

A SPECIAL PUBLICATION OF

The MONTANA STANDARD Independent Record



# 2016 AG DIGEST





# 4-H hog project transitions into successful business



Pat Hansen photo

Dyllon McDermid, of Deer Lodge, is pictured with his Duroc gilt Rosie whose full brother is on the Southern show circuit.

*"The price of success is hard work, dedication to the job at hand, and the determination that whether we win or lose, we have applied the best of ourselves to the task at hand."*

— Vince Lombardi, head coach of the Green Bay Packers (1959-1967)



Pat Hansen photo

Dyllon McDermid plays with piglets so they are easier to handle as they grow up, but also because "they are funny and always have a good sense of humor," he said. McDermid turned a 4-H project into successful business.

**PAT HANSEN**  
for Agricultural Digest

*"The price of success is hard work, dedication to the job at hand, and the determination that whether we win or lose, we have applied the best of ourselves to the task at hand."*

— **Vince Lombardi,**  
head coach,  
**Green Bay Packers**  
(1959-1967)

A true entrepreneur is a doer, not a dreamer, and Dyllon McDermid of Deer Lodge is a doer.

The young man has his own business, is an active 4-H member, competes in football, basketball, and track, and works in the field for neighbors during the summer.

The Powell County High School freshman is in his

seventh year of 4-H as a member of the Clover Club where he began raising market hogs as a project. The choice of hogs he said was because, "I wanted to do something easier and less expensive than a beef and I didn't want sheep or goats. Market hogs are a short-term project from April to August."

He tasted success his first two years in 4-H with his market hogs winning Reserve Champion each year at the Tri-County Fair in Deer Lodge, and he has been in the final drive every year. His hogs won the Symbol of Excellence carcass award in both 2013 and 2014.

The Symbol of Excellence is presented by MSU Extension and the

Montana Pork Producers Council for "selecting and raising a market hog which meets carcass merit standards and demonstrates a commitment to excellence in producing quality pork products."

## FROM PROJECT TO BUSINESS

Three years ago McDermid began a 4-H breeding project with a young Yorkshire/Hampshire cross (Blue Butt) gilt he purchased from Jason Stenberg in Big Timber. He named her Annie and she is a good producer and a kind hog.

Since then he has worked to establish his business, Lazy RY Hogs, by actively developing a breeding program that

See HOG, Page 4A

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Four free-range runs to house Dyllon McDermid's hogs are built on each side of the barn, and two separate pastures provide grass for grazing and room to run.

Pat Hansen photo

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## Hog

Continued from Page 2A

produces award-winning pigs marketed for show and meat.

His mother, Tammy Perkins, said, "Dyllon is tireless. He gets up, feeds the pigs, goes to work (or school and sports practice), comes home, plays with the pigs, goes to bed and does it all again the next day."

McDermid purchased two Yorkshire cross gilt piglets he raised to maturity. The Yorkshire is muscular with a high proportion of lean meat but is also a durable maternal sow with longevity and carcass merit.

There is a demand by some 4-Hers for Duroc hogs, so he purchased a Duroc gilt he calls Rosie from Hugh Braaten of Townsend. Her full brother is on the Southern show circuit. Duroc is a breed that forms the basis for many mixed-breed commercial hogs with an excellent rate of gain.

McDermid and his mother artificially inseminate the sows/gilts with semen from Cain Super Sires of Chariton, Iowa, and two litters are usually scheduled each year in February and July. Sows are in heat for 24 hours, so when it is time for them to cycle McDermid said they keep a close watch for start of cycling so semen can be ordered and shipped by UPS express in order to get it on time. Hog semen is good for only four days. Gilts breed at nine months of age and they cycle every 21 days, the gestation period is "three months, three days and 3 a.m." McDermid said with a grin. Four sows are in the midst of farrowing at this time and many hours are spent in the barn to assure all goes well.

