and the other forms of life not of our making, they remind us of the One who creates every good gift.

Birds are a sign of grace, to me all around things. They remind us of all the good things given to us. To delight in them is to praise their maker and your maker, too.

Is this reason enough to wish for snow? —

Reflecting pool reflections

By Roberta Hamlin

February, 1995

Dear Mandy:

It seems like ages since I wrote — so much has been going on. The Republicans on the Hill are in such a hurry to get things done! They have been keeping their staff members in the offices working late many nights and continue to keep Congress in session long after everyone should be home at supper. It is making my boss very nervous. Who knows what kind of legislation they may pass when he is not there to watch them.

The wonderful bright spot during the dreary month of February was the Washington Mardi Gras Ball. As I wrote last month, my boss had promised to do all he could to get tickets for me, so right away I began looking for that something just right to wear. I finally found a glamorous slinky red dress — floor length with a slit to above the knee, and ON SALE. Then, unbelievable luck, I found a pair of red silk shoes, just the same color, with rhinestone bows. If I do say so myself, I looked stunning.

Even though this year's Saturday tickets were almost impossible to get, the boss used all his pull and was able to get two for me and Dylan and then, at the last minute, two more tickets turned up from one of his friends who had guests who canceled, so Sara was able to go also. Even though I had heard about this party for years, it was much more than I ever expected!

One of Dylan's good friends from the *Hill is a member of the Louisiana State* Society, and he gave us a little of the history of the event. Many years ago (48 to be exact) Dan Broussard, who was then president of the Louisiana State Society, decided that something should be done in Washington for those Louisianians who could not get home to New Orleans for Mardi Gras. So, they planned a Mardi Gras dance.

They found sponsors for the party, and it grew each year. By the mid-50s, it had grown until they were using the ballroom at the Washington Hotel, and in 1956, Senator Russell Long (the son of Huey Long) decided that what the ball really needed to make it more authentic was a krewe (crew) like those in New Orleans.

With the help of his assistant, Bob Hunter, they organized about 50 Washington lobbyists into that first krewe. That is how my boss is involved — his predecessor was an original member, and when he retired, he passed his place in the krewe on to my boss. From that first group of 50 men, the membership in the organization has grown now to about 400, and from one Saturday evening party, there are now three evenings of festivities.

The first of the official activities was a huge food and music festival, held on Thursday evening. They brought from Louisiana four or five different bands, representing the various kinds of music popular in the state, and also a number of recognized Louisiana chefs to cook regional specialties. There was a big bandstand in the middle of the room where the musicians all sat, taking turns playing. All around the edges of the room were food stations where the cooks served up their special dishes. What a great party! Dylan and I were lucky enough to be able to go to it also — the boss had two complimentary tickets, but some clients came into town unexpectedly that day and he was unable to use them. Lucky me!!

On Friday night there was a big sit-down dinner dance for about 2,000 people, but we did not go to that. The boss, expecting other clients, had not purchased any tickets, so I had to miss it, which is probably just as well since I only had one new dress and no time to find another. I understand it was a great party also. They presented the Louisiana Festival Queens and the court for the first time at that dinner.

The ballroom was set up with banks of seats, all separated by low curtains. There was a large section of these boxes all around the edge of the room, and then also another group in the center of the room. And between the two, was an avid dance floor. There was general dancing for the first hour or so.

First came the presentation of the king and queen of the ball, and the girls of the court. The king and queen were in magnificent costumes, the festival queens wore incredible ensembles all decorated with the themes of their festival in sequins and rhinestones, and the debutantes were in white ball gowns. It really was beautiful.

The king came in first, then the festival queens. Next the Marine Band arrived to perform for the king. This year Vice-President Gore attended the ball, (and he sat out 30 feet from me!!) He arrived while the Marine Band was playing, along with a great number of handsome young secret service men with those cute little radios in their ears. I know they had to be crazy trying to keep an eye on the vice-president's safety. Can you imagine — 400 men in costumes and masks carrying bags filled with metal coins, gifts and beads!! I am sure that they were all quite nervous!

The krewe then paraded to the other Mardi Gras festivity — the street parade. The ball dance floor suddenly became a parade route, and out they came all in costume, with small floats that could fit into the ballroom. There were four or five floats, among them one of King Neptune and another great one that had in it a pelican covered with hundreds of little lights.

There were guys on the floats throwing beads and doubloons (the Mardi Gras coins) as well as a large group of cheerleaders on the dance floor. They also had the Olympia Brass Band and the Storyville Stompers in among more marching groups representing each Congressman's district. It was unbelievable. They went around the room at least twice and then the floats disappeared, the music changed and they switched back to the New Orleans Ball function, as the costumed members of the krewe called out the ladies to dance and presented them with gifts.

