

# North Dakota

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# AGRICULTURE

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**NORTH DAKOTA  
DEPARTMENT OF  
AGRICULTURE**

Local Food  
Access

The Next  
Generation

Pivoting in the  
Pandemic

# Pasture *to* Plate





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27 SUSTAINABILITY

# Champions of Conservation

North Dakota farmers work to ensure they leave the soil better than they found it

6 AG PROFILE

### North Dakota Agriculture

An overview of the state's food, farming and agribusiness sectors

8 TOP AG PRODUCTS

### What's Growing in North Dakota

A glimpse at the state's leading ag products



10 MEAT

### Pasture to Plate

Producers reap numerous benefits selling retail meat cuts directly to consumers

14 RESOURCES

### Consumer Connection

Local foods map links consumers and producers

17 AG TECHNOLOGY

### Growing Grand

Grand Farm looks to the future of agriculture

18 DAIRY

### Dairy Delights

North Dakota dairy processors churn out award-winning ice cream, gelato and more

22 PANDEMIC

### Pride and Perseverance

Entrepreneurs transform their businesses during a tumultuous year

24 TECHNOLOGY

### What's Trending?

Younger farmers utilize technology to connect, innovate and advance

28 FEDERAL GRANTS

### North Dakota CARES

Grants, cost-share programs assist businesses, organizations working diligently to keep consumers fed and healthy

30 AGRIBUSINESS

### Movers and Shakers

How resourceful North Dakota companies pivoted amid the pandemic

33 HEMP

### Green Gold

North Dakota's hemp industry is growing strong

## COVER STORY

PAGE 10

Calli and CJ Thorne run Triangle M Ranch & Feedlot in Watford City. *Photo by Colby Lysne*

PHOTOS: FROM TOP: PAUL BROWN; ISTOCK.COM/VITALINA



# I AM PASSING ON MY GRANDPARENTS' LEGACY.



## ACHIEVE MORE.

For generations farmers have served as the backbone of North Dakota's success. Bank of North Dakota thanks farmers, ranchers and ag lenders for partnering with us to create a strong agricultural economy.

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# North Dakota AGRICULTURE

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Please recycle this magazine.



Commissioner Goehring is a third-generation farmer who operates a 2,600-acre, no-till farm with his son, Dustin.

## Welcome to North Dakota Agriculture!

Whether you live in our beautiful state or are just visiting, take some time to get to know our farmers and ranchers.

Agriculture plays an important role in the lives of all North Dakotans. One of our state's largest industries, agriculture represents and encompasses much of our rich heritage and culture. In fact, almost 25% of our workforce is employed by agriculture, and nearly 90% of our land is used to support it.

This diverse and vibrant industry produces a wide variety of products used here and around the world, thanks largely to the hard work and use of efficient production practices by our 26,000 farmers and ranchers.

In this fifth edition, find out the latest agriculture statistics, what's growing in North Dakota, trends in ag technology and the future of agriculture.

We'll tell you about a few of our dairy processors creating the most delicious ice cream, gelato and more; show you how the state's hemp industry is set for success; and introduce you to some conservation champions.

Come along with us as we tell you about how more livestock producers are delivering meat straight to you and find the nearest one using our updated local foods map.

You'll learn how North Dakota entrepreneurs pivoted during the pandemic to transform their businesses; and how grants and cost-share programs helped keep consumers fed and healthy.

North Dakota has been blessed with abundant resources and a varied landscape that enable our farmers and ranchers to produce food, feed, fiber and fuel for families near and far. It is my hope that by sharing an in-depth look at North Dakota agriculture, you will come away with a greater understanding and appreciation for the men and women who produce the products you use every day.

While it's my honor to serve as Agriculture Commissioner, I am also a third-generation farmer. My son and I operate a 2,600-acre, no-till farm near Menoken in south central North Dakota, where we raise corn, soybeans, spring wheat, sunflowers and barley. As farmers and ranchers, we want to show you how agriculture touches all of our lives.

Enjoy this issue of *North Dakota Agriculture*!

Sincerely,

Doug Goehring  
 North Dakota Agriculture Commissioner



# North Dakota Agriculture

An overview of the state's food, farming and agribusiness sectors

TOTAL  
FARMS:  
**26,000**

**50**  
FARMERS  
MARKETS

ECONOMIC  
IMPACT: **\$7.5B**

PRODUCTION VALUE:  
**\$8,200,000,000**  
80% CROPS | 20% LIVESTOCK

**\$4.1B**  
AGRI-  
CULTURE  
EXPORTS | FEMALE  
FARMERS:  
**6,958**

**12,127** HEAD OF  
BISON

Sources: North Dakota Department of Agriculture,  
USDA National Agricultural Statistics Service

## VITAL, DIVERSE, RESILIENT

– these are just a few words that describe North Dakota's thriving agriculture industry and those who are a part of it. Despite the challenges of a changing economy, a pandemic, weather difficulties and more, North Dakota's 26,000 farmers and ranchers continue to be some of the best in the nation, producing crops and commodities for the world.