McDermid said 2015 was his first successful year



Pat Hansen photo

This 4-foot by 8-foot steel crate is Dyllon McDermid's first welding project. It can be picked up with a Skid-Steer to move hogs of any size.

because one of his sows had a twisted uterus in 2014 and the piglets were delivered by Caesarian section, but died shortly after birth.

In 2015, two sows farrowed in February with 22 piglets born. He sold 18 as 4-H show pigs in mid-April. The 4-Hers did well with those hogs during the Tri-County Fair in the various weight classes.

Each year, after the weight classes have been judged, there is a "home-grown" class consisting of hogs from breeders in the Tri-County area. In 2015 there were 21 hogs in the "homegrown" class; more than half of them were produced by McDermid, and all but one of those received either purple or blue ribbons and one placed second while another was third in the class.

"I'm pretty happy with the results," McDermid said.

He has a lot of family support and mentoring from with his mother and stepdad Tammy and John Perkins and stepbrother Scott Perkins. The entire

family worked together to build the barn with poles harvested on the ranch and wood sawed by a local sawmill. The farrowing side is insulated, has a wood burning stove and a plastic liner to keep it warmer this time of year.

Four free-range runs are built on each side of the barn and last fall two larger pens were built for finishing market hogs. To clean the pens, a Skid-Steer loader is used, but because pigs are clean and use one area for defecation, he said usually all that is necessary is to rake the runs and plant grass. He rotates usage of the runs to allow the grass to grow.

His first welding project was 4'x8' steel and wire carrying crate that can be picked up with a Skid-Steer to move pigs from a full-grown sow to piglets.

### FARM RANGE HOGS

McDermid is proud of his all natural, farm range hogs that are treated humanely. They are raised in the runs and pastures where they have room to run and, in addition to barley and ground corn, they

Last year two sows farrowed in July with 25 piglets that he sold for meat and fed out to the desired weight.

Dan Chladek of Chladek Meats of Deer Lodge comes to the ranch to butcher, so pigs are never on a truck and never stressed. A pen holds the pigs scheduled that day with a chute for killing so the others aren't stressed.

Tammy said, "Dan was very helpful in helping us understand the female and male reproductive parts; he opened them up so we could see what we were feeling during (artificial insemination)."

McDermid set a goal last year to have four sows farrow in February 2016 and is trying to build his business to six sows before graduating from high school.

He spends considerable time thinking about how to improve his business, and at this time is

contemplating selling one of the Yorkshires and purchase a Hampshire, a breed that is noted for being well-muscled, rapid growers with good carcass quality. The sows are praised as good mothers with longevity.

When McDermid goes to college, Tammy said she will continue to run the business of raising 4-H pigs with the help of his younger siblings until he returns.

For McDermid, his business is not just about ideas, but making ideas happen. Success comes from hard work and dedication, and he loves what he is doing and seems to be well on the road to being successful.

The late Steve Jobs, co-founder and CEO of Apple once said, "I'm convinced that about half of what separates the successful entrepreneurs from the non-successful ones is pure perseverance."





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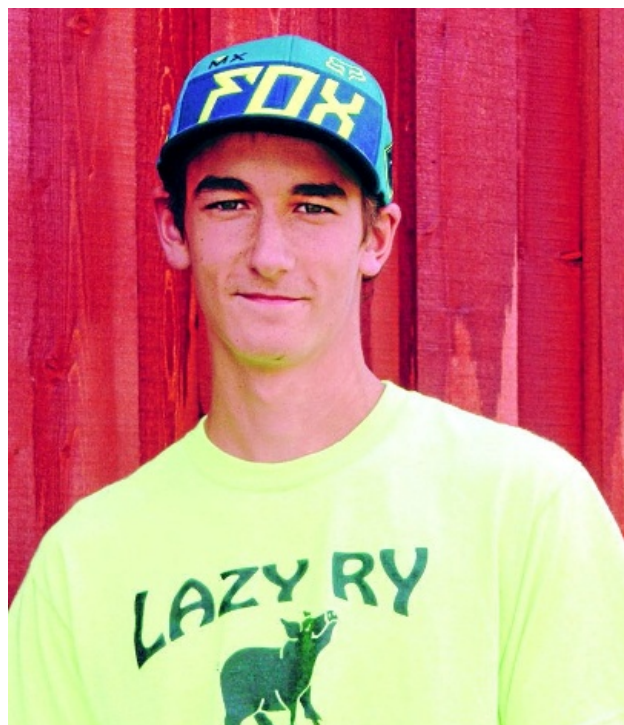
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Pat Hansen photos