And would you believe, someone came up to me and pulled me out to the dance floor, danced with me and then gave me a wonderful little treasure chest as a gift. I have no idea who it was! He wouldn't tell me, but I could tell from the voice that it was not my boss. It was SO exciting!

Suddenly, after the last "call out" dance (there were seven of these, I think) the costumed members started to slowly vanish, as other people began to dance. Pretty soon, it looked like any other ordinary dance, and at that point, you wonder if it all really happened, or if you dreamed it. One of the guests told me that was the way you were supposed to feel.

After the ball was over at midnight, there were a number of breakfasts. Dylan knows someone who was involved with one of them so we got invitations. It was great, for the music continued, the brass bands were playing in the hallways, and at the party we went to, even Elvis showed up!

Any other news seems anti-climatic after such a party. Now it is really down to work with all of the legislation ahead of us. Will send news of that as it occurs.

Give everyone my love.

Your dazed-out cousin,
LaLa

Mardi, The Mardi Gras in Washington was magnificent! Here's one of the floats which were even more beautiful than my red silk shoes.

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mental note to run into town to stock up on potato chips, Oreo cookies, Smucker hot AND chocolate syrup.

Hank continues as final courtesy to the bovine population and if they have the brains to consider it they must think it is some kind of Thanksgiving feast for the four-footed. There big rolls of hay replace their usual one and their silage ration is doubled. Irma remains the opinion that the cows may trample the hay and waste it before it is eaten. Hank flies into a tizzier. "They'll eat one bale today and then maybe they can make it through the drifts to the other two tomorrow!" Irma chuckles at this point that normal communication with Hank must cease. She will switch to emergency breakfast alert and speak to him only when necessary — that is, in reference to "the big one".

Mid-afternoon, while listening to the radio, Irma hears that the weather service has issued a winter storm warning for the area. She accepts the fact that snow will soon be falling and is even contemplating "a big one" until Hank shows up carrying two loaves of bread. She has been to the grocery store, stocked up on the necessary supplies and Hank's second-guessing her ability to prepare really tasty fat cookies. They're the long leaves, too — the kind you buy when you need to make enough sandwiches for a little league football team. In her intuition she realizes that sales are probably booming at some local country store where Hank's prophetic presence has frightened the more reserved shoppers into a panicked purchasing flurry.

"I just heard the news," blusters Hank.

"Yes, I heard it too — a winter weather advisory for tonight," responds Irma.

"I'm not talking about that!" Hank roars. "I'm talking about 12-18 inches of snow!"

"I thought the weather service said only 2 to 4 inches," Irma says in alarm.

"Don't worry about what the weather service said," Hank implores. "You've got to listen to all the old-timers and watch the signs of nature. If you do, you know that we're in for a big one!"

When they retire for the night nary a flake has fallen and Irma wonders if a foot and a half of snow can come down — whump — all at one time.

When her clock radio awakens her the next morning, Irma stumbles to the window and sleepily peers into the slowly lightening outdoors.

"Oh my gosh, Hank," says Irma in disgust. "Look at this."

Both stare out the window at two inches of new fallen snow and a sky that is brightening in a manner which announces the arrival of a sunny day. They're looking at the snow that was, but wasn't. It was there but it wasn't what they had prepared for — it's a little one.

"I hope you're happy," Irma chides her husband. "All that work and effort for nothing—to speak of."

"I am happy," answers Hank throwing out his chest. "Like a knight of old I am ever ready to do battle. It was a good drill," Hank concludes, "after all, the big one is still out there." —

Country Kid Stuff

March is Women in History Month

Career chat

Beth Hodge interprets history by playing the part

By LEE ANN HEIZER

Name: Beth Hodge

Position: American Farm Site Supervisor, Museum of American Frontier Culture, Staunton

Education: Bachelor of science in recreation and parks administration, Clemson University.

As a teenager Beth Hodge began getting occupational experience. "I started working as a volunteer in a camp for mentally retarded citizens. I decided to pursue recreational therapy."

With this as her educational background, Beth worked in a school setting for several years, but during the summer months spent her vacations as an "interpreter" at the living history exhibits at Humpback Rock. Usually attired in the typical dress of a historic period *interpreters* "use everyday chores as a vehicle to talk about issues of the day," according to Beth. At the Frontier Museum "we lead the visitor in their own investigation into history," she continued.

"I'm very interested in the life of women and what that was like," says Beth of the appeal of her job. "Women's lives were very complicated," related Beth as she spoke of the difficulties frontier women encountered — the early death of children due to diphtheria and other diseases, the possible loss of one's husband, and the very strenuous work which life without modern conveniences demanded.

"I like the physical aspect of the work," said Hodge explaining that each museum farm site has 4 1/2 acres of land on which to raise crops. She explained however that typical rural Valley women of the 1860's lived on and worked farms of 140 acres. Their days were long and arduous.