The state's farms are spread across 39.3 million acres – nearly 90% of North Dakota's land area – with the average farm spanning about 1,512 acres.

These farmers and ranchers work hard to produce some of the state's top commodities, which include spring and durum wheat, dry edible beans, canola, flaxseed, oats and honey. In fact, North Dakota spring and durum wheat production is important for not only the state but for the nation as well, as it accounts for 52% and 47% of U.S. production, respectively.

Livestock is also an important agricultural sector for the state, and North Dakota has more than two cattle for every citizen. There are approximately 12,127 head of bison in the state, which are raised for meat and hides.

North Dakota agriculture extends well beyond commodities and crops. Agritourism, agribusiness and food processing, innovative technology, local food and farmers markets, and agricultural education all contribute to the state's thriving industry. With continued hard work and diversification, the industry is poised for continued growth.



## Save the Trees

North Dakota is doing its part to defend its forests from encroachment of the Emerald Ash Borer (EAB) – a pest that feeds under the bark of true ash trees, killing them within a few years.

North Dakota has about 90 million ash trees, and ash trees are the most abundant tree species in naturally forested areas. While the state hasn't had signs of EAB yet, they have been found in surrounding states.

An effective way to prevent the spread is to use local firewood. EAB typically live in firewood or raw logs that have been brought in from an infected area. To help with this, the North Dakota Department of Agriculture has partnered with a free firewood finder to help users find and advertise local firewood at [firewoodscout.org](http://firewoodscout.org).



## Access Granted

To help continue growing North Dakota's agriculture industry, the Agricultural Products Utilization Commission creates new wealth and employment opportunities through the development of new and expanded uses of the state's commodities.

Up to 15 qualifying applicants present funding proposals on a quarterly basis to receive grants in categories like basic and applied research, marketing and utilization, nature-based agritourism and more.

In previous years, grants have been awarded to projects such as maximizing honeybee pollination to increase sunflower-oil yield, marketing, a bacon-yield improvement process and many more.

Learn more about the grants and how to apply at [nd.gov/ndda/apuc](http://nd.gov/ndda/apuc).



## We Can Work It Out

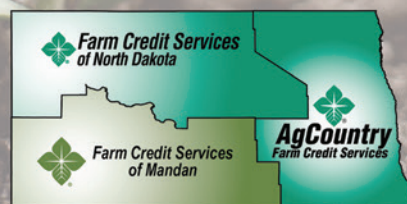
Sometimes, conflict in business is unavoidable. When issues arise, the North Dakota Department of Agriculture is here to help. The Department's Mediation Service (NDMS) exists to assist financially distressed farmers and ranchers. From farm credit issues to disputes over participation in USDA programs, NDMS demonstrates that regardless of the nature of the dispute, mediation can improve communication. It can help repair the relationship between parties, help tailor solutions that work for both parties, and is typically faster and cheaper than traditional litigation. The voluntary and confidential program provides a credit counselor and/or mediator through the department who can help both parties examine and discuss the issues, then come up with possible solutions. Farmers and ranchers can utilize mediation for a wide range of issues, such as disputes with federal and state agencies, agricultural credit, easements, property access and more. To learn more, visit [nd.gov/ndda/program/north-dakota-mediation-service](http://nd.gov/ndda/program/north-dakota-mediation-service).

# When it Comes to Financing, Farmers and Ranchers Trust Farm Credit

We've been helping agriculture and rural communities grow for more than a century.



