

July/August 2013

Feral Swine Subject of Federal Consideration

MFU readers may recall our earlier stand in support of the state's hog producers, wild-life and natural resource agencies, zoos, and many other organizations in opposing legislation to encourage the continuation and expansion of feral (non-native to the USA) hogs raised at shooting "preserves" as "sporting swine." A problem of nation-wide importance now, feral swine issues have been managed --or not-- on a state-by-state basis with no thought as to the overall consequences of what has been, so far, an ineffective approach to containing and reducing the damages and dangers of critters gone "hog wild."

USDA's Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS) posted a notice in the Federal Register that it was seeking public comment on its plans to prepare an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) to address the need for a national feral swine damage management program to protect agriculture, natural resources, property, and human health and safety. Calling feral swine "a harmful and destructive invasive species," USDA recognizes that "their geographic range is rapidly expanding and their populations are increasing exponentially across the U.S."

Noting that "overall feral swine populations and associated damage and disease threats have continued to expand at a much faster rate than local governments and APHIS have been able to address," APHIS has proposed implementation of a nationally co-

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MFU LIGHTS THE WAY!

From the late Chester Graham's memoirs as a co-founder of MFU comes this story of the early days of the new Rural Electrification Administration's efforts to provide electricity to rural Michigan. Federal funds were available for low interest loans to rural electric cooperatives to extend service to farmers in their districts. As Graham recalls it, "--the Michigan Farm Bureau and the Michigan State Grange called a public meeting in the House of Representatives in Lansing. Representatives from Consumers Power Company and Detroit Edison Company were invited to speak. A large group of farmers was present. The power company representatives had huge piles of financial records to show how they were making sacrifices on their rural power lines for which they charged the farmers \$1,000 per mile. The meeting adopted a resolution that no REA funds should come into Michigan other than as loans to the private for-profit power companies, except for some cut-over lands in the northern part of the state."

MFU FEATURED AT AG EXPO

The 34th year of bringing educational and commercial agricultural activities and exhibits to Michigan State University's East Lansing campus took place July 16 to 18. As Michigan's largest outdoor farm show, with more than 200 exhibitors, thousands of attendees from all over Michigan and neighboring states had an opportunity to learn more about products and services that help Michigan agricultural producers continue to succeed.

While the majority of folks strolling through the extensive Ag Expo grounds ranged from beginning farmers to those whose families had been farming for generations, non-farming visitors from urban and rural communities also enjoyed learning more about Michigan's farms and farmers. Businesses,

As he left the meeting, Graham was taken aside by Redmund Burr, legislative representative for the Railroad Telegrapher's Brotherhood, and Lucien Wilson, formerly on the staff of Farm Bureau publications, and told he should quickly call a meeting of the MFU Board of Directors at Owosso; both men would attend. They were emphatic that he should not write any letters, "--because we would be sunk if the opposition came into possession of one." So they met as planned and quietly formed the Michigan REA, raised \$15 out of pocket, and sent two men to Lansing to incorporate the Association. He was directed to then set up a series of mass meetings of concerned farmers in strategic areas of the state, to which Burr and Wilson would get Carl D. Thompson of the Public Ownership League in Chicago to attend as speaker. And again, Graham was reminded that he must NOT write any letters! (Pretty cloak and dagger stuff!)

Graham set up seven meetings throughout

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from implement dealers to fertilizer and seed sales outlets, drew potential customers to their booths to discuss the latest in new product lines and technology designed to help farm businesses prosper. Off-site demonstrations at various university farms were available throughout the event, along with a variety of educational sessions on the main grounds. One of the most visited booths was the MSU Dairy Store, where the many visitors seeking relief from the hot summer sun enjoyed free ice cream!

MFU had shared booth space with a kindred farm organization some years in the past, and the Board of Directors decided we should again take advantage of the op-

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Swine (continued)

ordinated and integrated swine damage management program in cooperation with Tribes, agencies and organizations at the state level to accommodate varying local laws and management objectives. Program components, using public input, would identify a range of actions that might be implemented to reduce the negative effects of non-native feral swine across the country.

A public meeting seeking comments on the proposal was held May 23 at the USDA Center in Riverdale, Md., which was also live-streamed on the Internet as a webcast. Written comments by a June 12 deadline were also invited. MFU submitted written comments in support of the APHIS proposal for the record.

If APHIS deems support is sufficient to pursue the creation of a draft EIS, the draft will be published in the Federal Register and the public will again have an opportunity to review and offer comments for consideration in the crafting of a final EIS. MFU will follow the progress of this endeavor and respond to an invitation to comment. If newsletter readers would like a copy of the MFU response letter submitted to date, contact Vice President Nordmark with your email address and a copy will be sent to you.

Health Alert: Hazardous Chemicals in Garden Hoses

The Ann Arbor based Ecology Center recently released a study that targeted toxic chemicals in common garden watering hoses which we thought we should make our readers aware of.