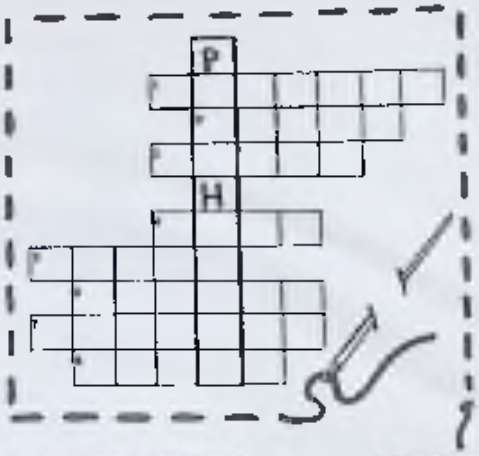
In her position as a supervisor, Beth has a variety of duties ranging from on-site costumed interpretation to administrative responsibilities to research. Preparing for an upcoming lecture series, Beth said "I'm doing a lot of reading now on rural women of the 1860's. I've really been doing a lot of digging in this area. The more you learn however, the more you realize you don't know," she continued. "I want to know everything!" Although some frontier women kept diaries few recorded their feelings about coping with the stresses of the day. Said Beth, "We can't get into the hearts of early women and know their thoughts."

Beth Hodge, farm site supervisor at the Museum of American Frontier Culture carries an armload of wood to the back door of the house on the American Farm. Women's chores of the 1800's are among those depicted by costumed interpreters working at the living history museum.

Photo by Lee Ann Heizer

The Frontier Museum is open year round, and no matter the temperature the costumed interpreters must dress to depict the time period. For the women this means long-sleeved blouses and long skirts and petticoats. In the summer months the interpreters cook over open fires in the houses and the clothing can be stifling on 100-degree days. By the same token, the houses are unheated except for the kitchen fire in the winter months so a day at work in March may mean huddling near the fire while trying to do daily chores. "We wear the traditional garb on the outside and the most technologically advanced underwear on the inside!" Beth said.

She said that the fascinating people she meets and works with makes her job very rewarding. "There are rewards every day," she commented. "Sometimes visitors get here right at the exact moment to see a lamb born and get to witness something they might never see otherwise," she continued. In helping visitors understand something of their rural heritage, Ms. Hodge finds great satisfaction. "I think if you can appreciate your past, you can better appreciate your present," she concluded. —



What's her name?

Fill in the boxes with the first name of the woman whose identity answers the clue. The vertical answer to the asterisk is the name of a notable woman in Virginia history. (Hint: Her married name was Lady Rebecca Rolfe.)

1. Mrs. Martin Luther King, Jr.
2. Civil War battlefield name
3. Author of "Little House..." book series
4. Mother of President John F. Kennedy
5. Wife of Va. Gov. George Allen
6. Mrs. George Washington
7. The current first lady of the United States
8. Philadelphia seamstress who reportedly stitched the first "stars and stripes" at the request of George Washington.

Stitch! Stitch! Stitch!

By LEE ANN HEIZER

In early days in America needlework was a necessity. Before cloth was mass-produced in factories weaving on home looms supplied much of the fabric for clothing. It took a great deal of time and skill, as well as raw materials to weave enough cloth to make a coat, dress, or pair of trousers. For this reason the use of the garment was very often extended by patching and re-patching. Skillful needlework by women could make a garment last longer for the wearer.

With many people in a family to clothe, the early needleworker faced a monumental task of endless hours bent over her stitchery. Women who had few ways to earn a living often sewed for their daily bread. The 19th century English poet Thomas Hood sympathetically portrayed the plight of seamstresses prior to the advent of sewing machines:

"With fingers weary and worn,
With eyelids heavy and red,
A woman sat in unwomanly rags
Plying her needle and thread--
Stitch! stitch! stitch!
In poverty, hunger and dirt,
She sang the Song of the Shirt.
*Work! work! work!"**

In some households women pursued needlework as a leisure activity and created numerous fancy needlework designs. These stitches used brightly colored yarns and often depicted animals, birds, fruits, and people. Girls and young women practiced their needlework on samplers. Samplers were long pieces of linen or other cloth. Stitches were embroidered across the width of the fabric in practice rows. The women gained skill as they repeated the needlework

Continued at top of page 21

Teresa Young, a costumed interpreter at the Museum of American Frontier Culture, displays a needlework sampler representative of 18th and 19th century stitchery. The designs are embroidered on linen which is a product made on the Scotch-Irish farm site.

Photo by Lee Ann Heizer

Continued from page 20

design for several inches. The samplers also served as a textbook of stitches. Girls and adult women as well could consult their samplers or those of relatives for examples of stitchery to use on future decorative projects.

Skill in needlework was an expectation for women of the time. It was even taught in school and some embroidered samplers bear not only the name and age of their creator but the name of their school as well. Needlework samplers often featured a motto or Bible verse as part of their design. Samplers incorporating the ABC's and numerals served a dual purpose—reinforcing stitchery technique and knowledge of the alphabet and number system.