Dyllon McDermid, a Powell County High School freshman, is in his seventh year of 4-H as a member of the Clover Club where he began raising market hogs as a project.



Building the Lazy RY Hog barn was a family project.

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# Cover crops grown specifically to improve SOILS

**PAT HANSEN**  
for Agricultural Digest

*"The nation that destroys its soil, destroys itself"*

— **Franklin D. Roosevelt**

Degradation of soil is subtle — whether in agricultural fields or family gardens, but there is good reason to care about soil health.

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Each year up to three million people are added to the United States population, and more than one million acres are lost

## On the cover

Tom Heggelund, left, a Galen area rancher, and Glen Green, NRCS District Conservationist of Deer Lodge stand among a field of sunflowers that are part of Heggelund's cover crop to explain how cover crops are helping build healthy soil on his ranch.

to cultivation annually as farmland is converted for homes, businesses or highway construction. In addition, another two million acres of prime cropland are lost each year to erosion, salinization and water logging — saturation of the soil by groundwater.

The Deer Lodge Conservation District hosted a workshop and cover crop field trip to three area ranches last October that was attended by more than

30 area producers.

District chairman John Hollenback said, "We don't just have an obligation to conserve and maintain soils, but we have an obligation to improve and build soil."

A cover crop is grown specifically to improve the soil and feed the "underground herd" by adding organic matter and nitrogen, to suppress

See SOIL, Page 9A



Pat Hansen photo

The Dry Cottonwood Creek Ranch broadcast seeded a cover crop last year that included 50/50 turnips and daikon radishes, hay barley and oats to begin the process of breaking up the compacted soil of an old alfalfa field.



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# Principles of healthy soil include diversity and organic matter

**PAT HANSEN**  
for Agricultural Digest

Healthy soils reduce water run-off and soil erosion, improve water-holding capacity, maintain soil temperature, have better crop/forage production, increased nutrients, and require fewer inputs so use less oil and gas resulting in more profit.

Building soil health includes using plant diversity to increase soil nutrients and pest resistance, less disturbance of the soils to reduce hardpan formation, letting plants grow as long as possible throughout the year to feed the soil, planting a cover crop after harvest rather than leaving fallow,

keep the soil covered as much as possible, and diversify through crop rotation and cover crops.

Lack of soil cover will result in less water retention and higher soil temperatures that kill "the underground herd" of single cell bacteria and microbes. Spiders, centipedes, insects, and dung beetles increase organic matter in the soil and help control pest insects by burying organic matter, and tunnelers aerate the soil for increased water infiltration. Other microscopic 'critters' are important to nitrogen cycling, and decomposition of organic matter. All organisms are interrelated and important to the

entire process.

Carbon provides food for the soil biology; no-tillage results in minimum carbon loss and starts to build the soil. Cover crops provide maximum carbon input and greater sustainability because the typical green plant is 42 percent carbon and a multi-species cover crop can influence the type and diversity of organic residues added to the soil.

The carbon cycle is the road to building soil with 1/3 going into the crop, 1/3 to residue and 1/3 to root mass. Good healthy soil will absorb water faster, and quite a bit of dirt clinging to plant roots,

See ORGANIC, Page 10A



Retired NRCS soil scientist Huey Long examines the soil in Tom Heggelund's cover crop field where the soil is improving, but would like to see a more granular structure.

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## Soil

Continued from Page 6A

weeds, reduce erosion, increase water infiltration, decrease nutrient losses, provide livestock forage, wildlife food/cover, and attract beneficial insects/pollinators. A diversity of plant species yields the best results.

