

Rhode Island Farm Bureau Newsletter



Agriculture and COVID-19

Volume 21, Issue 2

April 2020

One of the best comments I've seen on social media in the past few weeks is "I'd like to apologize to 2019 for all the bad things I said about it." Each year, in fact each **season**, brings challenges to agriculture locally and nationally. Now the arrival of COVID-19 has changed our lives and the way we handle nearly everything we do, but imperative to know is the following: Agriculture is considered critical business by the Department of Homeland Security. The details of that extend primarily to the food chain at this time, and it changes daily. Every day brings new guidance, new Executive Orders, new concerns. I will place no specific guidance here in regards to agriculture because what I type today may not be applicable tomorrow. The best advice I have is to take care of your health, first and foremost. Please do not fall victim to any scams that are proliferating during this trying time. Phone and email scams regarding government checks have already become commonplace. Don't make this difficult time worse by falling for a scam call to deposit your government stimulus check. For all things, find correct information through trusted resources in the news or online. To stay healthy, follow CDC and RIDOH guidelines and advice, both of which can be found on our website. This information is also available in the news media for those not connected to the Internet. I am constantly updating links and information on our website in regard to Critical Industry, COVID-19 Resources for Farmers, RI DEM's page for COVID-19 Resources for Farmers and any other information we believe may prove helpful. I am sending emails via our Constant Contact, please make sure rifarm@rifb.org is in your trusted email contacts so you don't miss an email.

We continue to work to ensure that farmers are able to prep, plant, harvest and market their products as they always have to supply the public with safe, healthy and abundant food, fuel and fiber. We will continue to provide updates on our website and via email whenever they are available. If you have a question that cannot be answered on the website, please call the office at 401-385-3339. You may have to leave a message, but we will return your call. If you can email, please reach out to us at rifarm@rifb.org.

If you are sharing photos of your farm or ag activities on social media, don't forget to use the hashtag **#stillfarming**. Stay safe and stay well.

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Meet the RIFB Board, April Edition

Kevin Breene of Breene Hollow Farm in West Greenwich got his first calf at 7 years old and that's when he decided he wanted to be a dairy farmer. He was a member of 4-H & FFA for several years and went on to get his associates degree in animal science from UCONN. In 1977 he started milking cows in a small barn at his parents' house, and in 1979 he purchased a piece of land in the west end of town and built a 60-cow milking parlor. The original farm had 130 acres and over the years Kevin has purchased surrounding land and the farm now totals 360 acres. He grows silage corn and hay and markets his milk through Agri-Mark Co-op along with his son, daughter and son-in-law. He has been on the RIFB Board for 6 years. Kevin has been the WG Town Administrator for 19 years, was a RI State Senator for 12 years, was on the WG Town Council for 14 years, and served on ASCS (Agriculture Stabilization Conservation Service) State Committee from 1982 to 1994. He is currently on the State Farm Service Agency Committee. Kevin hopes that his children and grandchildren will continue Breene Hollow Farm into the future.

Tim Gallagher of Old Sawmill Farm in Coventry started working at Stamp Farms during high school, and after graduation began milking at Breene Hollow Farm in the afternoons. He was planting silage corn and hay, and that's when he got the bug for farming. Tim graduated from SUNY Cobleskill in 1994 with a degree in Ag Engineering, and in the fall of 1996 he purchased property, opening for business in the spring of 1997. Tim grows tomatoes, corn, squash and other mixed vegetables alongside greenhouse crops- annuals, perennials and hydroponic vegetables. He sells his produce at retail at Old Sawmill Farm on Rte 102, and wholesale to local stands and produce distributors. Tim has been on the RIFB Board since 2015. He also served on the YF&R committee in the past and won a trip to Nashville with YF&R. Tim hopes that his daughter will continue with the farm in the future.

Tyler Young of Young Family Farm fell in love with farming at the age of two while sitting on his grandfather's lap as he drove his Ford 8N tractor around the farm. Tyler farmed summers and weekends helping his grandfather grow potatoes in Tiverton, Rhode Island. At the age of 16, Tyler gained more farming experience working on Verrill's Dairy Farm located in Massachusetts and at age 18 he spent a summer working on a cousin's dairy farm in South Dakota.

