

A Supplement To The News-Banner & Ossian Journal March 2024

A green tractor is pulling a sprayer through a field of young green plants in rows. The sprayer has a large wooden tank and is spraying a fine mist of liquid onto the plants. The field is divided into neat rows of crops, and the tractor is moving along a dirt path between the rows. The background shows a line of trees under a clear sky.

Spring Agriculture 2024

Agritourism: Helping farms diversify

As family farms continue to disappear across North America, diversification has never been more crucial to keep these small-scale operations afloat. One innovative avenue farmers are exploring to boost their income is agritourism. Here's a look at how agritourism is changing the agricultural landscape.

What's agritourism?

Agritourism is a commercial enterprise offering visits to rural environments or settings where visitors can partake in activities, events or attractions not readily available in urban areas. For

instance, visitors can engage in farm activities like fruit picking, feeding animals, wine tasting and tree planting.

How does it help small farms?

By integrating recreational or educational components into their operations, farms can diversify their income streams, offsetting the challenges of traditional farming and unpredictable crop yields.

Guided tours of a working farm can also generate revenue while helping consumers understand where their food comes from. Additionally, self-pick fruit gathering experiences provide fresh

produce to visitors, while reducing harvesting costs and labor for the farm.

Furthermore, agritourism can breathe new life into rural economies, attracting visitors from near and far and injecting much-needed capital into local communities. Farms can also share their stories, traditions and the history of their land with visitors, creating a sense of continuity and cultural significance.

Look for agritourism experiences to try out in your area to support your local farmers.



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Plant pathologist: A fascinating career

Have you ever considered studying plant pathology? Just like humans and animals, plants can also become sick and diseased. Plant pathologists are experts in this field and work to identify and manage plant health problems.

What is it?

Simply put, plant pathologists study the health of plants. They work to identify diseases, pests and other plant health problems.

Plant pathologists can work in various settings, from laboratories to fields, and are employed by different sectors, including seed research companies, biotech companies, universities and the government. They also work independently



for clients, such as farmers who need advice on disease management strategies to ensure a healthy and high-yielding crop.

Educational requirements

To become a plant pathologist, you typically need an undergraduate

or graduate degree in botany, horticulture, plant pathology or biology. Pursuing a master's degree also helps, particularly if you aim to work in research and development, consultation or academics.

Many educational programs provide opportunities for practical laboratory experience, and internships can help you gain real-world experience. Specific job training may also be required for some positions.

If you're interested in pursuing a career in plant pathology, look for relevant courses available at local universities and colleges.

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How farmers' markets help the local economy

Farmers' markets are more than just places to buy fresh, locally grown produce — they're essential components of a vibrant local economy. Here are three ways in which these vibrant marketplaces serve as engines of economic growth and community development.

They support small businesses

One of the most significant contributions of farmers' markets to the local economy is the support they provide to small-scale farmers and producers. By offering a direct sales channel, these markets enable farmers to bypass traditional distribution networks, retaining a larger portion of the profits and, in turn, investing back into their businesses.

This not only ensures the sustainability of local agriculture but also helps create jobs and stimulate rural economies.

They provide a sense of community

Additionally, farmers' markets foster a sense of community and pride among residents, attracting both locals and tourists. As these markets thrive, surrounding businesses, such as cafes, restaurants and shops, also benefit from increased foot traffic. The local economy experiences a boost as consumers purchase not only fresh produce but also other goods and services in the vicinity.

They promote sustainability

Furthermore, farmers' markets promote environmental sustainability

by reducing the carbon footprint associated with long-distance food transportation. The emphasis on locally sourced and seasonal products helps cut down on greenhouse gas emissions, making these markets eco-friendly as well as economically advantageous.

This National Ag Day, support a local farmers' market for high-quality food and support a stronger, more resilient local economy.

Invasive plants pose a significant threat to agricultural productivity, biodiversity and ecosystem health. These species are highly competitive and can easily outgrow native vegetation, resulting in damage to crops. Therefore, farmers must adopt effective management practices to safeguard their livelihoods and the environment. Here are some techniques that farmers commonly use to manage invasive plants.

1. Cultural control.

This method involves protecting and attracting native beneficial plant, insect and bird species to keep invasive plants at bay. This might even mean changing nearby human activities to prevent disturbance that often leads to invasive plant invasion.

2. Mechanical control.

Digging, pulling, mowing, mulching or burning invasive plants can be effective for small-scale infestations.

Stop the spread!