Types of cover crops include a combination of grasses such as barley, oats, wheat, corn, millet, sorghum, rye; legumes — clover, vetch, peas and soybeans, and broadleaf — radish, turnips, collards, lentils, canola, buckwheat, sunflowers.

Plants to use depend on climate and whether the location is irrigated or dryland. Once the plant roots are established, to maximize the soil building benefits, the crop can be used for livestock grazing for a short time in concentrated

## No-till drill available for rent

The Deer Lodge Valley Conservation District recently purchased a 10-foot John Deere 1590 No Till Drill that is available for rent and use starting spring. For more information, visit the NRCS office at 1002 Hollenback Road, Suite C, Deer Lodge, or call 406-846-1703

numbers so they graze uniformly and trample vegetation into the ground.

### COVER CROP FIELD TRIP

At the Clark Fork Coalition Dry Cottonwood Creek Ranch, south of Deer Lodge, the group saw a first year cover crop being used to break up the compacted soil of an eight-year-old alfalfa stand under pivot irrigation.

See SOIL, Page 11A



Gold Creek rancher John Hollenback (red cap) talks about his first experience with a cover crop that he planted last July for fall forage and to open soil structure to retain moisture. Elk ate much of the corn, millet, sorghum and sunflowers, but he grazed cattle on the remaining peas, daikon radishes and turnips.

Pat Hansen photo



Jay Brooker, NRCS Resource Soils Specialist, from Missoula, shows an example of compacted soil that will have slow water infiltration and more run-off.

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## Organic

Continued from Page 8A

represents better microbial life.

To test the microbial activity in your soil, cut a 6"x6" piece of unbleached muslin, wash it without detergent; then cut a slit in the soil with a shovel and push the cotton into the ground vertical to the surface of the soil; leave it for 6-8 weeks. If there is good microbial activity the cotton will be eaten.

Kevin Bossert, Soil Conservation Technician with Natural Resource and Conservation Service in Deer Lodge, cautioned that the effect of dewormers on organisms — especially in the spring — will affect microbial activity; so if possible hold livestock in a lot for three days before putting them on green pasture.

Bossert said, "I cannot stress enough the importance of organic matter. Natural grassland loses five percent organic matter per year; tillage increases the loss.

Improving organic matter management is at the heart of building healthy soils. Active organic matter has dead microorganisms, insects, earthworms, old plant roots and crop residue, that improve soil structure, reduce compaction, increase infiltration rates, improve water holding capacity and reduce erosion.

Good ways to maintain or build organic matter in the soil are to reduce or eliminate tillage, use diverse crop rotations and cover crops — with different root levels. Rotational grazing, leaving more residue so as livestock graze they break



Pat Hansen photos

A demonstration of two loam soils -- the first lacks carbon and organic matter and is prone to erosion, while the second is a healthy soil with organic matter that holds the soil together, absorbs moisture and resists erosion.



down organic matter and improve the soil.

Deer Lodge NRCS District Conservationist Glen Green said it takes time to get the soil biology working good, but you can get to the point where you do not need to apply artificial herbicides and fertilizers. He cautioned that what works for one, may not work for another, so make changes on a small scale.

Begin by developing a plan with objectives and goals for what you are trying to accomplish.

A soil test is critical to know where you are in regard to organic matter, microbe activity and soil respiration. Consider the soil condition, climate and specific issues — erosion, hardpan, late fall or early forage.

Powell County MSU Extension Agent Jodi Pauley said spring is the best time for a soil test, but it depends on your goal, adding that the NRCS and Extension Service are willing to help in any way possible.



Pat Hansen photo

Soil Conservation Technician Kevin Bossert holds a daikon radish that is part of Hollenback's cover crop; the long root helps breakup compacted soil. It is delicious to eat, too.

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## Soil ...