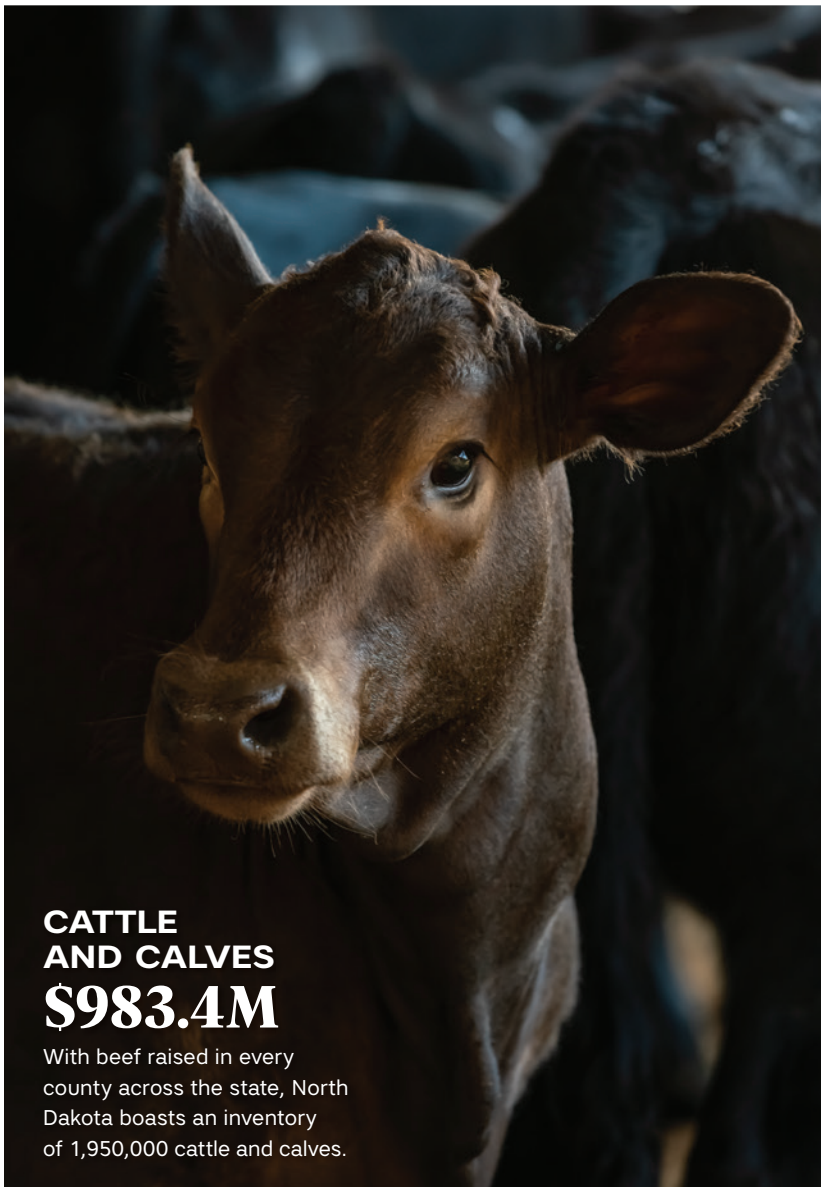
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**Farm Credit Services of North Dakota**  
800-264-1265 | [FarmCreditND.com](http://FarmCreditND.com)





# What's Growing in North Dakota

A glimpse at the state's leading ag products based on cash receipts\*



## CATTLE AND CALVES \$983.4M

With beef raised in every county across the state, North Dakota boasts an inventory of 1,950,000 cattle and calves.



## CORN \$1.4B

North Dakota's corn harvest included 3.13 million acres of corn for grain, which produced more than 410 million bushels in 2019. The same year, the state's corn for silage harvest totaled 140,000 acres, producing over 2.7 million tons.



## WHEAT \$1.6B

North Dakota farmers harvested more than 6.6 million acres of wheat in 2019, including 6 million acres of spring wheat, 610,000 acres of durum wheat and 70,000 acres of winter wheat. Altogether, the state's wheat production totaled nearly 321.2 million bushels in 2019, and the same year, North Dakota ranked No. 1 nationally in wheat cash receipts.

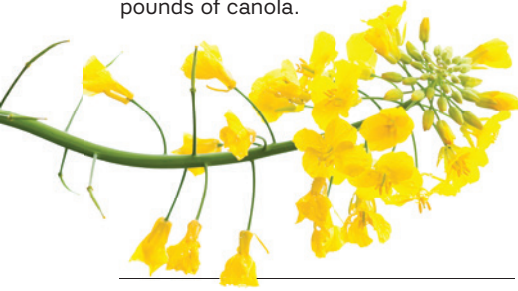
### \*WHAT ARE CASH RECEIPTS?

Defined by the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Economic Research Service, cash receipts refer to the total amount of crops or livestock sold in a calendar year.



## CANOLA \$541.7M

North Dakota's canola harvest totaled 1.61 million acres in 2019 and resulted in the production of nearly 2.9 billion pounds of canola.