Some fine examples of colonial sampler needlework still exist today and many are preserved in museums. Due to the fragility of cloth, few samplers from the earliest days of colonization in America remain. One of the oldest known preserved American samplers is that of Lora Standish, daughter of Captain Myles Standish. It was crafted in Massachusetts in 1653 and is on exhibit today in Pilgrim Hall in Plymouth, Massachusetts.

Native Americans too were expert needlecrafters ornamenting animal skins with beads and dyed porcupine quills. In fact quill work is a stitchery art form unique to North American tribal women. Before the arrival of Europeans bearing glass beads Native Americans had utilized shells, bones, animal teeth and horn to decorate garments and moccasins.

Written histories and paintings preserve a culture's heritage, but so does stitchery. Those who could not pick up a pen or paintbrush to record events often picked up needle and thread and crafted a tapestry which reflected significant happenings in their life and the life of their community.

"Excerpt from The Song of the Shirt by Thomas Hood (1843). ...

If you would like to learn more about the life of rural women in the 1860's you may be interested in attending the Annual Heritage Lecture Series, March 7, 14, 21, and 28 at the Museum of American Frontier Culture. This lecture-discussion series will focus on the historic role of women in Virginia. The lectures begin at 7:30 p.m. on each night of the series. For information telephone the museum at (703) 332-7850. ...

GRANDMA MOSES

1860-1961

Anna Mary Robertson Moses was born in Washington County, N.Y. and lived in Augusta County for about a year, after having been "overpersuaded" to go no further south than Staunton. Her observations of rural life found expression in embroidered pictures which she began crafting in the 1930's. Moving from needlework to painting, Grandma Moses (who did not begin her art career until age 75) completed over 1,500 paintings. The scantily educated farmer's daughter who left home at the age of twelve to earn her keep as a "hired girl" was awarded two honorary doctorate degrees recognizing her contributions to art in America.

FANNIE LOU HAMER

1917-1977

Born a Mississippi sharecropper's daughter, Fannie Lou Hamer began picking cotton at the age of six. Although she lacked formal education Hamer was a leader in the movement to help African-Americans register to vote in the early 1960's. In 1963 when accused of sitting in a whites only bus station waiting room she was jailed and beaten almost to death. Remembering her mother's words, "Stand up no matter what the odds," Hamer recovered and continued her crusade for voter rights. Following her zealous efforts on the part of African-Americans and passage of the 1965 Voting Rights Act Mississippi magazine named Hamer one of six "Women of Influence" in the state.

BARBARA McCLINTOCK

1902-

A geneticist, Barbara McClintock studied inherited traits in corn to discover the ways development of the grain is influenced by genes. Ahead of her time and out of step with many of her colleagues, McClintock's theories about the action of chromosomes were ignored for many years. In 1983 she said, "If you know you're right, you don't care. You know that sooner or later, it will come out in the wash." Finally recognized for the ingenuity of her work McClintock received the Nobel Prize for Medicine at age 81. No study of inherited traits today is complete without reference to the work of Barbara McClintock.

WILLA CATHER

1873-1947

A native of the Winchester, Virginia area Willa Cather was a writer who received the Pulitzer Prize in 1923. Her book which was recognized with this award was *One of Ours*, a fictional story about a young soldier in World War I. A prolific author, Cather set many of her novels on the American plains. She moved to Nebraska as a child and her stories *O Pioneers!* and *My Antonia* reflect the settlement of that region by immigrants. Her final novel, *Sapphira and the Slave Girl*, takes place in the Shenandoah Valley of Virginia and is based on remembrances of family stories from her childhood.

Here, there, everywhere

Troubleshooting rhodoes, azaleas, and laurels

The garden path

By Ben Critzer

Questions, answers, and free advice for gardeners

Yellow-leafed rhododendrons are not a new variety. I sometimes think they are for I see so many hanging out on foundation plantings in yards everywhere.

I gave up on rhodoes and azaleas 10 years ago. A few months after I would put them in a seemingly perfect, shady, well-drained spot along the north side of my house, they would begin a slow decline toward death. I got so frustrated I once left a dead one in the bed hoping somehow those brown leaves were a natural progression in the life of these usually beautiful evergreens.

A couple of years ago, however, the responsibility for the care and feeding of a dozen or more rhododendrons, 8 mature azaleas, and another dozen mountain laurel, Kalmia latifolia, fell upon me. I had no choice. I had to learn how to tend them.

The nursery workers who planted them assured me that spray applications of a 20-20-20 liquid fertilizer throughout the summer, mulch every year and a handful of high nitrogen fertilizer in the spring would be all the maintenance needed.

Everything looked great the first year: the rhodoes bloomed beautifully pink; the laurel threw out their showy blossoms like morning mist in a West Virginia Valley.

