



U.P. Ag Connections Newsletter

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Agricultural News from MSU Extension and AgBioResearch

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In this issue:

Page 2

- Low-Cost Management Practices to Increase Profits on Beef Cattle Operations

Page 3

- Low Cost Management continued
- 2026 Winter Cow-Calf Meetings
- 2026 Beef Quality Assurance Certification

Page 4

- Response of Fiber & Floral Hemp Under Different Water Regimes
- Gathering Ground is Seeking an Experienced Vegetable Grower

Page 5

- U.P. Pesticide Applicator Training & Exams

Page 6

- Advertisers

Page 7

- Advertisers
- Classifieds
- Market Report

Page 8

- Women in the Woods Snowshoe Series

News & Views—By Frank Wardynski

Is soil health important during the winter months? I used to think that in the western Upper Peninsula (and in the eastern) our heavy clay soil was just too dense to take on moisture. Under that mass of white water covering our fields was this swollen clay that let the melted snow run off. Even as cold as it is now, it is still melting and running off. Would it not be cool to capture and hold that water for when we need it? Well, we kind of can. Over the past couple years, I think I have improved soil aggregation, organic matter, and water holding capacity. Most of the water is still running off, but I think I am capturing more of it. And it does not matter, clay or sand, as we improve soil aggregation, we will increase the amount of water we can store in the soil.

Still looking for grazing cooperators – I am always looking for producers to host pasture walks/field days/farm tours. Especially pasture walks. I am working on a project trying to demonstrate soil health improvement with longer rest periods. But also, any interesting topics are welcome. If you are interested, please let me know.

Ag for Tomorrow Conference - will be held March 12, 2026, at Bay College in Escanaba. Note that it is a Thursday. I do not remember having it on that day of the week before. We hope it is not a problem. Format will be the same with a bit of change-up on topics.

Winter cow-calf meetings – Merck Animal Health is going to cover the cost of pizza or other food and soft drinks for meetings at three locations across the UP and a couple in Lower MI, details inside this newsletter on Page 3. Also note that the dates are going to confuse some people. One meeting will be February 26, and then two more on March 24, and 25, 2026.

Beef is about the only commodity with strong prices right now. The beef supply is low, but early indications are looking like the national beef herd is increasing in numbers. Two key factors: 1. Prices have probably found a level telling the cattle farmers across the country to retain heifers and: 2.

Significant rains have hit some major cattle producing regions allowing producers to feel confident in forage supply. Milk prices are struggling. The bright spots for dairy producers would be lower supplemental feed prices due to low grain commodity prices, good rains the past two years for good forage yields, and the calf and cull cow prices are incredible. Grain prices continue to struggle. That is helpful to livestock producers purchasing feed but is causing distress for grain farmers across the Midwest. I hear lots of blame for poor

grain and soybean prices directed towards tariffs, but those prices were this low before the tariffs were implemented. Input costs are another issue.



Year-end financial analysis – This is the time of year I am offering to come work on your finances. I will help you build the balance sheet, use your expenses and income to run a year-end financial analysis. We will go through your numbers, and I'll give you indicators of your farm financial strengths and weaknesses.

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Low-Cost Management Practices to Increase Profits on Beef Cattle Operations

By Frank Wardynski

Rising input costs continue to pressure beef cattle producers, making cost control just as important as maximizing production. Fortunately, several proven, low-cost management strategies can significantly improve profitability without sacrificing animal performance. By focusing on data-driven decisions, forage utilization, and basic animal health, producers can save money while building more resilient operations.

Fecal Egg Counts

Routine deworming is an unnecessary expense. Fecal egg counts (FEC) provide a simple and effective way to determine whether deworming is economically justified. Testing fecal samples to determine if parasite loads are high enough to justify deworming is relatively inexpensive. Merck Animal Health offers FEC testing at no cost for the testing or the shipping of the samples to the lab. Test kits can be ordered from online from animal health supply companies at no cost to the producer. If egg counts are low, deworming does not provide enough return to justify the expense. Avoiding unnecessary treatments saves money and reduces chemical inputs into the environment. If egg counts are high, targeted deworming improves animal performance, weight gain, and overall productivity, helping maximize returns. Educators and specialists at Michigan State University Extension [recommend utilizing FEC](#) to determine if cattle should be treated by internal parasites (see QR code).



Producers may feel that running cattle through the chute to collect fecal samples does not justify the dollar savings. However, fecal samples can be collected off the ground. Go out early, before cattle begin moving around. As cattle stand up in the morning, they will usually stretch and then defecate. Use a clean plastic bag to collect samples from the ground and try to label with animal identification.