## SOYBEANS \$1.7B

In 2019, North Dakota ranked ninth nationally in soybean production, with farmers harvesting 5.4 million acres of soybeans and producing 170.1 million bushels of the crop.



## POTATOES \$202.7M

North Dakota's 2019 harvest of 58,000 acres of potatoes produced more than 19.4 million hundredweight of the crop.



## BARLEY \$121.2M

Often produced for the malting and brewing industry, barley has a statewide economic impact of \$740 million each year.

## SUGAR BEETS \$192.6M

North Dakota's sugar beet harvest was 170,000 acres in 2019 and produced 4.42 million tons of the vegetable.



## DRY BEANS \$220M

Approximately 91% of the dry beans grown in North Dakota belong to the pinto, navy and black bean market classes, but varieties such as kidney, pink, small red and cranberry beans are also grown in small quantities across the state.

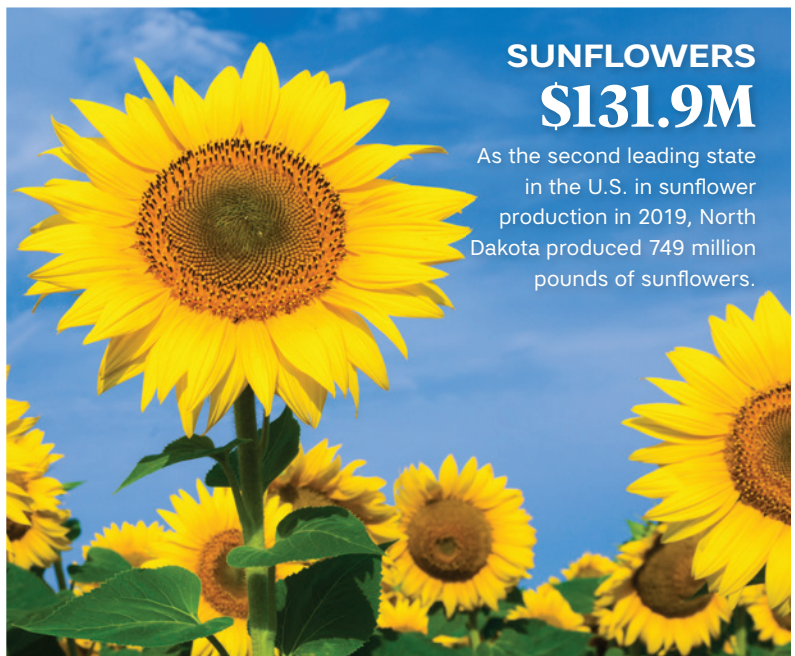


### **Find more online**

Learn more about agricultural crops and commodities in North Dakota online at [NDagriculture.com](http://NDagriculture.com).

## SUNFLOWERS \$131.9M

As the second leading state in the U.S. in sunflower production in 2019, North Dakota produced 749 million pounds of sunflowers.





# PASTURE *to* PLATE

Producers reap numerous benefits selling retail meat cuts directly to consumers

**T**hrowing juicy burger patties or a tender steak into our cart at the supermarket isn't something we usually put much thought into. But when the pandemic closed large meat processors and caused

shortages in stores, many producers moved quickly to sell meat directly to consumers.

### **Beef Profits Are No Joke**

Calli and CJ Thorne operate Triangle M Ranch & Feedlot,

a cow-calf operation and feedlot near Watford City. No one in four generations of Calli's ranching family had ever considered selling directly to consumers on a large scale. So Calli thought CJ was joking one April evening when



By selling direct to consumers, Calli and CJ Thorne of Triangle M Ranch & Feedlot increased profits – and relationships with consumers.



he suggested they start selling beef. “It’s very easy for a producer to just keep doing what they’ve been doing and not look for something that might work better,” Calli says. Within a week after that first discussion, the pair had applied for a retail meat license. By mid-May 2020, they’d already sold the equivalent of 40 head of beef cuts. By the end of the year, the Thornes had processed more than 120 cattle.

Their new venture has made significant financial sense for the Thornes. In 2020, average profit margins were projected to be \$57 per calf, Calli says. “By using a local butcher shop and then direct marketing our beef to consumers, we were able to have an average profit of \$550 per head.”

She says there’s been an

emotional reward as well. “It’s fun to talk with people about what we do and why we do it,” she says. “To see the end result, our meat going to other families to help feed them, has been very rewarding.”