The next spring I fertilized and heaped on the mulch. The rhodoes bloomed on schedule. The laurel looked a bit pooped, the human leaves started dropping off and the rest of the leaves took on a yellow cast. By this time I had read enough to know that yellow leaves sometimes were a sign of iron deficiency. I switched from the 20-20-20 to a formula for acid loving plants with chelated iron. As the summer progressed, the laurel got sicker and the rhodoes began to look not-quite-green. I laid down a fog of fertilizer every two weeks throughout the season. The rhodoes looked a little better. The laurel looked a little worse.

That third spring was a nightmare for me. As I stood in the evergreen bed pondering the problems, passersby raved about the rhododendrons — how pretty they looked. What was my secret? they asked. Fortunately, the blooms hid the yellowing leaves and the laurel were so far back in the bed no one noticed they were doing very, very poorly.

Rhododendrons and other broad-leafed evergreens are subject to myriad problems. What can be diagnosed by examining the leaves and stems. Yellow leaves generally signal lack of iron and trace minerals. You can begin to remedy the problem by applying ferrous sulphate, sometimes called fool's iron sulphate, to the ground around the plants. In addition to providing needed iron to broad-leaf evergreens, iron sulphate helps to acidify the soil. Also apply recommended amounts of Espoma Holly-Tone, once in the spring and again in mid-summer but no later than about the first of July. Do not cultivate. I will explain why later.

While I'm on the subject of fertilizing, I would like to clear up any misunderstanding about how to fertilize plants. I only use Espoma products for my gardens. There are several different blends for different plants and all are made of natural ingredients. Actually, reading the ingredients list on the bag is kind of interesting. With Espoma, there is little risk of burning plants by over-fertilizing. In fact, it is so gentle on plants I broadcast it over low growing junipers and just let the rain carry it down to the ground. When you fertilize, don't throw a handful under the plant. Scatter it out beyond the drip line — an imaginary line beyond the outermost leaves. That's where the feeder roots are. You are not wasting fertilizer by throwing it between plants and in a circle around them. You are only wasting fertilizer if you put it under the plants inside the drip line. The County Extension Service has an excellent booklet on how to fertilize. It even gives formulas for figuring out just how far feeder roots extend beyond trees and shrubs. Ask for publication 430-018, "Fertilizing Landscape Trees and Shrubs."

After you put down the iron and fertilizer in the spring, mulch with about one inch of pine bark. Because rhododendrons, laurel and azaleas love acid conditions and you want them to naturalize and not have to depend on you for foliar iron sprays later on, use pine bark mulch, not hardwood mulch. Over time the pine bark mulch will help acidify the soil. Some nurseries sell it by the truckload or it is available by the bag for about $3 per one cubic foot bag. Remember, buy mulch, not nuggets or anything that doesn't resemble the hardwood mulch you normally see.

It takes about three big bags of pine mulch per plant, more if your plants are bigger than about three feet tall. Pour out the mulch, first around the plants, spread it between plants and out beyond the drip line of each plant. For the first year, put down about one inch of mulch. You don't want to risk smothering the feeder roots. In time, your plants will send roots into the mulch and you can begin to put down thicker layers. For now, however, keep it kind of thin. Also, don't let any mulch touch the trunk of the plant. This could lead to fungus problems later on. If your space is limited, consider doing a raised bed with a rock wall or landscape timbers. It doesn't have to be very high — about one foot is fine.

I regret to have to tell you this, but you will just have to get used to the fact that you can not cultivate for weeds around rhodoes. Broad leafed evergreens have wide-spreading roots near the surface. They support themselves, not so much with deep structural roots as with mats of roots near the surface. If weeds are a problem around your plants, you will just have to get down on your knees and hand pick them. Water regularly. A quick-fix I sometimes use for yellow leaves is Dragon Liquid Chelated Iron and Trace Mineral foliar spray. Mix with a sticker-spreader so the solution will stay on the leaves and spray the plants until the mixture runs off. I prefer this product because it does not have any nitrogen in it, which can promote rampant growth. By using Espoma, I am providing my plants with all the nitrogen, phosphorus and potassium they need.

Even if your rhododendron or laurel leaves are yellow, take a closer look before you begin with iron treatments and acidic fertilizer. Yellow speckled leaves and dark specs on the underside of the leaves are a sign of the dreaded lace bug. I say dreaded because they are hard to get rid of and if left unchecked will spread rapidly from plant to plant. As soon as the weather gets warm in early April, spray both sides of the plant's leaves with rotenone/pyrethrum and a sticker-spreader. Spray again in 10 days to two weeks and keep up this spraying schedule all summer. If you do not use organic products ask your nursery person or consult a book on plant problems for other types of treatments.