However, it's crucial to ensure proper disposal to prevent re-infestation.

3. Biological control.

This approach involves introducing predators, such as insects or pathogens, imported from the area where the invasive plants originated. This can help reduce their populations without harming other plants.

4. Chemical control.

Herbicides can be used

as a targeted approach to control invasive plants. However, farmers must carefully follow label instructions and take the necessary precautions. Stem injection is an effective approach.

Lastly, farmers must stay informed about invasive plant species prevalent in their region and participate in workshops to learn about effective management practices.



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Asparagus: a fascinating perennial crop

Do you love the taste of asparagus? This nutritious vegetable isn't only delicious but an interesting perennial crop with a unique growth and harvesting process. Asparagus is one of the first seasonal crops you see in grocery stores each year, serving as a sure sign that spring has finally arrived. Here's a look into the intriguing world of asparagus farming.

Planting

Farmers plant asparagus crowns, which are essentially stems attached to long strings of roots. These crowns are planted about six to eight inches under the ground. Once planted, the asparagus is left to grow for an entire year before it can be harvested the following year. This initial wait is crucial for the establishment and growth of a strong root system.

Harvesting

The first harvest of asparagus occurs during the second year after planting,

typically lasting for two weeks. As the asparagus plants mature, the harvest period extends. In the second year, farmers can typically enjoy a four-week harvest window, and by the third or fourth year, the asparagus can be harvested for the full six-to-eight-week period.

Once established, an asparagus spear can grow up to 10 inches within 24 hours. This rapid growth forces farmers to harvest the crop daily during its peak season. Moreover, since asparagus must be picked by hand, it's also highly labor-intensive.

Longevity

Asparagus plants are incredibly resilient and long-lived. With proper care and maintenance, they can last up to 20 years. This longevity makes asparagus a worthwhile investment for farmers and ensures a stable supply for consumers.

Look for locally grown asparagus in a grocery store or farmer's market near you.

Dairy cows benefit from playing sports, too!

Did you know exercise isn't only good for human health? It's good for all creatures, even farm animals! Dairy cows are no exception, and there's plenty of research to prove it.

Benefits

Physical activity has many positive effects on cows regardless of how they're raised. A key benefit of exercise is that it improves leg strength. Physical activity also improves hoof condition, minimizes the likelihood of lameness and reduces teat injuries. Regular activity also helps increase rumination, promoting good metabolic and digestive health.

Active cows live longer, which increases profitability for the farmer. Moreover, cows grow more accustomed to human contact as they're moved to and from the exercise areas, which improves human-animal relations.

Challenges

Farmers wishing to provide their cows with more freedom of movement face several challenges, including poor weather conditions, inadequate space and a lack of time to move the animals. Additionally, farmers may be concerned for the comfort and udder health of the cows.

Nevertheless, several solutions can ensure cows have quality time in the pasture. Creating a setup where cows can move freely from inside to outdoors can cut down on human labor. Cows that are free to roam outdoors can feed themselves and spread their manure, reducing fodder harvesting costs.

Do you want to see more farmers adopt measures to help their cows get enough exercise? Support producers who have introduced such a system and encourage others to do the same.



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3 challenges facing the agricultural sector

Since the World Health Organization declared a global pandemic in early 2020, businesses big and small have faced significant challenges. Though the pandemic has ended, many sectors, including the agricultural industry, are facing familiar and unfamiliar challenges.

The agricultural sector is crucial to the survival and health of billions of people across the globe. Though it's obvious that modern agriculture is vital to feeding a global population that was greater than eight billion people at the dawn of 2024, the United Nations notes that agriculture also boosts prosperity and economies by providing jobs. That reality only underscores the notion that the challenges facing the agricultural sector are facing everyone, even those whose livelihoods are not directly linked to the industry. According to Earth.org, an organization that offers environmental news, data analysis, research, and policy solutions, the following are three sizable challenges facing modern agriculture.

1. Climate change: Perhaps no challenge

is greater for humanity in the twenty-first century than climate change, and the agricultural sector is no exception. Climate change has caused shifting weather patterns marked by unpredictability and potentially disastrous developments like prolonged drought. Estimates from NASA indicate corn yields may decrease by 24 percent by the end of this century, a potentially dangerous development linked to a host of factors, including a shifting climate and elevated surface carbon dioxide concentrations that can be traced to human-caused greenhouse gas emissions.