### **Clamoring for Lamb**

Joana Friesz took her retail lamb cuts to participate in a pop-up meat market at a closed Kmart parking lot in Fargo in May 2020. “When I pulled into the parking lot, it was full of cars, and I said to the friend who’d come along with me, ‘I thought Kmart was closed,’ but we got busy getting situated and didn’t think much of it,” Friesz recalls. “It wasn’t even time for us to open and all these people started coming out of these cars. It was like a scene from *The Walking Dead*.”

Friesz Family Farm near New Salem has raised sheep for more than 40 years. Friesz hand-makes wool items from her flocks of registered Corriedale, Border Leicester and Lincoln sheep, along with raising breeding stock. She sells frozen farm-raised lamb cuts, snack sticks and country-style sausage and brats at farmers markets, Pride of Dakota events, her local grocery store and a few specialty stores. “I wanted to promote North Dakota-raised lamb to customers,” she says of her motivation to sell retail. “People are so excited they can get locally raised lamb.”

### **Seizing the Opportunity**

Fourth-generation rancher Ryan Fleck had sold whole and half beef





and pork but had never sold farm-raised retail pork cuts until his butcher, Justin Hill, suggested it.

“He saw an opportunity because of a lack of butcher shops,” says Fleck, owner of Cross on a Bench Meats near New Salem.

Fleck sold over 100 pigs in 2020 and estimates he’ll send as many as 200 pigs to market this year. Fleck sells through his Facebook page, Pride of Dakota, and pop-up markets and delivers statewide. He says his pork retail business will cover two-thirds of his family’s living expenses this year.

At one Fargo market, Fleck sold his entire inventory in about 30 minutes, but even folks who arrived too late to purchase told him how much they appreciated the opportunity to buy direct off the farm. “That’s really rewarding to me because I get to see the person who’s buying my product,” he says. “People say they will continue to buy local, and I hope that’s true. We should all be eating as much of our own North Dakota produce, meats and other things as much as we can.”

– Kim Hill

## MEAT STATS



The U.S. produces **13%** of the world’s pork.

Beef and lamb are both classified as red meat, due to their high concentrations of **myoglobin** (an iron-rich protein that gives meat its red hue).

**IN 2020, THE U.S. EXPORTED**

**6.56 billion**

**POUNDS OF PORK TO OTHER COUNTRIES, VALUED AT MORE THAN**

**\$7.7 billion.**

**Beef contains 10 essential nutrients:**

- Protein
- Vitamins B6 & B12
- Iron
- Zinc
- Riboflavin
- Niacin
- Phosphorus
- Choline
- Selenium

Lamb meat provides all **nine** essential amino acids that the body needs for growth and health.

*Sources: Pork Checkoff, North Dakota Beef Commission, Healthline, Nutrition Advance*



**Find more online**

For more information about the state’s industrious farmers and ranchers, visit [NDagriculture.com](http://NDagriculture.com).



# BNSF DELIVERS *for* AMERICAN FARMERS

Company's roots in agriculture run deep

With nearly 40 million acres of farmland, agriculture adds approximately \$10.9 billion annually to the North Dakota economy. BNSF Railway partners with the state's farmers and producers to keep the ag economy growing.

## AGRICULTURE IS IN BNSF'S DNA.

Throughout the company's ranks, employees, including executive leadership, grew up in farming communities and often in farm families. BNSF values and invests in resources to keep its agriculture relationship strong.

"In 2003, BNSF introduced the ombudsmen role to ensure we had local agricultural connectivity in specific markets and to provide them with a single source of contact with BNSF," says Jim Titsworth, general director of agricultural development. "Their focus is to be an advocate with the railroad and preserve this ever-important relationship.

"The first ombudsman was put in place in early 2004, and now we have three that serve our agricultural communities in the North and Midwest who are deeply entrenched with our producers and are intimately familiar with the concerns and issues as some of them are ranchers and farmers themselves," he continues.

BNSF is the only railroad that makes this concerted outreach effort to the agricultural community. Working closely with producers and customers means BNSF is prepared with the right capacity to keep record volumes of agriculture products moving.

BNSF is a vital link in the agricultural supply chain that begins on the farm with tractors and combines and includes trucks, trains, ships, mills, retail stores, grocery sacks, and, finally, dinner tables around the world.

BNSF is the largest grain transporter by rail in North America and knows the importance of providing reliable transportation services. The company spends

millions annually to expand and improve infrastructure to keep it strong and the network fluid.