Continued from Page 9A

A 50/50 ratio of turnips, daikon radishes, hay barley and oats was broadcast seeded in May and was cut and baled in July with a yield of 2.5 T/acre. After cutting, the field was irrigated and they were surprised at how much regrowth there was on the turnip and radish tops.

Ranch manager Maggie Schmidt said, "We had 100 head of cattle on it, but wish we had done rotational grazing so the cattle would have done more trampling of vegetation into the ground."

Glen Green, Natural Resource and Conservation Service District Conservationist in Deer Lodge, said standard rotation with a cash crop

like hay is two to three years of a cover crop before going back to hay. Powell County/MSU Extension agent Jodi Pauley added that rotation from alfalfa needs to be two to three years for nutrient recovery and to break a disease cycle.

Tom Heggelund Ranch near Galen has been using cover crops for several years. Heggelund explained there were many bull thistles he wanted to get rid of, but wanted to get away from spraying. The field was in alfalfa and grass but wasn't getting good production, so he farmed it, sprayed the thistles and seeded a pea, oat and barley hay mix. The first year the hay was good, but then it started decreasing.

The first cover crop he planted included peas, oats, barley, triticale, rye,

vetch and turnips.

"We had too many turnips and the cows lost weight until we fed straw," he said, but when we put them back on grass they did ok." He rototilled in the cover crop residue that year.

In 2014 he planted the 25 acres with a cover crop that included sorghum, plantain, corn, buckwheat, vetch, collards and chicory. He let cattle graze it in December, creating small paddocks with electric fencing and allowing the cattle to graze two-three days in each paddock with the goal that they trampled at least half of the vegetation into the ground, and moved them frequently for good manure distribution, he said.

Heggelund said the corn died out about Labor Day, but the vetch and collards grew later

with growth in January.

He said, "I thought about grazing it in the summer, but decided I wanted to keep the roots in the ground longer. I didn't put the cows in until December 2015, but supplemented with alfalfa hay when it was real cold.

In that field, the cover crop was followed by seeding barley.

Last year a cover crop was seeded June 20 and included sunflowers, peas, turnips, corn, collards and vetch under irrigation.

"This has more diversity with the nitrogen and carbon plants together for hay or grazing," he said. "The bull thistles are mostly controlled by haying before the thistles bloom."

Heggelund said, considering the alluvial fan and the historic Anaconda

Co. smokestack that produced tons of arsenic on the surface of the land it this area, these soils are headed in the right direction with soil structure and soil aggregates looking better.

### CHALLENGE OF ELK

The final stop was the John Hollenback Ranch at Gold Creek where a herd of 400 elk came and ate some of the first crop alfalfa, but the second crop "they came in by droves and cleaned off the field and broke fences."

A neighbor is protecting them, he said, but I'm working with FWP officials who are trying to reduce the numbers.

In the fall of 2014, Hollenback sprayed a hayfield with Roundup and then seeded it to winter wheat. Even though elk were eating in the field, he got more than 3 T/acre

when he cut the wheat for hay on July 1, 2015 — before it was headed so he wouldn't have a nitrogen problem.

On July 5, he seeded a cover crop of lentils, peas, millet, corn, turnips, daikon radishes, sorghum and sunflowers, irrigated by a pivot.

Hollenback said, "I hoped to protect the cover crop for fall grazing, but it is getting beat up pretty badly by elk. I'm going to turn cattle in now so they will have some forage."

He said, "I have a lot of things to learn, but saw things at the other places that I can learn from. Each individual has to make their decisions, but I'm planning to do the same on an alfalfa field next year to open soil structure and retain moisture; that's a plus for me."

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# National FFA officer visits Montana



Pat Hansen photo

National FFA Vice President Sydney Snider of Ohio encouraged the audience, "Wherever you are, be all there," and not just be focused on destination because the middle part of the journey of life can make it all worthwhile.

**"We often forget to be present. Are you all there? We need to be 110 percent present, wherever we are."**

**—Sydney Snider, National FFA Vice President**

**PAT HANSEN**  
for Agricultural Digest

A national FFA officer and FFA members from throughout Western Montana celebrated National FFA Week in Deer Lodge on Feb. 25.

