

# THE REPORTER

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## Wentzville Farmers Try Chicken Tractors



### The Heart of a Farm

Where is the heart of a farm? It's beating in the breast of the person who knows that his/her work day starts the moment feet hit the floor, seven days a week, rain or shine, snuffles or not – the animals are waiting, the fields are calling, the old familiar smell of the barn already filling the nostrils. That old farm dog waiting by the door, those chickens glad to survive another night of enemy prowlers, those cows dutifully lining up for the milking or the feeding. The farmer layers on the clothes, knocks yesterday's dirt off the gloves; and, before breakfast, goes out the door in all weathers to greet the animals, warm the machinery, investigate the fence rows and scout the fields. With callused hands and sun-weathered face, the farmer puts in a long, hard day's work.

The heart of the farm is in those individuals who, each day, weigh risk against promise and rise to the work again



### Farm Feature

**Blind horse, wayward bird, unwanted donkey...Here is your home: where vegetables grow, animals roam, and humans are happy — The Kim Dewalter Farm.**

and again. Recently a small, but unique, farm revealed its heart to *The Reporter*. That heart is Kim Dauwalter: a vegetable farmer with egg-laying hens and a variety of animals on a patch of land in Forstell.

Kim isn't a farmer by birth. She grew up in Ferguson, Mo., the daughter of Ben and Betty Gold. She originally had an interest in cooking, and earned a degree in restaurant and hotel management. "Actually I really wanted to be a jet pilot," she revealed, "but all

See KIM, pg. 2

## News & Notes

### Hoormann is Agronomy Specialist for County

University of Missouri Extension has appointed Rich Hoormann, EC Region Agronomy Specialist, to provide agronomy coverage for St. Charles County. Rich is based in the Montgomery County Extension Center located in Montgomery City.



He can be contacted (573)564-3733 or by email at hoormannr@missouri.edu Hoormann has 26 years of experience working in extension services in Nebraska and Missouri, plus 10 years working in the agriculture industry for Farmland Industries, Agrilience, Cropland Genetics and Monsanto.

The name may be familiar to many landowners in St. Charles County because Hoormann served as the Extension Agronomist Specialist here during the years of 1983-1995.

"It will be good to renew friendships, visit farms and see the changes," Hoormann said. "I am also looking forward to working with the next generation, as many of the farmers I worked with have retired and turned over day-to-day operations to sons and daughters."

**KIM, from pg. 1**

the adults were saying, 'no, be a secretary.' So I got the degree in restaurant management thinking I wouldn't be stuck in an office, and that it could be different every day."

So she tried that for a while; and by the late 80s she was married and expecting a child. Kim's daughter Jennafer was nine when they decided to move west to the Foristell area to "be out of the suburbs and have a more country feel with space to spread out."

By that time, Kim had been diagnosed with Multiple Sclerosis - a physically debilitating disease that is progressive and incurable.

"It was bad, but it wasn't going to stop me," she recalled. "I was raised with a strong work ethic, learned from my mom. You work for what you want, and you can do more than you think you can."

Kim runs the entire farm herself, getting help when needed but completing all the daily chores herself. She has either purchased or devised a variety of contraptions and tools to make her work possible. Among them, a lift chair with a remote control to pluck her from the wheelchair and set her on the tractor; a golf-ball retriever adapted to grab eggs from nest boxes; and a remote controlled pulley system to raise a bucket and swing it through a little door to provide a special diet to her oldest horse.



Her wheelchair, encrusted with farm soil around the bottom, can transport her anywhere on the farm—even into the fields where she checks the crops and pulls weeds.

"I have four acres in produce, and a high tunnel which I cost-shared on with the NRCS." She grows tomatoes, cucumbers, peppers, squash, sweet corn, turnips, beets, pumpkins and garlic; and sells the produce in two little shops on her property. In addition, Kim accepts a few products like honey from other local growers. Within the shops, visitors will also find a variety of painted gourds, bird houses and planting pots - all hand-painted by Kim.



And then there are the animals.

"It started with three goats," she explained. "I was housing a few animals for a friend while he put up a new fence. My pre-teen daughter soon fell in love with the animals, and our friend let her keep three goats. Shortly after that we went to Long Meadow Rescue Ranch in Union to adopt a couple more goats."

Kim had been in a wheelchair for about 11 years by that time. Taking on more animals certainly wasn't a priority, but Long Meadow Rescue Ranch is a hard place to leave if you are an animal lover and if you understand how it feels to be lame or unwanted.

"Jennafer also fell in love with a pony named Buddy. The ranch really wanted to place him and a couple other special needs ponies. We looked them over, and in the end we left that day with three old ponies and five goats. The other two ponies, Trixi and Dusty are now 32 and 37 respectively.