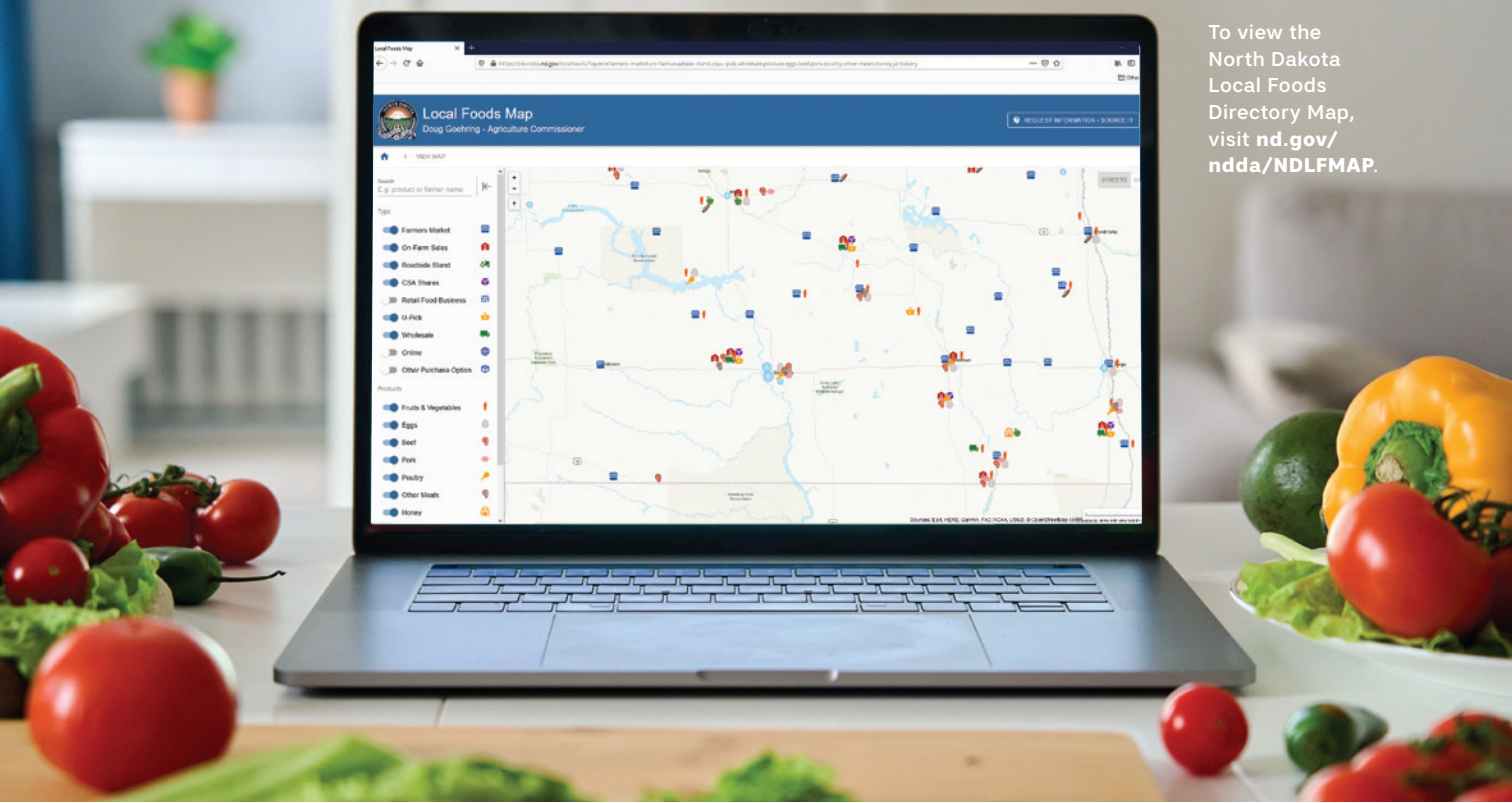
"At BNSF, we have a longtime commitment with the American producers that has lasted more than 170 years," says Angela Caddell, BNSF group vice president of Agricultural Products.

"Together, over the years, we have innovated to make the U.S. farming supply chain one of the most efficient and productive in the world," she adds. "We have always been a critical link to delivering agricultural products whenever and wherever they're needed, and we're proud to provide that service."

For more information, visit [bnsf.com/ag](https://www.bnsf.com/ag).







To view the North Dakota Local Foods Directory Map, visit [nd.gov/ndda/NDLFMAP](http://nd.gov/ndda/NDLFMAP).

# CONSUMER CONNECTION

Local foods map links consumers and producers

**D**emand for local-raised beef has doubled annually since 2015 for Feiring's Grassfed Beef, a family ranching operation putting itself on the literal map in western North Dakota.