I don't know exactly how to get into this next part without scaring away anyone planning to plant rhododendrons for the first time or upsetting those gardeners who have sick broad-leaves. Even if your problem seems to be just yellow leaves, take another look at the plants in the spring. If they stay wilted-looking and leaves die but don't drop off, the plants could be suffering fungus infection. There are several types of fungus problems. To narrow your choices, consult with your nursery person for proper diagnosis. Remember to take along a branch to make diagnosis easier.

Barring any fungus problems, your rhodoes could be slowly drowning. If you water them and the water stays on the surface a long time, the problem may be poor drainage caused by heavy clay soils. Broadleafed evergreens need a well-drained site. There are at least two choices. First, try regular applications of gypsum. Over time, gypsum loosens clay soil and improves drainage. A readily-available product is Sol-U-Gal. The Augusta Farm Bureau and Wetsel sell it. Follow the directions on the bag, except for the part about working it into the soil. The second remedy, the one I favor for existing rhodoes that are getting weaker and weaker each year, is to dig them up and start all over again. Don't scream. It's not all that hard. Actually, there is another solution: yank out the dying plants, build a new, well-drained bed and buy some new plants.

Now is not a good time to disturb rhododendron and laurel. Not that it can't be done, it's just that your plants will be better off if you wait until fall. Next October or November, I'll plan a special column outlining all the steps for moving broad-leaf evergreens and building new homes for them. For now, be content to follow the fertilizing and bug-proofing guidelines I've talked about. Pay extra attention to your rhodoes, azaleas, and laurel this summer. Maybe these treatments will begin to solve your yellow-leaf rhododendron problem. —

New magazine features gardening guidelines

A new gardening magazine landed on my cluttered desk the other day. Central Virginia Gardening Guide, based in Charlottesville, is a full-color, information-filled quarterly publication. At last, someone has created a "focal" magazine for gardeners and horticulturists: same general hardiness zones, professional advice and ads about garden shops and nurseries I never knew existed.

Even the title doesn't bother me. I fished a road map out of my Jeep's glove compartment. It's a little out of date but Virginia still encompasses most of the middle Atlantic area and westward to who knows where. Also, J. Fry and P. Jefferson, who compiled the map about 1775, show Augusta County beginning at the Blue Ridge Mountains and apparently ending somewhere off the left side of my map. By those standards, I consider myself a Central Virginia gardener sitting here in the Valley of Virginia.

Among those listed on the magazine's editorial advisory board is Peggy Newcomb, director of the Center for Historic Plants at Monticello. When I first met Peggy, she headed Monticello's gardens and grounds department — no small task. A group of us spent the better part of a day following Peggy on a very special tour of Mr. Jefferson's gardens and grounds. An author and expert on Jefferson's horticultural endeavors, Peggy is the type of person who gives freely of her knowledge. She opened up Jefferson's gardening world to me and I have since read as much as I could put my hands on about him and visited Monticello as often as time has allowed.

I don't know how many articles she will have time to write for Central Virginia Gardening Guide, but the current issue features a piece by her titled "Thomas Jefferson- Pioneer with Native Plants." If you don't know much about Mr. Jefferson's life as a gardener, Peggy's story is a good place to start.

Of course, Central Virginia Gardening Guide is not centered around Mr. Jefferson's works. The issue I read had articles on such topics as tree trimming, planting spring bulbs, and small-scale farming. For subscription information telephone 804-293-8818 or write to the guide at 114 E. Main St., Suite 301, Charlottesville, Va. 22902. —

Extension Service offers trip to D.C., educational programs

VERONA — A trip to Washington D.C. to visit Capitol Hill lawmakers and three educational programs are being coordinated by Virginia's Cooperative Extension Service.

Area residents have the opportunity to travel to Washington D.C. on April 11 to visit with Virginia Sen. John Warner and observe Congress at work.

A bus will take individuals to D.C. and will pick up passengers at 7 a.m. at the Extension office in Verona and at 7:30 a.m. at the Howard Johnsons at I-81 Exit 245.

The day in Washington will begin at 11 a.m. with a meeting with Sen. Warner or one of his aides who will provide an update on a national environment issue. Time in the afternoon is allotted to visit with representatives, observe a committee hearing, House session, or Congressional session.

According to Betty Barger, Augusta County Extension agent, the purpose of the trip is to help people become more familiar with the federal lawmaking process and to learn about special environmental issues which Congress will address this year.

There is a $20 fee for the trip which covers transportation. Registration at the Augusta County Extension Office must be completed by March 28.

For people involved in home-based businesses, the Extension service has scheduled a Home-Based and Micro Business Conference April 26 at Hunt Ridge Inn in Lexington. The day-long event will begin with registration at 8:30 a.m. Topics presented will include legal and legislative issues affecting home-based and micro businesses, marketing, pricing for profit, recordkeeping and taxes, liability insurance, how to develop a business plan, technology developments for home-based businesses, and family issues which affect businesses operated at home.