Hybrid Vigor

Hybrid vigor (heterosis) occurs when crossbred offspring outperform the average of their parents, especially in traits like growth, fertility, and overall vigor. Many commercial cattle herds continue breeding within a single breed even though they are producing commercial cattle. While purebred systems have a place, commercial producers can gain significant performance advantages through crossbreeding. Unless cattle producers are operating a registered purebred program, strategic crossbreeding can improve offspring performance with minimal added cost.

Stockpile Forage to Reduce Winter Feed

Winter feeding is frequently the largest expense on a beef operation. Stockpiling forage to allow certain pastures to rest and accumulate growth for later grazing—can substantially reduce hay needs during the early winter.

Example:

- One animal unit (1,000lb cow) eats roughly 2–2.5% of body weight in dry matter.
- Accounting for moisture and 10% feeding loss, about 29lb of hay per animal unit per day is required.
- Extending the grazing season by just two weeks saves roughly 400lb of hay per cow.
- At \$100/ton hay value, that equals \$20 per cow.
- Adding one month at the end of the season and one week in spring can increase savings to \$50 per cow.
- For a 1,400 lb cow, multiply by 1.4, pushing savings to \$70 per cow per year.

Those numbers add up quickly in larger herds.

Improve Pasture Management to Grow More Grass

Better pasture management is one of the most cost-effective investments on any cattle farm. Avoiding overgrazing allows plants to recover and maintain strong root systems. Rotational grazing with frequent moves and adequate rest allows for increased forage production, improved soil aggregation, and better ground cover from trampled forage, with leads to more

moisture retention and water infiltration. Healthier soils grow more forage, reducing feed costs, especially during dry periods. Managing rest periods and stocking rates pays off both short-term and long-term.

Use of Implants and Ionophores

Growth implants and ionophores offer proven tools to improve feed efficiency and weight gain when used appropriately. Implants can increase average daily gain by 10-20% with a relatively low cost per head. With today's feeder cattle prices, using implants is highly cost effective. Producers should be asking for premiums to not implant their cattle. Ionophores improve feed efficiency by altering rumen fermentation, leading to better feed conversion. Ionophores can be challenging to feed to the cow herd, especially if producers are only feeding hay. However, improving feed efficiency can help lower the greatest enterprise expense.

Vaccination and Weaning

Calves that are vaccinated, boosterized, and properly weaned consistently sell for more per pound than calves that are not preconditioned. While vaccines and weaning do involve extra labor and expense, the market rewards these efforts through with higher sale prices, reduced health risk for buyers, and stronger demand and buyer confidence. Preconditioned calves typically experience less stress, better weight gain, and fewer health problems after sale, making them more valuable to feedlot operators.

Managing costs does not require major financial investments. Often, the biggest gains come from management and labor with minimal out of pocket costs. For more information on managing cow-calf cost of production and financial management, Contact Michigan State University Extension Educator Frank Wardynski at 906-884-4286 or wardynsk@msu.edu

2026 Winter Cow-Calf Meetings

By Frank Wardynski

Michigan State University Extension is conducting three cow-calf meetings across the UP and two in Lower MI. Merck Animal Health will be sponsoring the meetings providing pizza and soft drinks. Topics will include beef market outlook, protecting cattle prices with Livestock Risk Protection program, effects of maternal bovine appealing substance, and genetic selection for carcass characteristics. All programs will start at 6:00pm EST.

- February 26, Rudyard Township Hall in Rudyard
- March 24, Baraga Lakeside Inn in Baraga
- March 25, Upper Peninsula Research and Extension Center in Chatham

Note: the dates may appear off with the meetings a full month apart. The

Rudyard site will be host to a crew of MSUE educators and specialists while the programs in Chatham and Baraga will be presented by Frank Wardynski. **Reservation is required and you should contact the Ontonagon County Extension Office to reserve a spot by calling 906-884-4386.**



2026 Beef Quality Assurance Certification

By Frank Wardynski

Michigan State University Extension and the Michigan Cattlemen's Association will be hosting a Beef Quality Assurance (BQA) Certification program at **Bay College in Escanaba starting at 6:00pm EST on April 22, 2026**. Participants can sign up at <https://mcas.memberclicks.net/bqa2026#/> which is on the MCA website. Frank Wardynski will be present to deliver the program and proctor the test. This program will include a meal with soft drinks. Reservation is required so that we know how much food to bring. Also in April, no date has been set yet, but a BQA Transportation certification program will be conducted in the Escanaba area. If interested, Contact Frank Wardynski at 906-884-4386 for more details.