Special guests were Sydney Snider, National FFA Vice President for the Eastern Region, Ben Meyer, Western Regional Manager of the National FFA Organization, Jim Rose, Montana FFA Advisor and three State FFA officers: President Lauren Melhoff, Treasurer Todd Lackman



Starr

and Parliamentarian Trevor Motley.

Having a national officer speak is a special occasion – the last visit of a national officer to Montana was in 2006.

There was a sea of blue as nearly 200 Western Montana FFA members and their advisers from Beaverhead, Corvallis, Deer Lodge, Missoula, Ruby Valley, St. Regis, Stevensville and Victor, as well as a few parents and interested citizens filled the Elks Lodge.

## AWARDS CEREMONY

During the awards program, Discovery, Greenhand, Chapter degrees and Creed Speaker awards were presented by the individual chapters to

members who had completed the requirements for each. Montana FFA Parliamentarian Trevor Motley announced the degree recipients.

Eleven young people, who are new members just beginning their FFA journey, received the Discovery degree. The Greenhand degree and bronze pin was awarded to members who have accomplished a number of basic requirements of the FFA program.

Eight Greenhands received Creed Speaker awards for their knowledge of, and ability to recite the FFA Creed. The creed was written by E.M. Tiffany and reciting it has become a rite of passage for Greenhorn members. The creed strengthens



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their belief in the future of agriculture based on the achievements of present and past agriculturists, while looking forward to the promise of better days through better ways, while enjoying the things they have.

FFA members believe that to live and work on a good farm or to be engaged in other agricultural pursuits is pleasant as well as challenging as they gain knowledge and skills to work efficiently, think clearly and become leaders who produce and market the products of their toil; and become an influence in their homes and communities as they contribute their part

The Chapter degree and silver pin, is the highest degree a chapter can bestow on its members. It is usually awarded during the second or third year of membership and recognizes the member's agricultural studies, SAE project work, leadership, and scholastics. An SAE—supervised agricultural experience—can be raising livestock at the school farm, horticulture, entrepreneurship, agri-science research, agricultural service or any of several other activities.

Victor FFA Advisor Tassy Tintzman who brought 12 students to the open house said, "It was nice for them to receive the awards from a national officer. We were at the national convention last fall and they saw her get elected as a national vice president."

Mariah Millhouse, a member of the Missoula FFA chapter said she really enjoyed the event especially "the ice breaker and degree ceremonies where we were recognized somewhere other than

See FFA, Page 14A



A sea of blue is seen as nearly 200 FFA members and their advisers from eight western Montana chapters gather in Deer Lodge for a recent National FFA Week open house that featured a national FFA officer and other special guests.

Pat Hansen photo

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## FFA

Continued from Page 13A

our chapter.”

Watching the young people interact with each other, Deer Lodge FFA Adviser Bill Lombardi said, “This is exciting. We had the opportunity to have Sydney visit, and it was too big of an opportunity not to share it. Often people do not realize how rare these opportunities are. Western Montana chapters are a pretty tight group, and it was cool for them to get Greenhand and Chapter degrees in front of other chapters.”

## MEET SYDNEY SNIDER

National FFA Vice President Sydney Snider is a vivacious, energetic young woman who grew up on a small farm near the town of Moscow in southern Ohio where they raise beef cattle. She and her sister raised goats and pigs as their 4-H and FFA projects. This fall she will be a sophomore at Ohio State University studying Ag Communication.

“I’ve had a lot of fun this week,” she said. “Montana is beautiful with the mountains and prairie, and the people are very welcoming.”

Ben Meyer, Western Regional Manager of the National FFA Organization and Jim Rose, Montana FFA Adviser escorted



Pat Hansen photo

National FFA Vice President Sydney Snider, holding cell phone camera, takes a selfie with a group of western Montana FFA members in Deer Lodge recently.