Tyler attended the University of Minnesota and graduated with a Bachelor of Agricultural Business Administration degree and a minor in Agronomy. In 1984 he married his college sweetheart and returned to Rhode Island to farm with his grandfather. In 1997, Tyler and Karla bought a 180 acre farm in Little Compton, RI. With one piece of used equipment and a few run down old barns they began growing potatoes and winter squash for the wholesale markets.

Once their wholesale market became successful, Karla wanted to begin a retail business selling Tyler's crops. They began with the "On Your Honor" system selling strawberries from a white spool on their front yard. When the yard grew from one spool into wagons of plants, cut flowers, fruits and vegetables, they decided it was time to build a farm that operates seasonally from May thru November. Fall is their busiest time of the season when customers come from all over Rhode Island and Massachusetts to enjoy picking their own apples.

Today, Tyler grows and manages 300 acres of crops. They focus on wholesaling their crops directly to 13 grocery stores, a few specialty food distributors and processors. Tyler specializes in growing 100 acres of assorted potatoes which he sells to Ocean State Peeled Potato. He also grows approximately 500,000 pounds of winter squash, and specialty crops such as kale, cabbage, hot peppers and sweet corn. They have a 5 acre apple orchard with 1400 apple trees, 500 nectarine and peach trees, Asian pears, and strawberries. For the retail farm stand, Tyler and Karla grow annuals, perennials, cut flowers, hanging baskets and a variety of fruits and vegetables. They offer Pick Your Own strawberries, flowers and apples to their farm stand customers.

Tyler joined the RI Farm Bureau right out of college. He spent 10 years on the Board before being elected Vice President, a position he held for 20 years. Tyler took a break from RIFB to take the opportunity to sit on the largest vegetable commodity board in the country, Potato USA. He started off representing RI and now sits on the Domestic Committee as one of 10 representing the USA. Tyler spent 6 years on the Farm Family Board of Directors and 8 years on the Farm Family Advisory Board. In 2018 Tyler once again was elected to the RIFB Board of Directors. Tyler manages his farm with his wife Karla. They have 3 daughters who have all graduated from college and have ventured off to pursue their own dreams. Both Tyler and Karla have dedicated their life to their family and farm.

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Young Ag Professionals Committee 2019-2020

Maggie LaPrise is the 2019-2021 Young Ag Professionals Chairperson for Rhode Island Farm Bureau. Maggie is no stranger to Rhode Island Agriculture. She is currently a Junior at Penn State-World Campus where she is getting her Bachelors in Ag Business. Maggie also works full time on her family's dairy farm and helps to manage the newly opened EMMA Acres Farm Stand. Growing up she was an active member in the SRI 4-H Dairy Club and has been the Dairy Quiz Bowl Coach for the last two years. While Maggie was a student at URI, she worked in the State 4-H Office, which gave her the opportunity to see all the areas of 4-H and how diverse the programs are. Not every project area is animal-focused like hers had always been. This experience also helps Maggie in leading the YAP program. Rhode Island agriculture is very diverse, and the young professionals come from all different agricultural backgrounds which makes the programs very unique. Maggie is excited about what she and her fellow Executive Committee members have planned for this year, and she hopes to see a lot of Young Ag Professionals get out there and get involved!



Hi everyone! My name is **Meg Quinn**, I am the Vice-Chair of Young Ag Professionals. I grew up on a small farm raising turkeys, layer hens and a few beef cows here and there. I recently received a USDA Youth Loan and was able to start my dream flower farm. I have always enjoyed working with plants and flowers growing up, so I was happy for the opportunity to start my own business with cut flowers. I am currently a sophomore majoring in Elementary Ed at CCRI, and will be transferring to RIC for the fall to complete my bachelors there. I am excited to be a part of the Young Ag Professionals and to work with my team to plan some awesome events!