Garden hoses were tested for lead, cadmium, bromine (also used as flame retardant), phthalates and bisphenol A (BPA), and chlorine (PVCs). These chemicals have been linked to birth defects, impaired learning, liver toxicity, premature births and other serious health problems. A third of the hoses tested contained high levels of one or more of the chemicals of concern.

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IN THE PRESIDENT'S CORNER

Thompson's Tidbits



As I write this message I am babysitting my vivacious (cute) four-year old granddaughter. As any grandpa will tell you, grandchildren can do no wrong, especially when grandma is not looking! But, boy, once grandma gets involved, like seeing a hand in the cookie jar right before lunch (they're small, right?), it's hard to tell who is in more trouble, Joslynn or grandpa!

Speaking of trouble, can anyone, except for the 218 members who supported the measure, really look at the U.S. House action to "divorce" the nutrition title from the rest of the farm bill and to repeal permanent farm law and not see trouble for agriculture? And further, what were those members looking at that was more compelling than the urging of over 500 separate and diverse agricultural organizations, NFU in the lead, all calling for keeping the farm bill intact? The previously passed Senate bill and this House bill now move to the conference committee stage with my hope that more rational thought will ultimately prevail. Maybe what are needed in Washington are more grandmas!

Looking ahead the 80th Annual Michigan Farmers Union Convention will be held at the Doherty Hotel in Clare on Nov. 8 to 9, 2013. It is not too early to make your reservations by calling their toll free number of 1-877-2-DOHERTY. Identify yourself as being with Michigan Farmers Union for the special group room rates that start at \$79 plus tax. Please make an effort to come and participate in this meeting. This is YOUR opportunity as a member to share YOUR thoughts and opinions as to what policy initiatives should be ad-

vanced during the coming year. Come also to hear what benefits are available to all members and what should be pursued in the future. Watch your mail for more detailed information as the convention nears. It is worth noting that a special treat is planned for Friday evening. Alaska Farmers Union President Bob Shumaker has agreed to come and give a presentation on his experiences traveling to the African nation of Zambia and the work he and others have done regarding enhancing agriculture and rural life in Zambia through Farmers Union's partnership with the National Cooperative Business Association's Farmer-to-Farmer program. He will also be speaking on what agriculture is like in Alaska.

While their efforts have been noted elsewhere, I would be amiss if I did not say a big thank you to the volunteers who spent time at the 2013 Ag Expo Michigan Farmers Union booth. This was an exciting, although HOT, experience that established our presence and will only get better with time.

In closing, if you have any questions or concerns regarding our organization or agriculture and rural life in general, please do not hesitate to contact either me or any of the other officers or board members. It makes our job as leaders so much easier when everyone participates. – Bob Thompson, President

LOOKING TO
CONTACT A BOARD
MEMBER?

Page 4 has direct contact information for our entire board.

Hoses (continued)

Water in hoses left in the sun for two days yielded phthalates and BPA higher than the federal safe drinking water standards.

Consumers are advised to read hose labels and avoid those hoses with a California Prop 65 warning that says, "This product contains a chemical known to the State of California to cause cancer and birth defects---." Buy hoses that are listed as drinking water safe and lead free. Polyurethane or natural rubber hoses are a great improvement over PVCs and are better choices.

For hoses you already have for which no labels are available, let the water run for a bit before using, to

flush the water that's been sitting in them, which will have the highest level of chemicals. Store hoses out of the sun to reduce leaching of chemicals into the water left in them after previous use. Don't drink water out of your hose unless you know for sure that your hose is drinking water safe, and don't give it to pets, either. Even low levels of lead may cause health problems.



To read the study Ecology Center researchers released on what they found and what you can do to avoid toxic chemicals during gardening, visit their website at www.HealthyStuff.org.

THE BENEFITS OF BOTANICAL INSECTICIDES

In one of their advertisements in a trade publication, Minnesota-based MGK Company had a well-written background piece on the beneficial uses of natural plant-based insecticides that we felt was worth sharing with our readers. Full credit to MGK for the following excerpts:

"Synthetic insecticides are so prevalent in today's agriculture that it's hard to believe they didn't exist just a few decades ago. As recently as the 1940s, most insecticides were developed primarily with botanical-derived active ingredients. *Pyrethrum* [from chrysanthemums], *azadirachtin* [from seeds of the Neem tree, indigenous to India], *sabadilla* [from a lily variety native to Latin America], and numerous other botanical derivatives were relied upon almost exclusively by commercial growers and household gardeners alike for effective and practical insect control.—A number of recent trends are motivating growers to rediscover the power, effectiveness and environmental benefits of botanical insecticides. The explosive growth of organic agriculture is one contributing factor. Another key issue shared by many growers is their concern about the potential impact of 'conventional' farm chemicals on our food supply and on the envi-

ronment. As such, botanical insecticides have developed into a core component of many Integrated Pest Management [IPM] programs—."