Snider of her tour of FFA chapters throughout the state starting in Bozeman and traveling to Big Timber, Joliet, Billings, Roundup, Lewistown, Great Falls, Cascade, Helena and Deer Lodge. She was interviewed on radio, television and Northern Ag Network, visited with Office of Public Instruction officials and had breakfast with the Collegiate FFA and Ag Ed Club at Montana State University in Bozeman before returning to the National FFA Center in Indianapolis, Indiana.

“Wherever you are, be all there”... this quote by missionary Jim Elliott is Snider’s favorite.

“We often forget to be present,” she said. “Are you all there? We need to

be 110 percent present, wherever we are.”

Snider can’t cook, but enjoyed the day a friend helped her bake cupcakes and cookies to take to FFA camp to share with other staff members. However, enroute she was thinking about camp and not totally concentrating on driving until she almost went through a stop sign and slammed on the brakes propelling the goodies off the back seat into her hair and all over the front of the car!

She ruefully admitted, “I was too focused on the destination and missed the opportunity to be present.”

On another occasion, Snider was skiing with friends and was convinced she could win a race with them down the hill. I

is the middle part of the journey that can make it all worthwhile,” she said.

Although planning to relax during an airline flight, Snider said a conversation with an elderly man seated next to her was the most meaningful encounter of her life.

Don Harris, 84, was the former executive vice president and chief merchandising officer of Wal-Mart. He retired at age 46 because he wanted to spend more time with his wife and children, and the company provided him the opportunity to do so. For the next 10 years he and his wife traveled extensively, until she died suddenly.

“He was spending time with those who meant the most to him,” Snider said. “Are we all there for those in our life? We can feel completely alone, but step back to see those we truly value and those who

value us.”

She cited an example of Seth, a disabled high school senior at camp who was confined to a wheel chair, but his goal was to ride the zip line. There was concern about how to get him to the top, but one of the staff members worked most of the night to develop a lift; and while his friends cheered him on, Seth experienced his dream.

“That was only part of the journey for Seth,” Snider said. “He is now a junior at Ohio State University and wants to become an agriculture mechanic to help those of us in agriculture.”

“Are we all there for those who are there for us?” she asked. “Tonight we are celebrating the accomplishments of FFA members here. We have the same chance to be all there and allow our journey to be meaningful.”



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Applications are available at each of the high schools in the Tri-county area; or by contacting Travis Cline.

Application deadline is April 1.

For more information and application, contact Rocky Mountain Stockgrowers Association, attn: Travis Cline, Scholarship Committee, 96 N. Mullan Trail, Gold Creek, MT 59733 or [clinegenetics@hotmail.com](mailto:clinegenetics@hotmail.com)

## Beef herd rebuilding continues in United States

Brenda Boetel

U.S. beef cow herd rebuilding continued throughout 2015, as shown by the USDA National Agricultural Statistics Service release of the CATTLE report in January 2016.

The number of all cattle and calves in the U.S. on Jan. 1, totaled 92.0 million head, a 3 percent increase over 2015. Note that National Agricultural Statistics Service did revise downward the July 1 2014, cattle and calves inventory by 0.6 percent and the 2014 calf crop by 1.1%. Inventory of cattle and calves on Jan. 1, 2015 was also revised downward by 0.7 percent.

According to the report, on Jan. 1, the number of beef cows and heifers that calved at 30,300,800 head was up 3.5 percent from

the 29,302,100 head on Jan. 1, 2015. The number of beef replacement heifers at 6,285.2 thousand head increased over 3% from 2015; however industry expectations were for a 5% increase. Finally, the number of beef replacement heifers expected to calve in 2016 at 3,924.6 thousand head was up over 5.7 percent from the 3,712 thousand in 2015. This suggests that the 2016 calf crop should increase by approximately 3.8 percent this year as compared to a 2.3 percent in 2015.