Welcome everyone! I am **Aaron Gathen** and I am the new Young Ag Professional Treasurer. I am an Agriculture Teacher at Narragansett High School and I am the State Advisor for the Rhode Island FFA Organization. I also work at a dairy farm over the summer making hay and working all of the crops. A unique hobby of mine is pulling oxen and going around to the fairs throughout the summer. As a YAP board member we are planning on running some awesome activities for our members over the course of our term!



Sarah McCormick is the proud co-owner of Little Falls Farm in Greene, Rhode



Island. Little Falls Farm was established in 2004, originally starting with dairy goats and beef cattle for 4-H projects. Sarah was an avid member of Rhode Island 4-H and FFA where she exhibited livestock, participated in public speaking competitions, and much more. Over the last sixteen years, Little Falls Farm has become the home to over thirty head of Southdown and Border Leicester sheep, which are raised for locally produced meat, fiber and show stock. Sarah also judges livestock competitions in Rhode Island, Connecticut and Massachusetts for 4-H, youth and county shows. She is also a local sheep shearer in Rhode Island.

Sarah graduated from the University of Rhode Island in 2019 with her bachelor's degree in Animal Science and Animal Management. She has been a veterinary technician in Rhode Island for the last five years. Sarah is involved with many 4-H and agricultural organizations as well, including the Rhode Island Sheep Cooperative, The Northeast Southdown Breeders Association, The Southern Rhode Island 4-H Fair Committee, and many more. With her involvement with Young Agricultural Professionals, Sarah hopes to involve the Rhode Island youth with building their strengths through their agricultural paths in professional ways. Sarah's objectives are to include the integrity of Rhode Island's local food systems into the Young Agricultural Program to strengthen the core foundation of the Rhode Island Farm Bureau and therefore the core values of the farmers and ranchers that we support.

Update your Farm's Commodities

We are happy to have fully transitioned to our new membership database supported by Pennsylvania Farm Bureau. One item that came to our attention as we transitioned, was that most farms have outdated commodities listed.

Please take a moment to send us an email at rifarm@rifb.org or call the office at 401-385-3339 to update your commodity listing with us. This will help us to identify specific farms and growers when the need arises.

Thanks in advance!



Did you know that you need a conservation plan?



The RI Conservation Districts are working with NRCS, under a special program, to write Farm Conservation Plans for the Farm Forest and Open Space (FFOS) Program of Rhode Island.

A conservation plan is a tool designed to help you better manage the natural resources on your farm and in turn may help save you money.

If you are in the farm program or are thinking about applying, this is a great opportunity for you!

Funding has been secured for a limited # of plans.

ACT NOW to assure you are approved for this special offer before all slots are filled.

Get a \$950 valued plan for only \$100, under special project funds!

For more information, contact your local Conservation District:

Northern RI Conservation District
Serving Providence County
(401) 934-0840

Southern RI Conservation District
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Don't forget your membership benefits! You can easily save the cost of your dues by taking advantage of these discounts. Go to rifb.org for more info on:

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Updating Your Email Address

RIFB wants to provide you with timely updates on legislation, meetings and other important information. We have worked hard to ensure that all member emails are correctly categorized to ensure that you receive our emails. If you do not currently receive emails from **RI Farm** (rifarm@rifb.org), please email us (**using your preferred email**) or use the Contact Form on our website to provide us with the best email to use.

The #1 Reason People Don't Join Farm Bureau?

No one asked.

Not a member of RIFB?

Know someone who *should* be a member?

Full-time farmers, part-time and hobby farmers, landowners, gardeners, foodies and anyone who enjoys local food and farms in Rhode Island– you can join RI Farm Bureau and help us to support the future of agriculture in RI and beyond.

You can stop by the office to join or renew, or join or renew online at rifb.org.