The fee — which covers lunch and handouts — for the event is $25 for one person or $45 for two persons representing the same business. Deadline for registration for this conference is April 12. Registration forms may be obtained at the Augusta County Extension Office.

The Extension Service is offering two educational programs which may be presented at civic organization meetings or to other groups of interested individuals.

In cooperation with the Augusta County Fire and Rescue Staff, the Extension Service is offering Family Emergency Preparedness training. The program helps people to be prepared for severe weather such as flash floods, snow and ice storms, or loss of electricity. Participants in this program learn simple steps for the family to take in preparing for a disaster or weather-related emergency. Information offered includes emergency survival education on heating, meal preparation, and medical needs.

Also being offered to the community is a weight management program which emphasizes a low fat-high fiber diet with walking as exercise. The 15-week program is best suited for groups of 10-20 with each session being about 30-45 minutes long. At each week's session there is discussion, weigh-in, and tasting of recipes. Cost for this program is $1 per session per participant.

For information about any programs offered by Virginia Cooperative Extension, call the Augusta County office at 245-5705. —

Made from Scratch

No butter, no eggs, no milk... remember Depression cakes

This week's Made from Scratch offering comes from Augusta County subscriber Janet Dowell of Staunton who writes:

"Several years ago I got this recipe from the Port Republic cookbook. The daughter-in-law of Mrs. Alice "Aunt Pet" Meyerhoeffer, submitted the recipe and it is a very old recipe.

"I submitted this to the cookbook for Memorial Baptist. Following the publication of the cookbook, some of the books were at Surratt Tire Center in Staunton. Isabel Garber of Staunton saw the cookbook and the recipe for the cake. She purchased the cookbook, went home, made the cake and gave me a call.

"She said that her mother always kept this cake in the bowl shown of the kitchen cabinet and when they came home from school, they would have a piece of the cake. Joy is the one that told me they called it 'Depression cake.'

She said that she had looked for many years for this recipe and was really excited when she saw the recipe in the cookbook from Memorial Baptist."

Thanks, Janet, for sending this in. We're happy to pass it along to our readers. —

Depression Cake

1 pound raisins
2 cups water
1 cup cold water
2 cups sugar
1/2 cup shortening
1 tablespoon baking soda
1 teaspoon cloves
1 teaspoon cinnamon
1 teaspoon nutmeg
4 cups flour
1 cup black walnuts (optional)

Stew raisins in 2 cups of water for 15 minutes. Add remaining ingredients. Mix well. Pour into a greased and floured tube pan. Bake at 350 degrees for 1 hour.

Measure preserves Jump Mountain

LEXINGTON — Thanks to a determined group of local property owners and an innovative approach to financing land conservation, an agreement was reached recently which ensures Jump Mountain will remain a forested land mark for future generations of Rockbridge County and surrounding areas.

Three property owners donated a conservation easement to the Virginia Outdoors Foundation restricting development on a 1,006-acre parcel located on Jump Mountain.

"The protection of Jump Mountain is a major milestone," said James F. Reese, a Rockbridge resident, thinker and vice chairman of the Valley Conservation Council which was involved in the conservation effort from its inception. "Hopefully other land owners will look at Jump Mountain and see that they can take effective action to protect their properties for generations to come."

Jump Mountain looks like a massive, cresting wave in the distance when viewed from the I-81 corridor in eastern Rockbridge County.

"This easement is an extraordinary gift to the people of Rockbridge County and the state of Virginia," stated Faye Crawford Cooper, executive director of the Valley Conservation Council which assisted the group in arranging the land protection project.

The owners still own the property but utilized the easement to guarantee the ecological integrity of Jump Mountain perpetually. The easement prohibits the subdivision of the 1,006-acre parcel.

Valley Conservation Council is based in Staunton and promotes land use which will sustain the farms, forests, open spaces, and cultural heritage of the Valley of Virginia. —

Mailboxes of the month

Since we're raising agriculture in this month's issue of Augusta Country, it's only fitting that this month's mailboxes — we couldn't make ourselves choose just one — reflect the affection folks have for agricultural pursuits. The "udderly" divine Holstein cow mailbox was found at the home of John and Mary Meehan. The saddle mailbox is Josie Maynard's. Both are located on Old Greenville Road. Augusta Country subscriber Ellen Southers of Staunton spotted the saddle mailbox and let us know about it. We found the cow mailbox while we were looking for the saddle.

AC staff photos

BENEFIT EVENTS

Auxiliary planning barbecue, concert

BRIDGEWATER — The Bridgewater Home Auxiliary is sponsoring a chicken barbecue April 1 beginning at 4 p.m. at the Bridgewater Village Center. At 6:30 p.m. the Rockingham Male Chorus will perform in concert in the village's chapel. The event is open to the public. Free will donations will be accepted. —

Fundraiser to benefit elk habitat

STAUNTON — A banquet and auction will be held March 25 at Inglenook in Staunton to benefit preservation of natural elk habitat.