2. Population growth: The booming global population is attributable to numerous factors, including longer life expectancies in developed nations due to medical advancements. How to keep the global population fed at a time when the climate is adversely affecting crop yields is a significant challenge facing both humanity and the agricultural sector. As the population grows, so, too, does the demand for water, which also must be used to grow crops. Navigat-



ing this challenge will be significant, and how it's managed could affect the economic stability of the agricultural industry in the decades to come.

3. Investment: Perhaps no industry is more vital to human survival than agriculture. Earth.org notes that countries with strong agricultural sectors often boast higher standards of living and health than nations with a less productive agricultural industry. Despite that, Earth.org notes that investment in the agricultural sector is not commensurate with the growing population. Supporting measures to invest more heavily in the agricultural sector could reduce food shortages in the decades to come and

ensure the agricultural sector is better positioned to address the many challenges it is already confronting in the twenty-first century.

The challenges facing the agricultural sector affect those who work in the industry but also the global population as a whole. Recognition of that reality may compel more people to support measures designed to ensure the agricultural sector can thrive and help the world to overcome potentially devastating challenges in the decades ahead.



Growing cover crops is an agri-environmental practice that offers several benefits. Cover crops are sown during or after the growth of a primary crop, such as corn, wheat or soybeans. Species are varied and may include ryegrass, radishes, biofumigant mustard and alfalfa. They're neither harvested nor destroyed in the fall. Instead, they're left to freeze and decompose naturally.

Cover crops have positive effects on your current crops, as well as those in subsequent years. Here are some of their benefits:

- The roots of cover crops make the soil more porous, enabling better water infiltration. This improves the soil composition and helps prevent erosion. Reduced erosion prevents the formation of a crusty surface, thereby minimizing the pollution of waterways caused by runoff.

- Cover crops nourish subsequent crops when they die by increasing the activity of microorganisms like bacteria and fungi, as well as enriching the soil with nitrogen. The crops you plant next season benefit from the nutrients, and you see better growth and higher yields.

- Cover crops help control weed growth and provide an alternative to herbicides. Since the ground has constant cover, it's less accessible to undesirable or invasive plant species.

This practice can also be used in your garden. Find out which cover crops are best suited to your local climate and growing conditions.

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Career opportunities in the agricultural sector



What is seed technology?

Seed technology utilizes scientific methods to improve the quality, viability and overall performance of seeds. There are many benefits to modern seed technology. Here are two of the most important:

1. Develop more resilient crops. As the climate continues to change and new plant diseases emerge, developing resilient crop varieties is crucial to sustainability. Seed technology helps create plants better equipped to withstand adverse conditions, such as drought, pests and diseases.

2. Improve yields and increase food security. Selectively breeding and optimizing the genetics of seeds can significantly increase crop yields. This is essential in meeting the global food demand and ensuring food security for the growing population.

Seed technologists help the world towards a sustainable and food-secure future by using the power of science and innovation.

Individuals approach their careers in various ways. Some may aspire to climb the corporate ladder, while others may pursue a career that affords them ample personal time to spend how they see fit. Many individuals look for careers that afford them ample opportunities to work in the great outdoors, which could make the agricultural sector an appealing industry.

Talented individuals with an array of diverse skills dot the agricultural sector landscape, and the following are just a few of the many careers to consider within this vital industry.

- **Equipment technician:** Data from the career experts at Indeed indicates agricultural equipment technicians earn an average salary around \$65,000 per year. Agricultural equipment technicians maintain and repair existing machines and install new ones, among their many responsibilities.

- **Purchasing agent:** An agricultural purchasing agent buys products and raw materials at wholesale. Indeed notes that purchasing agents often



must meet specific purchasing quotas for processors and work with various clients who supply an array of agricultural products. The national average salary for agricultural purchasing agents is around \$51,000 annually.

- **Warehouse manager:** The receiving, shipping and storage of agricultural materials is overseen by a warehouse manager. Indeed notes that these professionals now routinely utilize artificial intelligence products to manage inventory. Warehouse managers must know and adhere to safety procedures and guidelines

that dictate how materials and products are stored. The average salary of a warehouse manager is around \$52,000 per year.

- **Sales:** Like every industry, the agricultural sector requires talented sales personnel. Agricultural sales reps sell materials and products and identify the needs of potential customers. Agricultural sales reps may spend ample time on the road at trade shows. Doing so allows them to identify customers as well as their needs and wants, and promote their own products and services. An ability to foster strong and trusting interpersonal relationships is invaluable for agricultural sales reps, who Indeed reports earn an average of about \$60,000 per year.