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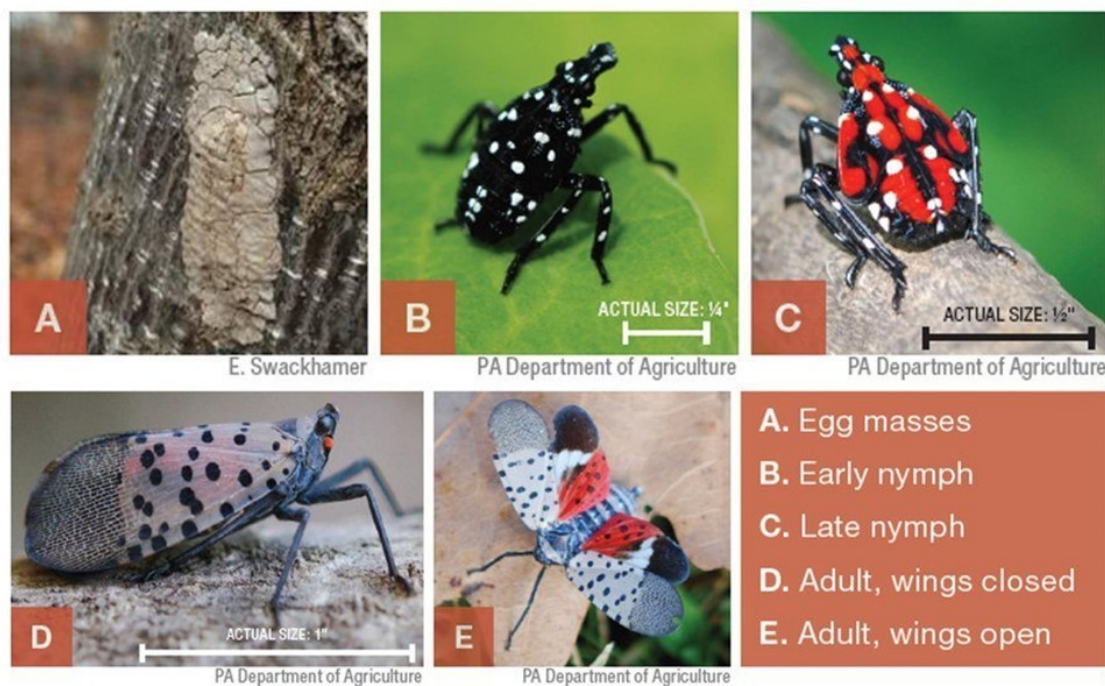


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Spotted Lanternfly: A potential new pest to be on the lookout for!



The spotted lanternfly (SLF, *Lycorma delicatula*) is a new invasive pest to be on the lookout for in Rhode Island. Although not currently found in Rhode Island, this Chinese native could spread to our state within the next few years. Spotted lanternfly (SLF) is currently found in Pennsylvania, New Jersey, Delaware, Maryland, Virginia and West Virginia; and additional individual finds have been intercepted in New York, Connecticut, Massachusetts, and North Carolina. This pest is known to feed on a broad list of host plants, including grapevines, fruit trees, and various hardwoods and ornamentals. A potential introduction into Rhode Island is likely, as this highly invasive insect can spread rapidly by hitch-hiking in vehicles or on infested equipment, materials, and commodities.

Currently, only grape growers in Pennsylvania and Virginia are experiencing significant economic loss due to direct damages caused by SLF feeding. Other agriculture and nursery growers have been impacted due to significant increases in insecticidal treatments of infested material, as well as a decrease in agritourism. However, as SLF spreads and quarantine zones expand, the cost of compliance to best management practices is impacting industries such as timber/forestry, trucking, and green industries. Increased time for training and inspection of vehicles and commodities has led to production and shipping delays. The extent of long-term impacts is still relatively unknown, though it is clear that SLF has the potential to negatively impact several industries on a multi-state level.

What can you do to prepare for a potential introduction? Learn how to identify SLF, and understand which life stages are present seasonally. Currently, be on the lookout for overwintering egg masses, which are similar in appearance to gypsy moth egg masses. Nymphs will begin to hatch out in late April and could spread to Rhode Island on infested shipments or vehicles at this time. Landowners may also remove hosts that are attractive to SLF and not desired on your property, such as the invasive tree-of-heaven (*Ailanthus altissima*). Visit www.uri.edu/biocontrol/spotted-lanternfly/ and www.extension.psu.edu/spotted-lanternfly to stay informed about best management practices, research updates and the spread of SLF. If you suspect you have found a spotted lanternfly, take a photo and try to collect a specimen. Contact the URI Biological Control Lab (www.uri.edu/biocontrol/home/contactus/) or RIDEM Division of Agriculture (www.dem.ri.gov/pestaalert) to report the find.