"Our business is to make connections with our customers and have that good relationship," says Trish Feiring, who runs the grass-fed beef and pastured poultry business with her husband, Donnie, and their two daughters in Beach. "We want to sell a product, not just a commodity."

The North Dakota Department of Agriculture (NDDA) has placed food producers like the Feirings on a digital map, pinpointing opportunities for consumers to connect with farmers and ranchers to buy local foods. While available for years, the map's use skyrocketed when COVID-19 hit, prompting the department to enhance it for optimum user experience.

Pre-pandemic, about a half-dozen North Dakotans a day browsed the map of direct-sales

locations in the state where they could buy beef, fresh eggs, produce and home-canned goods. That spiked to around 400 visits per day during the pandemic's early months, says Jamie Good, local foods and organics marketing specialist for the NDDA.

"The pandemic caused a big shift for folks looking for alternatives in their own backyard," he says. "The pandemic really made people want to understand where their food is coming from and take a hard look at that."



## Meeting Local Demand

The demand for local food exceeds the capacity for time and labor at the Feiring family's ranch, where they raise broilers for poultry meat, cattle for beef and laying hens for eggs. They sell beef in quantities as small as snack sticks to as large as freezer-filling cuts by the quarter, half or whole animal.

"More and more people understand that a tie between the producer and the consumer is important," Trish says. "There has been a huge trend in local foods. I think over time, the growth will continue to steadily get better."

The NDDA has twice updated its interactive online map from spring 2020 to spring 2021. The updates allow users to sort map information based on the commodity, such as beef, pork, fruits, vegetables, baked goods and jellies. The digital tool expands producer profiles, improves search functions and grants users the ability to send inquiries to farmers. The layout includes around 50 farmers markets and more than 360 map markers for anything from produce and poultry to U-pick farms and Community Supported Agriculture programs.

Good says the consumer searchability upgrades make North Dakota's digital mapping tool more enhanced than many other states' online local foods maps.

## On the Map

Market owner and vendor Danielle Mickelson uses the NDDA's maps frequently, encouraging patrons to visit markets throughout the region. The NDDA still prints a paper map of farmers market locations in addition to the online version.

"We find that the map

is a really nice talking piece for a world that is increasingly passionate about local foods," says Mickelson, who runs Mickelson Tiny Plants and owns Lena's Fresh Farmers Market in downtown Rolla with her husband. The family grows fruits and vegetables and makes baked goods. They also preserve upward of 30 varieties of canned products, including pickles, jams and sauces from their garden produce.

As with most cottage food businesses, the family started small, selling from a card table and kitchen bowls. Mickelson quit

her teaching job and steadily grew to purchase a permanent site for a two-day-a-week farmers market. She has recorded only growth since, and the pandemic supported that trend across all product offerings.

"As people hunkered down in their small towns, local foods became a rock for them to stand on," Mickelson says. "It was the place they would get fresh fruits, vegetables, sourdough bread and all the products that were not being shipped as efficiently into their town anymore."

— Joanie Stiers



Above: The Feiring family. Below, left to right: Lena's Fresh Farmers Market; North Dakota Representative Marvin Nelson and Danielle Mickelson at a farmers market.





## Let's Talk Food and Farming



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# Growing GRAND

Grand Farm looks to the future of agriculture

**F**argo-based Grand Farm is on a mission to revolutionize agricultural technology through collaboration and innovation.

Launched in April 2019, Grand Farm is powered by Emerging Prairie, an organization that connects entrepreneurs in North Dakota through events that foster economic growth. The initiative's goal was to create change with help from ag technologists and growers to solve some of agriculture's key pain points in the Red River Valley region.

"Grand Farm starts with challenges, and there are five main ones," says Dr. William Aderholdt, Ph.D., director of the program management office at Grand Farm. "They include feeding the growing population, the ag labor shortage, lack of venture capital in the industry, a workforce skills gap of technologists and ag safety."

To tackle these issues, Grand Farm facilitates demonstrations and experimental projects into possible solutions, including things like soil-health monitoring, precision spraying, the effect of unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs or drones) and more. Grand Farm partners with over 40 organizations to help with these projects, such as tech companies from around the world, the United States Department of Agriculture and teaching institutions like the University of North Dakota and North Dakota State University.

"Grand Farm is about thinking



to the future," Aderholdt says.

"In 2020, we had plans for five projects and ended with 41. With the forming of more partnerships, we're bringing on 100 projects for 2021 with the help of more than 40 organizations." As well as conducting trials, the farm also holds several events for growers and others involved in the industry. "We have 66 events with hundreds of speakers in a socially distanced setting planned for next year," Aderholdt says.