The Shenandoah Valley chapter of the Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation is sponsoring the event which will begin at 5:30 p.m. with a presentation by Ed Clark, director of the Virginia Wildlife Center. At 6 p.m. the social hour begins and will be followed by a buffet dinner at 7 p.m.

An auction will be held beginning at 8 p.m. and will feature items contributed to the fundraiser by area businesses and artists.

Tickets for the event are $65 for couples and $45 for singles. Call Charles Schooley at 337-1165 for ticket information. —

Stuarts Draft artist's style is no style

By [illegible]

STUARTS DRAFT - Creativity flowing from the heart and fingers of Matilda Lee Nissley of Augusta County will not allow her to confine art to one subject, form, or medium. Her work can not be recognized by any one style.

"Although I have done some landscapes, I enjoy doing specific views and objects and bring out their beauty, rather than large scale landscaping. I think that's partly why I don't have one style of painting," said Mrs. Nissley. "I also like to work with a variety of media."

While it is true that Mrs. Nissley does not have a specific style, there are common factors among her work. Whether black and white or color, her work has a focus of mood. As one studies each piece, tiny details add expression and interest to the overall effect.

One of Mrs. Nissley's daughters said, "Mom has a capacity to notice and enjoy beauty that many people miss. She can get joy out of the small things of life, just by noticing. This is one of the gifts Mom passed to us that has really been a blessing to me. No matter what hard things life brings, I can always find something beautiful."

Mrs. Nissley does not remember a time that drawing was not a part of her nature. Art was her favorite subject in school but it was not enough.

"I doodled around on my other school papers when I was little," she said. "I don't remember my teacher complaining about finding sketches on my assignments."

When she was about 10 or 11 years old, around 1937, Mrs. Nissley had an opportunity to do some drawing for students in Sweden. A Swedish school and Rose Valley, her little one room school in Delaware, were participating in a cultural exchange through art.

"We were supposed to draw anything that showed our culture and countryside, such as people working and our landscape," said Mrs. Nissley. "I went out and drew things I saw including a man pushing a lawnmower. This was my first experience in going out and drawing real things. Before this, I had only drawn from my imagination.

"I never drew from real life again until I painted a little country church behind our home in about 1963. I'm glad I did that church," she said. "Now the church burned. I want to do the painting over, make it larger, and do it proper," she said. "I want to do the town right."

At the time Mrs. Nissley did that first oil painting, she was trying to learn to paint on her own. From oils she moved on to other media, including water colors, acrylics, black and white pencil, colored pencil, and even mixing media. However, with eight children and being basically self taught, all this took years.

"In 1958 I started a home course in art. Because I already had six of my eight children, I didn't get very far," said Mrs. Nissley. It took me a year to work through the first five or six lessons. Since I had paid for the course, I asked the school if they could send me my books."

The company did send the books and even though it was a commercial art course, Mrs. Nissley said she did get some of her basics in drawing, color tone, and values from the books.

By 1965 the youngest of Mrs. Nissley's children was going on two years old and the self-taught artist started thinking more about her art.

Matilda Nissley shows off some of her artistic creations.

Photo by Irene Kagarelis

"I started playing around with paints this time, not just drawings. I used my books for perspective, but they weren't covering the type of art I wanted to do."

Mrs. Nissley started studying books from the library and the work of other artists.

"An artist told me the best thing I can do is to study the work of good artists," she said.

In 1984 Mrs. Nissley took the drawing lessons from a private instructor in Staunton. In 1988 she took four water color lessons in a Waynesboro class.

From 1985-87 she had the opportunity to travel with her husband to various old country farms. During this time she drew many of the old buildings and gained much experience in shading and perspective. Some of her prize drawings were done during these years.

Although Mrs. Nissley never had the privilege of attending an art school, her creative ability has enriched her life and brought her interesting experiences and accomplishments.

During the 1960s she did illustrations for songs and stories during church and youth programs. She covered these large white bed sheets with chalk drawings. One was a Nativity scene done for a school program. Another was "The Angelus" done for a Waynesboro church and the last was a drawing of The Shenandoah Baptist Church commissioned for a church celebration.

Mrs. Nissley has had illustrations published in *The Evening Sun*, a daily newspaper in Hanover, Pa., and has created illustrations for textbooks, a published paperback, and the cover of another published book.

She has taught beginning art and water color classes for the Augusta County Parks and Recreation Department.

In 1993 Mrs. Nissley won a Judges Award in the May art exhibit, sponsored by the Staunton Fine Arts Association, at Gypsy Hill Park. Her latest achievement was designing the cover and illustrating the book, *Bits and Pieces of Senior Memories, Wisdom, and Humor*. —