For our 2020 Raffle to benefit our RIFB Scholarship program, we are once again having a RIFB Farm Products Raffle. We will offer 3 chances to win for \$5 a ticket!

Our three prizes will be \$500, \$300 and \$200 in RIFB Member Farm's gift certificates. RIFB will be purchasing the gift certificates for this raffle from our member farms, so if you offer gift certificates at your business and would like us to consider including your farm in our **2020 RIFB Farm Product Raffle**, please call the office at 401-385-3339 or email rifarm@rifb.org. If you sell food items, you must have the proper permits to do so for us to include you in our raffle. We plan to purchase primarily \$25-50 Gift Certificates depending on the average product values of a location. We'd love to get a nice balance of member farms offering produce, fruit, meat, flowers, plants, syrup and/or honey, and any other products which you may grow/produce. **Please reach out if you are a current RI Farm Bureau member interested in participating and have a physical stand or store for the winners to redeem their gift certificates.**

In addition to raising money for our scholarships, given out each fall at our RIFB Annual Meeting, our RIFB Raffle helps publicize our member farms and gets people out to shop at farms they may not be aware of. For that reason, we want to involve member farms from **all areas of Rhode Island**. If you would like to participate, please contact us by **May 15** so that we can make our final decisions. There will be small info sheets available to detail all the participating farms. If we have more interest than we have funds to purchase gift certificates this year, we will be happy to place any other farms on a waiting list to start off in 2021! **Again, please reach out if you are a current RI Farm Bureau member wishing to participate and have a physical stand or store for the winners to redeem their gift certificates.**

Thank you for all you do to keep agriculture in RI. Together we can use this raffle to increase awareness of what RI agriculture produces!

**Continue to Receive
the Printed Newsletter.**

RIFB plans to stop sending the printed version to our **Friend of Farmer** members as of this fall. We want to be conscious of waste and costs, but we are happy to continue to mail a printed copy to any of our members that request it. Please call the office and speak to Rebecca to be placed on the **Printed Newsletter list** to receive your free newsletter by mail. Current **Full-Time** and **Part-Time Farmer** members will continue to receive a mailed copy unless you request digital copy only.

**Farmers- Do you have
something to sell or trade?**

Are you looking for a particular implement or service? Do you need seasonal or full-time help or are you someone looking for a summer or full-time ag related job?

The New England Ag Exchange Website is a collaborative effort between Farm Fresh RI, the Young Farmer Network, RI DEM Division of Ag and the RI Farm Bureau. It provides an online forum to buy/sell/trade, share advice, seek/offer land or labor, and more.

Visit <https://exchange.farmfreshri.org/> to see how it can help you!

President's Corner

The COVID-19 virus has certainly changed our everyday lives for the time being, but experts are hard at work developing tests to detect the virus more quickly, to find vaccines and to help get us through these trying times. With the rush on grocery stores to purchase food and supplies, the value of local business has become more apparent to many who may have focused on the big box stores. Local farms and farm stands, farmers markets and small businesses that have been able to continue to provide food and goods have experienced a jump in sales and new customers. One positive that should come from this once we return to what is sure to be a “new normal” is a return to local. The value of supporting our neighbors and local businesses should carry on, and my hope is that we see farms and small businesses enjoy a rise in steady customers when this is all past us.



Henry B. Wright III, President RIFB



The Zipline : A Message from AFBF President Zippy Duvall

Some say this is the week when the coronavirus outbreak and business closures will hit the make-or-break point for the U.S. economy. Things would be much worse if Congress and the President had not taken action—passing and signing the coronavirus aid package last week.

None of us can afford to lose farms and ranches, especially now that we're more focused than ever on the security of our food supply chain.