The five states with the largest numbers of beef cows that have calved include Texas, Oklahoma, Missouri, Nebraska and South Dakota. These states account for over 38 percent of the U.S. beef cows and over 46 percent

of the increase in the beef cows occurred in these five states. Texas, which has 4.3 million cows and over 14 percent of U.S. beef cows, saw a 3.9 percent increase in their beef cow numbers. Additionally, Oklahoma, Missouri, Nebraska, and South Dakota averaged over 4 percent increases in beef cows. In spite of continued drought in parts of California in 2015, beef cow numbers increased to 625,000 (5.9 percent) although milk cow numbers decreased slightly from 1.78 million head to 1.775 million head (0.3 percent).

Oklahoma saw the greatest increase in U.S. beef replacements of 40,000 head to 460,000 (9.5 percent), followed by increases of 32,000 head (21 percent) in Arkansas and 30,000 head each in Colorado (18

percent) and Texas (4 percent). Interestingly, South Dakota, Nebraska, and Kansas all saw decreases in the number of heifers held for beef cow replacements.

A combination of 2.7 percent more beef and milk cows, and 2.9 percent more beef and dairy replacement heifers expected to calve should lead to a larger calf crop again in 2016. The combined total of calves under 500 pounds and other heifers and steers over 500 pounds (outside of feedlots) is 25.9 million head. This is 5 percent above one year ago. Those cattle that were grazing small grain pastures at 1.9 million were down 30,000 head from 2015.

Brenda Boetel is with the Department of Agricultural Economics, University of Wisconsin-River Falls.

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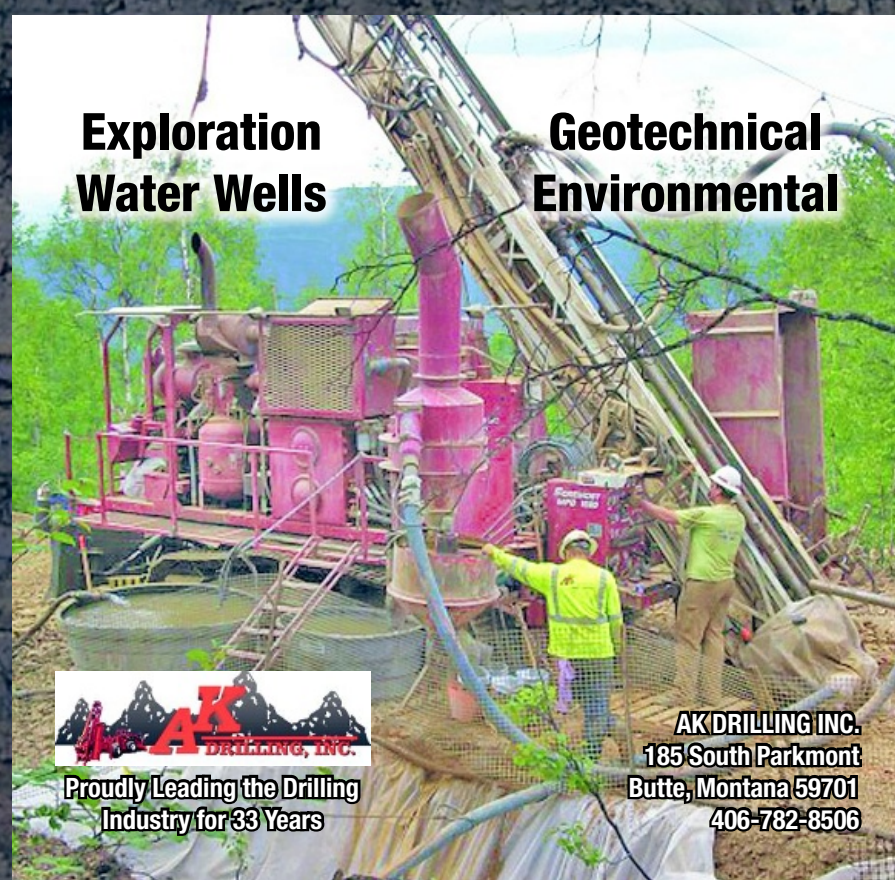
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