As if that wasn't enough, a few years later Kim received a call about a black and white pony named Poco that needed a home. "So we took Poco, but we didn't realize how attached this pony was to a donkey it had been living with. That donkey, Elvis, wasn't getting along with the other horses at our friend's farm, and our friend had sent Elvis to two other homes before calling me to say the donkey was going to market. Of course I said I would take him!"

Once Poco and Elvis were back together, Elvis' behavior problems improved. By then Kim had acquired the egg-laying hens, peacocks and ducks. Soon she purchased a riding horse for Jennafer—a full-bred Half-linger named Stanza who is now the old horse who receives the special diet; and then two mini ponies named Shorty and Magic joined the group. The hodge-podge of animals is rounded out by two black cats, and a rescued dog named Baby.

"Once an animal comes here, they will stay till the end of their days. They become like family. The animals and the crops are the reasons to get up each morning. They need me, and I'm happy to take care of them."

While Kim is extremely independent, physically strong, and fiercely determined, she still asks for and accepts help when needed. Vocational

Rehabilitation services has assisted with repairs and modifications for the tractor and the lift. Lincoln University's Farm Outreach Worker Reneesha Auboug, has helped Kim connect with other growers to

provide opportunities and encourage partnerships. For example, Kim is now leasing some of her fields to a garlic grower who will then sell the fresh garlic in Kim's shops.

"The best part about growing your own food is knowing where it came from. I like to invite families out to my farm so they can see the fields where their vegetables have grown, and I can show them the animals. People are so many generations removed from the farm these days that I think it is important to show children where their food really comes from."

Kim also occasionally receives help from neighbors. "One of my favorite neighbors is a 92-year old gentleman who understands the growing seasons. I always watch to see when he plants, and that's when I plant." Other neighbors nearby will come to Kim's aid in an emergency.

"I do fall sometimes," she said. "But I always have my cell-phone, and I have some wonderful friends who live close by. Besides, if there is a will, there is a way; and the animals need me". That is the heart of this farm.

## County Producers Embrace Cover Crops

The District began offering Cover Crops as a permanent conservation cost-share practice this fiscal year, beginning in July 2015. The response has been overwhelmingly positive, with the District cost-sharing on approximately 1,600 acres across the county. This represents a huge benefit to all the citizens of St. Charles County as we will begin to see the benefits of cleaner stormwater runoff and healthier, more productive soils.

The cost-share program serves as an incentive to get farmers to try something "new" or different. At one time, no-till was a new idea that farmers worried would just add another layer of risk to their already risk-laden profession. Over time, no-till has proven to be extremely beneficial to soil health, and has saved our country's waters.

Similar benefits are being seen with cover crops. Producers have seen increased biological activity, specifically the return of great numbers of earthworms; and have reported that root activity in the soil has greatly improved surface soil structure. In addition, producers across the United States who have been in a cover crop program for 2 to 5 years are reporting increased yields on their cover cropped fields.

To learn more, contact the SWCD at 636-922-2833, ext. 3

## Terraces Address Gully Erosion on Borgman Farm



Before terracing, this ditch was approximately 3 feet wide and 2 feet deep, and ran to the tree line.

Phase one controlled erosion on the upper part of the hill, using water and sediment control basins. Water is removed using underground outlets. Immediately following construction, rains challenged the basins, but they performed as expected, collecting silt from the recently disturbed slopes. No-till planting of the cash crop minimized soil disturbance. Harvest allowed for a new look at the basins, and sediment was removed from the channels and cover crops were planted. Stop in the office for your copy of the guide sheet: *Terrace Inlets: Why Orifices are Important*.



After terracing: Three risers and terraces are seen, effectively eliminating the gully on the upper portion of the field.

## Soil Science 101 - Soil Texture and Structure

Soils are made up of four basic components: sand, silt, clay, and organic matter. Soil Texture refers to the way the soil feels based on the percentages present of three of those components. Sand and silt are formed by the breaking down of bedrock, and usually reflect the parent material below the soil layers. Sand is the largest particle, is round in shape, and has low water-holding ability. Silt is the middle sized piece, is blocky in shape, and is better at holding water. Clay, which is made up of silicon, aluminum and oxygen, is the smallest particle, is usually flat in shape, and has a high water-holding capacity.

The ideal soil, sometimes referred to as a loam, is a mix of sand, silt and clay, with a high level of organic matter. A mix of these differently shaped particle sizes has the best potential to move water throughout the soil profile, and hold water for plant use.

