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FARM CRISIS

What is the future of farming?

Two generations of Bertrams farm together near Spring Hill

By Michael Jacobson

Joe Bertram Sr. is worried. Worried that America's next generation of farmers won't have a chance to start.

On his family's 400-acre farm near Spring Hill, including 80 acres he rents from his brother, Joe checks the prices on his cell phone. After low prices all fall, there was a little surge this winter, but now prices are back down: \$3.42 per bushel of corn and \$8.10 per bushel of beans.

Then in the new office off the house where he grew up, Joe considered his input costs: seed, \$65 per bag; fertilizer, around \$50 per acre; plus fuel, taxes, and a mortgage (if you have one). Then, there are propane costs to dry your crop if the harvest is wet.

"They're all costs you're hoping to recoup when you sell your crop in the market," said Joe Sr., who has been farming again for the past half dozen years (three years without his dad Clarence) with his son Joe Jr. In addition to 400 acres they have 45 beef cows.

"You've got a sharp pencil behind your ear, and what you're wearing out is the eraser," added Joe Sr. "You're constantly changing the numbers."

"This spring will be a decision-maker. If we get a wet spring, a cold spring, or late,



Photo by Michael Jacobson

Joe Bertram Sr. and Joe Bertram Jr. farm 400 acres by Spring Hill, including 45 beef cows. Joe Jr. works off the farm, though he'd love to be able to farm full-time. Joe Sr. feels blessed, and sometimes cursed, to have a son who wants to take over the farm.

there will be a lot of farmers that can't make it," predicted Joe Sr., a former legislator who served on the Senate Ag Committee while serving in the Minnesota Senate.

Last fall, the Bertrams got pretty good corn – 190 to 225 bushels per acre. "The people who got corn, it was pretty good," said Joe Sr. "We've got eight bins here, and they're all full," he added, noting that because of low prices they still have part of their 2018

crop as well as their 2019 crop in storage. "I'm hoping for a price increase."

"I'm concerned about the young farmers," continued Joe Sr., who has invited Gov. Tim Walz (DFL-Mankato) to hold a farm forum in Stearns County about the farm crisis. "It's sad. They want to farm, and they're struggling. Milk prices are low. They're wondering how long they can make it," he said.

"Everything is down...

milk, beef, corn," he added.

Tough Year

Between the low prices and the bad weather, 2019 was a tough year for farmers. Plus, you had the uncertainty of President Trump's tariffs with China, a major importer of U.S. soybeans, though the Bertrams did get a \$44-per-acre subsidy. "This past year was probably one of the worst," said Joe Sr.

Some areas didn't get plant-

ed due to the wet spring, and lots of farmers struggled to get their crops out. "All the lights were on," said Joe Sr. of the late-night harvesting work. "All the farmers were out at 2 or 3 in the morning."

You don't have to go far to see standing corn, he added.

Even \$5 corn and \$11 beans would be enough, said Joe Sr. "For us, on a farm that's been paid for, we're still going to have expenses," he said.

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PEER MINISTRY

Expert teaches coping skills in Paynesville in January

Peers are best at helping others during a crisis

By Michael Jacobson

Lyle Griner travels around the country teaching peer ministry. "I travel to fantastic places and end up in a church basement," said Griner, who started with peer ministry as a youth minister and now does it full-time through his company, Peer Ministry Leadership.

He visited Paynesville on Saturday, Jan. 25, for community-wide peer ministry training, which attracted a dozen people to the high school for a day of training.

Peer ministry was developed by a school counselor in Palo Alto, Calif., who wanted to give her students the skills in how to talk to people, in how to help people.

"I tell my kids you do far more youth ministry than I do, because you know far more youth than I do," said Griner, who realized that his youth had the contacts and just needed skills. He has been doing peer ministry training for more than 20 years.

"All of a sudden, my students were my staff," added Griner of peer ministry.

"It continues to be an empowerment thing for us. It's about teaching skills, but it's also empowering them to do the ministry," added Griner.

Griner typically works with individual churches, but did a community-wide peer ministry training in Mora, and now a second one in Paynesville.

"For us, our community has



Photo by Michael Jacobson

Lyle Griner of Peer Ministry Leadership (right) led a community-wide peer ministry training at PHS on Saturday, Jan. 25. Aimed at teaching skills to youth and people who care about youth, it was organized by the Paynesville Ministerial Association.

helped shape the young people with how we treat them," said Pastor Adam Butler, whose church, Paynesville Lutheran, has been teaching peer ministry the last five summers at its summer camp at Camp House, north of Two Harbors, Minn.

Butler, along with the Paynesville Ministerial Association, organized Griner's visit to Paynesville in January. (Griner was originally scheduled to visit last fall, but his visit had to be rescheduled until January.)

It was hard booking Griner months in advance and finding a Saturday without teenage conflicts. Butler hopes this

exploratory event can lead to a bigger event in the future for the Paynesville community.

In peer ministry, participants learn listening skills, drawing-out questions, and helping skills. "Just to notice, even," said Griner.

"Could we reshape a whole culture?" he asked. In today's digital world, while cell phones and social media can be powerful tools and modes for heart-to-heart communication, "that face-to-face relationship is needed," he said.

"Kids don't have to fix anyone," he added of the first step being simply to care.

Griner compared peer min-

isters to the Good Samaritan in Jesus's parable. The Good Samaritan helps bring the robbery victim to an inn and pays the innkeeper, who actually does most of the work in caring for the injured man. "Sometimes helping is pointing in the right direction," said Griner.

Helping can be as simple as saying "hi" in the cafeteria. One of Griner's graduates in Ohio once saved a life simply by saying "hi" at lunch and inviting someone to her table. Her new friend later said, "Thank God of her coming to get me. I thought today was my last day."

Reactions

"I attended in order to get a better understanding of how young men and women in their generation... (1) think; (2) issues they are having; and (3) how to better communicate with them. Working with young people at work and teaching religion (at St. Louis Catholic Church), I felt it would be helpful to understand them and better communicate with them," said Jerald Quarfoot of the peer ministry training. "I learned a lot! How to better community with them. Questions to ask young people in order to open them

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LEGISLATURE 2020

Partisan bickering starts at commission hearing before session start

Parties spar over commission chair

By Peter Callaghan
MinnPost

The first partisan fight of the Minnesota Legislature's 2020 session occurred at...the Legislative Commission on Metropolitan Government? Inexplicably perhaps, but yes.

What was to have been a meeting on Wednesday, Feb. 5, to consider different responses to increased crime on Metro Transit's light rail lines quickly dissolved into an argument over who should be the chair of the joint commission that oversees the Met Council.

Shortly after the current chair, Rep. Jon Koznick (R-Lakeville), began the hearing, Sen. Scott Dibble (DFL-Minneapolis) made a motion to reconsider a decision made two months ago. That led to, in sequence: a call for a recess and the departure of the chair and vice chair; an exchange of accusations of partisan mischief; and a duel over what Mason's Manual of Legislative Procedure would say about whether the motion to recess should have been voted on and who could be chair once the chair and vice chair had departed. When all that couldn't be resolved, the remaining commission members retired to their cell phones. No one was sure how to proceed – or even whether they could adjourn.

Might they have to remain in legislative limbo forever?

The 2020 session of the Minnesota Legislature – with Republicans controlling the

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Paynesville Press

211 Washburne Avenue, P.O. Box 54, Paynesville, MN 56362

Phone: 320-243-3772

Fax: 320-243-4492

www.paynesvillearea.com

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