Most people are focused on businesses such as restaurants or airlines, which certainly have experienced a sharp and sudden decrease. What they may not be thinking about is the cumulative impact on agriculture. Most hospitality and travel industries were doing well before the virus. Farmers and ranchers were not. Coronavirus is just the latest in a string of misfortunes that have kept the farm economy down for several years: weather disasters, a trade war and, even before that, commodity prices have been below the cost of production. Which is worse: a sudden blow or a prolonged downturn? The answer is whichever one you and your industry are facing. But none of us can afford to lose farms and ranches, especially now that we're more focused than ever on the security of our food supply chain.

Consumers understandably might think that farmers and ranchers are doing well, given the empty shelves we're all seeing at grocery stores. But those buying habits could slow down, and we've already seen a dramatic drop in demand from food service, restaurants and schools and universities. There are unofficial estimates that the current market price of milk is down 40% compared to January. Prices for cattle, corn and other farm goods also are falling. We are thankful for the aid package that will help us sustain our food producers. Farm Bureau worked tirelessly to include up to \$23.5 billion that USDA can use to help farmers and ranchers when estimates turn into hard data on the impacts to producers.

The Zipline, cont.

People are driving less, and that has driven down demand for ethanol made from corn at the same time as oil production has increased. Ethanol plants are idled, corn prices are down, and livestock producers who relied on distillers dried grains—a byproduct of ethanol production—are scrambling to replace that source of animal feed.

Agricultural futures, which many farmers and ranchers depend on to lock in better prices later on, are down as well. That shows a concern that consumers will buy less in the coming weeks and months, as the economy slows and unemployment worsens. It also reflects worries about whether our overseas markets will return if product can't move and as economies around the world are reeling from the virus outbreak and restrictions to contain it. We're certainly hopeful that trade will continue and grow.

Another concern that came to our attention quickly after the federal government began taking more stringent actions to curb the spread of coronavirus was whether our farmers would get the workers they were expecting from Mexico and other countries. Each spring tens of thousands of farm workers make their way to the United States to do the hard work many American citizens don't want to do: pruning, plowing, planting, and picking produce.

Farm Bureau and others worked overtime to ensure that processing of visa applications submitted by farm workers would not be adversely affected, and the State Department at the end of March made changes to make available more seasonal farm workers, while also protecting public health. Our farmers and ranchers are committed to feeding our country now and in the future, and we need workers to do it. About 20% of farm workers in the U.S. come through the H-2A program. They play a critical role in ensuring Americans have access to the food we need. Now we are monitoring to make sure the visa process operates smoothly as more government agencies move to telework.

We're also working to share guidance developed by state Farm Bureau organizations, state Departments of Agriculture and university Extension services to help farmers and ranchers know how to protect their workers, their families, their consumers and themselves. Farmers and ranchers wear many hats even under the best of conditions, and now more than ever. The guidance for farmers as employers will help them do what we always want to do: feed and take care of people. You can find a collection of those resources on our COVID-19 webpage.

Another impact we're watching is the availability of farmers markets as some local governments order that they be suspended. Many farmers depend on farmers markets for most of their sales. With restaurant business severely cut, farmers who sell meat and produce directly to restaurants are more dependent on direct-to-consumer sales. The assistance passed by Congress last week should help farmers and ranchers who will be affected by the loss of their markets, but we must keep an eye on this to make sure the assistance is adequate to ensure that those farmers will be there for us when things get back to normal.

Our ability to clear hurdles for America's farmers and ranchers depends on our awareness of issues surfacing across the country. We had an impact on the farm worker issue and the aid package because we could share information in real time. Please let county and state Farm Bureau leaders know of other ways this situation is affecting farmers' and ranchers' ability to be productive and survive the economic hit. We are in constant communication with state Farm Bureau leaders so we can jump on new issues as they come up. Even as we all practice social distancing or physical distancing as some are now calling it, we're more connected than ever by phone, video conferencing and email. By working together, we'll address the economic impacts of the virus and ensure our fellow citizens have the nutritious food they need. We will get through this.

RI Farm Bureau

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