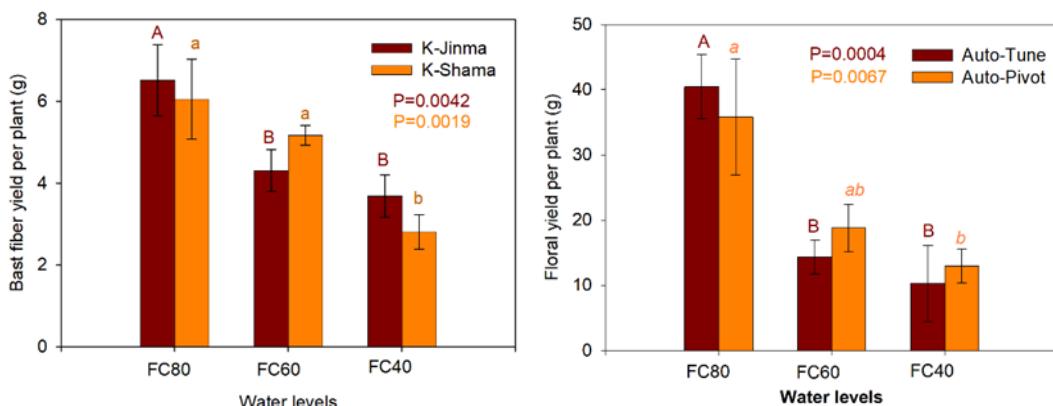


Response of Fiber and Floral Hemp under Different Water Regimes

By Umair Ashraf and James DeDecker

Hemp (*Cannabis sativa* L.) containing less than 0.3% Δ^9 -tetrahydrocannabinol (THC), is primarily cultivated for its fiber, seeds and medicinal properties. A pot experiment was conducted in the greenhouse at the MSU Upper Peninsula Research and Extension Center (MSU-UPREC) to assess the effects of different water regimes, 80%, 60%, and 40% field capacity (FC), on two fiber (K-Jinma and K-Shama, Kanda Hemp) and two floral (Auto-Tune and Auto-Pivot, Beacon Hemp) hemp cultivars. Seeds of both types were sown on June 11th, 2025 with nine and two seeds per pot initially, and then thinned periodically to three and one seedlings per pot for fiber and floral types, respectively. The pots (10 x 11 inches (diameter x height)) were filled with soilless media (VeggieDoo 301, Morgan's Composting, 4 kg/pot with \approx 26% initial moisture) with six pots per treatment (replicates) and eight extra pots per treatment

(to destructively estimate soil moisture on weight basis). The water treatments were initiated on July 11th, 2025 (for floral type) and July 17th, 2025 (for fiber type). Pots and plants were weighed weekly and irrigated accordingly to maintain the treatments. Fertilizer (Espoma Organic Garden-tone, 3-4-4) was applied to fiber types at 22.5 g per pot. The plants were sampled at 21 and 35 days after flowering (DAF) for floral types and 15 and 30 days after treatment (DAT) for fiber types. Our moisture treatments had significant effects on hemp morphology and yield, but not quality. Specifically, bast fiber and hurd yields of both fiber cultivars were significantly lower ($P<0.05$) at FC40 than FC60 and FC80 (Fig 1). However, drought stress did not have a significant effect on bast:hurd ratio or THC concentration of fiber types. Regarding floral types, floral yield was substantially reduced at FC40 and FC60 as compared to FC80 (Fig 2). Similar to fiber types, drought stress did not have a consistent discernable effect on cannabidiol (CBD) or THC concentration. However, CBD and THC concentrations were numerically higher (>0.3% THC) under FC40 at 21DAF as compared to FC60 and FC80. Overall, the FC40 treatment was



found to be yield limiting for fiber and floral hemp, with auto-flowering floral cultivars showing more drought sensitivity than fiber cultivars. We are thankful to Dr. Alexander Wilson from the Medicinal Plant Chemistry Lab at NMU for providing access to their GC-MS facility.

Gathering Ground is Seeking an Experienced Vegetable Grower on Washington Island, WI.

Our production-oriented and teaching farms are seeking a self-motivated, positive, and hard working farmer to join our team! This fast-paced and physically demanding role is ideal for someone who loves working outdoors, has a strong attention to detail, and works well both independently and as part of a team. The ideal candidate has previous experience working in vegetable production and has some experience working on or leading a team.

Applicant must possess the following:

- **Physical & Mental Stamina:** Must be able to perform physically demanding and repetitive work outdoors for extended periods in all weather conditions (heat, humidity, rain, cold, snow).
- **Strength:** Ability to lift and carry up to 50lbs regularly and perform tasks requiring repetitive bending, stooping, kneeling, cutting, and digging on uneven terrain.
- **Work Ethic:** A strong work ethic, a positive attitude, punctuality, and the ability to work both independently and collaboratively as part of a small team.
- **Attention to Detail:** Meticulous attention to detail, especially during harvesting and quality control. Commitment to task completion and responsive to feedback

Position is full time April-October. Pay will be \$15-18/hour + housing, depending upon experience. If farmer is interested in staying on the Island year-round, a housing offer will be extended beyond the growing season.