"*Pyrethrum*—extract from the chrysanthemum flower has been applied—as a rapid knockdown, broad-spectrum insecticide with minimal toxicity to the environment.—*Azadirachtin* is a complex molecule with multiple insecticidal properties that kill through direct contact and ingestion, and regulate insect growth. These characteristics provide a degree of residual control, making *azadirachtin* effective on the toughest-to-kill pests, such as Lepidoptera, beetles, and true bugs.—*Sabadilla*'s unique properties were first discovered by the Incas and Aztecs centuries ago—and has historically been used to effectively control various crops pests such as Lepidoptera, diamondback moths and cucumber beetles—with low mammalian toxicity."

In promoting these insecticides, MGK advertises their use as "Back to the Future." More information can be found at www.mgk.com.

AG-EXPO (CONTINUED)

portunity for providing information and education about MFU, with an eye toward potential member recruitment, given the new and many member benefits that have been added over the past two years. Board members took turns staffing our exhibit area, creatively designed by MFU President Bob Thompson and his wife, and engaged many passersby in conversation who stopped to see what we were all about. Many different handouts as take-aways went with the visitors, the most popular being the colorful Farmer's Share of the Food Dollar provided by NFU.

In recognizing that the emphasis at Ag-Expo is primarily aimed at grain and livestock producers, MFU also plans to have a booth at December's annual Great Lakes Horticulture & Greenhouse Show

in Grand Rapids to gain positive exposure to this equally important component of Michigan's diverse agricultural economy. Fees to cover booth rental at these shows have been made possible by membership dues. As membership grows, additional opportunities to promote MFU and family farmers and rural communities will become available.

GMO Apples Nearing Approval

A Canadian biotechnology firm expects the U.S. government to deregulate its product, called Arctic Apples, by this fall while it is anticipated that the Canadian government will do the same by the end of 2013, according to the company, Okanagan Specialty Fruits (OSF) of Canada.

Arctic Apples have been genetically modified to be non-browning when sliced. Company scientists determined which genes control the browning process and figured out how to turn those genes off. Using that process, any apple variety can be modified to be non-browning.

Arctic Apples have been in field trials in North America for a number of years. The company originally focused on Golden Delicious and Granny Smith varieties, then added Gala and Fuji.

Approval for other varieties is expected to follow. They hope that non-browning apples will be popular with fresh-cut, food service, and whole, fresh apple markets.

Opponents of the deregulation maintain this new non-browning technology is not needed nor being called for by consumers. Stating that the browning process is a natural occurrence resulting from exposure of cut apple surfaces to oxygen, they argue that it can be delayed if desired by lightly coating cut or sliced apples with Vitamin-C-fortified apple juice. Furthermore, naturally low-browning apple varieties are already in the market. Nonetheless, if Arctic Apples are deregulated, OSF expects commercial plantings to be in the ground by spring of 2014.

LIGHT (CONTINUED)

Lower Michigan, with the first five coming off without a hitch. Continuing committees were set up at each meeting to take necessary steps toward incorporating and applying for an REA loan. But at the sixth meeting near Big Rapids, some men came in to attempt to break up the meeting. However, the local chairman managed to carry the meeting through to completion and secure an elected continuing committee. No one ever was able to determine for sure who had sent the strangers to disrupt the meeting.

The seventh meeting at a school house south of Ithaca was not as successful, Graham reports, as “Two men came into the meeting early and broke it up before [guest speaker] Thompson had a chance to speak. A later unofficial report claimed these men were sent to the meeting by the County Agricultural Extension Agent.”

Many more follow-up meetings were held with additional continuing committees formed. On his way home from such a meeting in Jackson, Graham stopped by the Dimondale Town Hall to check on progress of a planned Ingham County continuing committee. He found a group of men visiting on the steps of the hall. They told him the County Agriculture Agent had visited most of the farmers in the area to tell them that REA would not be possible in their county. The committee had as yet held no meeting. So they opened up the hall, turned on the lights, entered some items of business in the minutes and set the date for the next meeting. He notes that eventually a large REA co-op served that area.

To demonstrate the commitment MFU and its supporting farmers had to procuring electric service to their rural areas, Graham continues with this action item: “Under Michigan law [at the time] one mile of transmission line established legal status. A group of Farmers Union members in Eaton County assembled poles and transmission wire and, one dark night, set up the first transmission line in Michigan. The first REA co-op to provide service in Michigan was in an area where they could buy power from a municipally-owned power plant.”

He goes on to say, “A move was afoot to have REA in Michigan placed under the supervision of the Michigan Public Utilities Commission, which was reported to be controlled by the very companies it was created to [regulate]. We took a committee of five—to lay our problem before Governor Frank Murphy. Without hesitation the Governor assured us that REA would never be placed under the MPUC while he was Governor.”

In a not unfamiliar scenario of the “little guy” persevering against powerful, well-funded opponents, Graham concludes with, “Soon after the REA co-op began to function, the private power companies made a public announcement that their finance departments had ‘discovered’ (editor’s emphasis) that it was not necessary to charge \$1,000 per mile for extending rural power lines. [Imagine that!] The farmers stuck to their cooperatives.” The next time you flip on your lights, remember who made it possible ‘way back then!’

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