

NEW FARMERS

Getting a Head Start

Farm Service Agency Youth Loans Help Prepare These Two Young Farmers For Success.

By Thomas Becker

The Farm Service Agency has a Youth Loan program to assist young future farmers in getting starting in the agriculture industry. This past spring, Peter Martens applied for a Youth Loan to plant organic corn, oats, soybeans, peas and spelt in conjunction with his parent's farming operation.

GOING WITH THE GRAIN

This is the second year for Peter's operation under the Youth Loan program. He had a successful season in 2005 through the use of sound management and some solid guidance from experienced mentors. These included his parents Klaas and Mary Howell Martens, Penn Yan agriculture teacher and FFA advisor John Kriese, and Farm Service Agency staff.

Peter's profit from 2005 enabled him to purchase a tractor and to increase the amount of rental property for 2006. Peter is up to about 180 acres under his control. The Youth Loan has helped Peter understand break even

points along with using crop insurance to minimize risk and safeguard against natural disasters.

Every year, as part of the loan application, the FSA loan officer develops a farm business plan with Peter that both he and his mentors are comfortable with. Peter is able to lock in prices for the crops he will be producing through Lakeview Organic Grain, a Penn Yan feed mill owned and operated by his parents.

The Youth Loan program helps Peter pull resources together to gain the knowledge and experience he'll need to pursue farming on his own. Peter also serves as Treasurer of the Penn Yan Future Farmers of America chapter and plans to participate until graduating from high school.

SPRINGING AHEAD WITH HEIFERS

Peter's sister Elizabeth Martens also received a Youth Loan this spring for a heifer raising project. Through her research, Elizabeth discovered that certified organic Holstein spring-

ing heifers have a high market demand and pay a premium above conventional heifers.

With the assistance of FFA advisor John Kriese, her parents and the FSA loan officer, Elizabeth was able to develop a farm business plan that involved purchasing 4 open dairy heifers, feeding them organic grain grown on the family farm along with some purchased organic feeds, breeding the heifers via artificial insemination, and selling them as certified organic springing heifers.

Elizabeth diligently researched the requirements for organic certification of milk cows and developed a time line to ensure that organic certification would be obtained prior to sale. She had to carefully evaluate her costs and the tools available to minimize risk. Elizabeth was able to get some of the sample grains from Lakeview Organic Grain for free to help lower her feed expense, and she was able to add the cattle to her parent's farm insurance policy.

Elizabeth's long term goal is to study veterinary medicine. She wants to establish several agriculture enterprises to help finance her col-

COWS AND CROPS

Animal Welfare --
What DO People Think?

By Larry E. Chase

Animal welfare is a hot topic among some producers and consumers of animal products. But what does the general public think about farm animals and their well being?

We can get some insight from a survey conducted in 2004 by the Social Responsibility Initiative at Ohio State University. Andrew Rauch and Jeff Sharp from the Department of Human and Community Resource Development were the authors.

Surveys were sent to 3,500 randomly selected Ohioans. The response rate was 56%. The majority of the respondents lived in a city or suburb (62%) and about 4% resided on a farm. Here's what they found:

92% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that it is important for farm animals to be well-cared for.

85% indicated that the quality of animal lives is important even though some animals are used for meat production. 81% believe that the well-being of farm



With the help of an FSA Youth Loan and some dedicated mentors, Elizabeth Martens and her brother Peter are developing their own farm enterprises while still in high school and living at home.

lege. Currently, her responsibilities on the home farm include taking care of the family animals, assisting with the grain crops and helping to bale hay. She is also active in FFA.

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animals is just as important as the well-being of pets.

75% of the respondents felt that farm animals should be protected from physical pain.

Only 33% were interested in learning more about farm animals.

47% said they agreed or strongly agreed that increased regulation of the treatment of farm animals is needed.

59% said that they would be willing to pay more for meat, poultry or dairy products labeled as coming from humanely treated animals. Within this group, 43% said they would be willing to pay 10% more for these products, and 12% said they would pay 25% more.

These results demonstrate that people in Ohio are concerned about how producers treat their animals. It is interesting that a majority are willing to pay more for products from "humanely treated" animals. It would be helpful to have similar data for the Northeast.

Reprinted from the January 2006 Dairy Agent Update, from Cornell University's Total Dairy Management Program.

Larry E. Chase is a Professor in the Department of Animal Science at Cornell University.

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