Think you'd be a good fit? [See our full description and application instructions.](#)

If this job sounds exciting to you, but you do not have experience growing vegetables, consider our [6-month internship program](#). This program allows people interested in farming to experience a full season of growing while gaining education and work experience.





U.P. Pesticide Applicator Training & Exams

MSU Extension and MDARD will offer Pesticide Applicator Training and Exams in the Upper Peninsula on April 1st, 2026. The program includes a core manual review (RUP credits), lunch and MDARD exams (Full training & exam participation required). Core exams (private and commercial) will be offered by MDARD, while commercial category exams will be available onsite through Bay College Testing Services.

Wednesday, April 1st, 2026 – Bay College in Escanaba, MI

Who: Pesticide applicators seeking MDARD exam prep, administration and/or RUP recertification credits

What: A four-hour core manual review, followed by lunch and MDARD exams

When: Wednesday, April 1st, 2026

- Core Manual review 8:00am – 12:00pm
- Lunch 12:00pm – 12:30pm
- MDARD core exams (included), and/or commercial category exams scheduled independently with Metro Institute at Bay College Testing Services 12:30pm – 4:00pm

Where: Core Manual review and MDARD core exams at Bay College, Joseph Heirman Univ. Center (JHUC), Ball Room 952 – 2001 N Lincoln Rd; Escanaba, MI 49829 – Parking Lot A

MDARD commercial category exams at Bay Testing Services, Student Success Center (HUB) Rm. 876 – 2001 N Lincoln Rd; Escanaba, MI 49829

Why: MDARD exam prep, exam administration, and/or RUP recertification credits

Registration:

- I) Register online for the **Core Manual review and MDARD core exams** at <https://www.canr.msu.edu/events/rupreview-core-testing-apr-1-2026-escanaba>.



Private applicators register for I only. Commercial applicators register for I and II

- II) Schedule and pay for **MDARD commercial category exams** separately online at <http://michigan.metrosignup.com>, selecting the Escanaba, Bay de Noc College, location and April 1st date, 12:30pm – 4:00pm ET



Category exams at Bay Testing services must be booked online at least 48 hrs in advance!

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Accommodations for persons with disabilities may be requested by contacting the event contact James DeDecker two weeks before the start of the event at dedecke5@msu.edu. Requests received after this date will be honored whenever possible.



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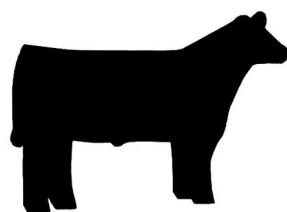
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Holstein Steers	\$164-\$200 per 100 lbs.
Hogs	\$49-\$60 per 100 lbs.
Lambs	\$200-\$282 per 100 lbs.
Cull cows	\$150-\$171 per 100 lbs.
Calves	\$900-\$1200 per 100 lbs.
Goats	\$260-\$410 per 100 lbs.

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Grade Holstein bred heifers top \$3600/head

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FOR SALE: Straw—large round & small square bales. **Hay**—large rounds of first & second crop, small squares of first, second and third crop. Call Marenger's Farm (906)241-9365

FOR SALE: Mixed Hay—round bales 700# & 2nd cut small square bales. Call Alan or Karen Raynard @ (906) 647-6697, Pickford.

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Corn	\$15.19	\$303.75	\$220-510
Soymeal	\$27.99	\$559.75	\$440-655
Oats	\$18.20	\$364.00	\$319-416
Barley	\$15.08	\$301.50	\$240-386

Average price/100 wt. for 1 ton lots

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FEBRUARY 2026

WOMEN IN THE WOODS SNOWSHOE SERIES

Falling in love with Michigan's forests!

You're invited to the 2026 Women in the Woods snowshoe hike series! Be a part of a community of women who appreciate the forests around them, while getting fresh air and exercise to fight off cabin fever. Kids are welcome. These events will be free, beginner-friendly, guided hikes. Pre-registration is requested!

02/18 VALLEY SPUR CROSS COUNTRY TRAIL
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02/25 ANDERSON LAKE PATHWAY
GWINN, MI
4:30-6:00 PM

Contact Sara Kelso at sara.kelso@macd.org or (906) 251-3071 for questions, to register, or to borrow snowshoes! Snowshoes available for rent at the Valley Spur Lodge for \$2.

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