Soil structure refers to the shape of soil clumps, and is determined by the individual particles in relation to each other. Soil structure is one of the most important physical properties of soil, and will greatly affect its productivity.

Soil clumps, often called aggregates are bound together to form soil peds. Peds come in different shapes and may be rounded, blocky, platy, or columnar. The shape and arrangement of the peds will determine the amount of pore spaces



of air and water. A granular structure, which would include smaller aggregates with rounded edges, is the best for growing plants because it has both large and small pore spaces.

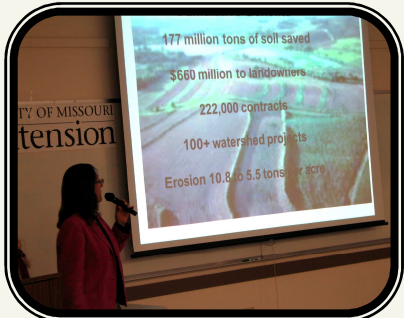
Stable aggregates are made possible through the presence and activity of organic matter. An aggregate without organic matter would fall apart when set in water, whereas water stable aggregates will sustain their structure even in extreme conditions like heavy rains.

A land manager has no control over the texture of the soil (the amount of sand, silt and clay); but can greatly influence structure. When we plow, cultivate, lime, add organic matter, and stimulate biological activity, we can change soil structure. Bacteria and roots produce a sticky substance that glues particles together. Fungi and root hairs wrap soil particles into balls forming aggregates. This process is further assisted by excretions from bacteria, and digestion by earthworms.

Stable aggregates are promoted through the use of cover crops and the reduction of tillage. If you can reduce your tillage, you will reduce disturbance to the soil food web, and allow bacteria and fungi to do their work to form water stable aggregates. To learn more, contact the Soil & Water Conservation District, 636-922-2833, ext. 1.

# District Holds 71st Annual Meeting; 100 Cooperators in Attendance

The 71st Annual Meeting of the St. Charles County Soil & Water Conservation District Cooperators was held November 19 at the University Extension Building in St. Peters. Around 100 cooperators and landowners were in attendance to enjoy a Thanksgiving-style buffet dinner accented by a variety of homemade side dishes and desserts.



The guest speaker was Colleen Meredith (below), Director of the State's Soil and Water Conservation Program. She provided information about the program through the years, highlighting the accomplishments of the districts and landowners, and the benefits of the conservation practices that

have been implemented. She localized her presentation and included facts about St. Charles County, specifically mentioning local men and women who helped establish the dedicated sales tax that supports the program today. She also pointed out that the St. Charles County citizens have provided the highest percentage of votes that passed the tax 10 years ago, surpassing the state average and all non-urban counties.

The district was pleased to be able to award the Cooperator of the Year recognition to James Borgman who has consistently used no-till as a conservation practice to save soil; has implemented cover crops on grain crop fields to improve soil health and water quality, and installed waterways and water and sediment control basins to reduce gully erosion.



Landowner and Conservation Cooperator, James Borgman, top at left, was presented the Cooperator of the Year award by Don Johnson, Chairman of the SWCD Board of Supervisors.. James has taken several steps on his land to improve soil health, save soil resources and protect water resources. James is seen at right with wife, Diane.

**Congratulations James!!**



The district would like to extend deep appreciation to the businesses and individuals who donated items for door prizes.

- FCS Financial**
- Tractor Supply Farm & Home**
- Straatman Feed**
- Affordable Accounting & Tax Services**
- Edwards Bros.**
- Jo Leah Roberson**
- Don Johnson**
- Katy Land Trust**
- Farmer's Coop**
- Mordt Tractor**
- Charles Farm and Home**
- Sydenstricker**
- Denise Camel**
- Lincoln University**
- Saale Farm & Grain & ASE Farms**
- Leonhard Insurance**
- Rural King**
- The Victor L Phillips Holding Co.**
- St. Charles County Government**
- SWCD**
- The Brandt Family**



**The SWCD Board of Supervisors are:**

- Don Johnson**
- Paul Kamphoefner**
- Sam Harris**
- Adam Bonderer**
- Nathan Brandt (interim secretary)**

**The SWCD Staff are:**

- Frankie Coleman, Manager**
- Charles Perkins, Technician**
- Theresa Dunlap, Information/Education**

**The NRCS staff are:**

- Renee Cook, District Conservationist**
- Shawn Keller, Soil Conservationist**
- Curtis Hoeft, Soil Conservationist**

**Lauren Iffrig, Volunteer**

The Soil & Water Conservation District (SWCD) and the USDA Natural Resources Conservation District are equal opportunities and employers.