- **Environmental engi-**

neer: Environmental engineers play pivotal roles within the industry, and could become even more vital in the decades ahead as the effects of climate change become more apparent. Environmental engineers design and implement solutions that occur on agricultural sites, helping to address issues such as unhealthy soil, insufficient drainage and inefficiencies, among other concerns. A career as an environmental engineer within the agricultural industry can be rewarding and lucrative, with Indeed noting that the average annual salary for this position is a little more than \$77,000.

These are just some of the career paths individuals can consider as they explore the agricultural sector.

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Snail farming: a lucrative venture

Snail farming, scientifically known as heliculture, has gained popularity as a lucrative venture in recent years. This unique agricultural practice involves the farming or cultivation of edible land snails for human consumption and various other purposes.

How does it work?

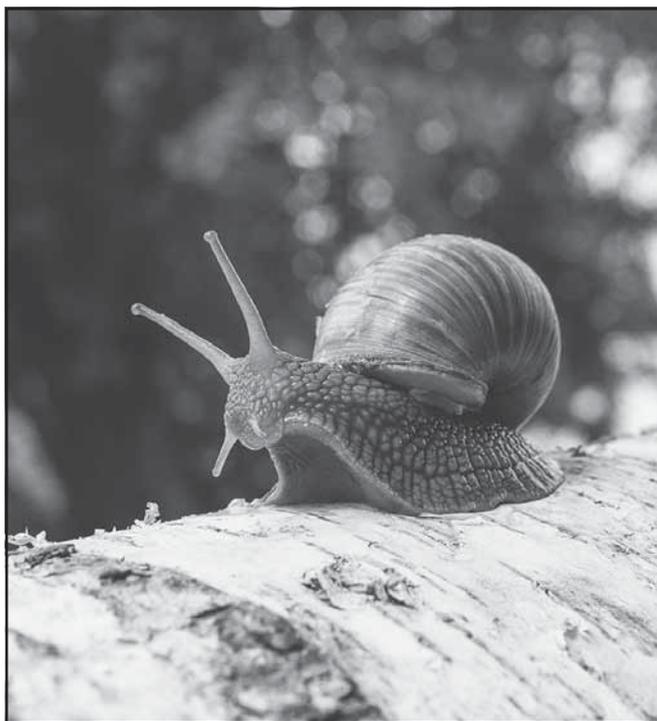
Snail farming can be carried out through different methods and in various environments. Here's an overview of the key methods and environments for snail farming.

- **Outdoors.** Snail farms can be established in outdoor environments, such as gardens, open fields or dedicated snail farms.

- **Indoors.** Some snail farmers opt for controlled indoor environments that allow them to regulate the temperature, humidity and other environmental factors to create ideal conditions.

- **Closed systems.** Closed environments like plastic tunnel houses or greenhouses offer another option for snail farming.

Moreover, snails can be bred and hatched inside a controlled environment, such as an incubation chamber, and then



transferred to outdoor pens to mature.

The benefits

Snail farming offers several advantages over traditional livestock farming, making it an attractive venture for both experienced and novice farmers. Snail farming offers the following benefits:

- It has a low carbon footprint
- It doesn't require much space
- It has low startup costs compared to other

types of farming

Plus, snails are slow-moving, gentle and easy to control.

Snails can be used for their meat, shells and eggs, providing farmers with various income streams, making snail farming an attractive option in the modern agricultural landscape.



5 weeding tools used in vegetable production

Weed control is as important in your vegetable garden as it is in large-scale commercial production. Although herbicides are frequently used to minimize weed growth, several agricultural tools provide excellent results. Here are five:

1. **Rotary hoes.** This tool allows you to weed an entire area before the crop emerges. You can also use it after the crop is well rooted.

2. **Wheel weeders.** These tools are used both close to the crops and between the rows. You can attach them to various pieces of agricultural equipment to simplify their use.

3. **Weeding discs.** These tools are used to remove weeds from a row when the crops are developed enough to prevent them from being buried or

uprooted.

4. **Weed torches.** Using intense heat or flame makes it possible to remove weeds between the rows. It can also weed closer to the crops, provided certain precautions are taken to avoid harming them.

5. **Mechanical weeders.** These tools can be equipped with guidance systems to enable precision weeding. The cameras can be calibrated to differentiate crops from weeds based on data like the plant's color, size and position.

Do you want to know more about the weeding techniques used by your local farmers? Start the conversation by visiting their produce stands or an open farm day.

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