He maintains that technology is so important in agriculture because increased collection and management of data can help draw all the insights together for farmers, which solves problems faster and more efficiently. He says that one pain point they're trying to address for North Dakota farmers is the issue of specialization.

"Specialization in technology has kept farmers from being generalists," Aderholdt says. "For example, if I want to grow



hemp and manufacture CBD, I have to buy special equipment because it's so specialized.

I can't also grow soybeans if I'm in debt from the hemp equipment. That's a problem."

UAVs, or drones, are another big area of research for Grand Farm and all of North Dakota. The state leads the unmanned aircraft systems industry as the drone test state.

"Drones can deliver information to farmers really rapidly, and they provide information you can't get from the naked eye," Aderholdt says. "Capabilities like thermal imaging, water flow and elevation – you can use those sensors to tell you something is wrong before you can see it."

Grand Farm has several goals for the future, including land expansion, looking at indoor and controlled environments, as well as agriculture in space.

Learn more about the initiative at [grandfarm.com](http://grandfarm.com).

– Rachel Bertone



# DAIRY *Delights*

North Dakota dairy processors churn out award-winning ice cream, gelato and more



PHOTO: ISTOCK.COM/NISELOVALENA





PHOTOS: MAARTJE VAN BEDAF



**M**aartje van Bedaf of Carrington has fond memories of visiting gelato shops as a child in her native Netherlands.

“I thought it would be fun to bring gelato to North Dakota,” Maartje says. “We already had the main ingredient – milk – at our fingertips.”

In 2018, Maartje launched Duchessa Gelato and began making gelato using fresh milk from her family dairy’s 1,500 cows. She started with a mobile gelato cart from Italy and set up at farmers markets, weddings and events. Her business quickly grew, and now customers can order gelato online.

Maartje churns the gelato in her parents’ garage but is building a Grade A processing facility with her husband, Casey Murphy. The couple started Cows and Co. Creamery in 2020 and plans to add fresh cheese curds and artisan Gouda cheese to their product line by summer 2021.

“Gouda is a Dutch cheese, so to bring that to North Dakota is a perfect



opportunity for us,” Maartje says. “You can do a lot of fun things with milk; it’s a great outlet to be creative. When using milk, cream and sugar, it’s not hard to make something taste good.”

### **Pride Dairy**

Ice cream is another dairy dessert produced in North Dakota, and Kriss Allard can attest that there’s always a demand for the tasty treat. His company, Pride Dairy, has been in business since 1930 and sells 200,000 gallons of freshly made ice cream

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Maartje van Bedaf and her husband, Casey Murphy, run Duchessa Gelato and just launched a new venture, Cows and Co. Creamery, in 2020.



# We're growing value.

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- **Workforce incentives and training**
  - » Assistance for job training and workforce development

For more information about value-added or ag diversification programs in North Dakota, contact Kevin Sonsalla, manager of ag and bioenergy development for the North Dakota Department of Commerce at 701-328-5323 or [ksonsalla@nd.gov](mailto:ksonsalla@nd.gov)

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SPRING WHEAT

(USDA 2020 report on 2019 production)







every year. Pride Dairy is known for its award-winning Thomas Jefferson Vintage Vanilla – the No. 1 selling ice cream at Mount Rushmore in South Dakota.

“Mount Rushmore had Jefferson’s handwritten ice cream recipe hanging in their dining area and had reached out to several ice cream makers to see if they could replicate it to sell in their shop,” Allard says. “Jefferson used to make the ice cream and serve it to dignitaries while he was in office. We had to change a couple of things – mainly that he used raw eggs, and we don’t – but we were granted the rights to make it for them.”

Pride Dairy makes 23 flavors of ice cream in Bottineau, including an unusual black licorice ice cream.

“We source as many of our ingredients locally as we can,” Allard says. “Juneberry is one of our most popular flavors, and those are grown locally, as well as our chokecherries and some of the rhubarb.”

### Prairie Farms

In May 2020, the award-winning dairy cooperative Prairie Farms purchased the former Dean Foods



milk-processing plant in Bismarck. The Bismarck plant employs 70 people and bottles fluid milk in whole, 2%, 1%, skim and three different chocolate varieties. They also bottle buttermilk, half-and-half and heavy whipping cream.

“We ship milk to schools for lunches, and we even do 5-gallon bags of milk for university cafeteria milk dispensers,” says Tara Stiles-Rath, quality manager for Prairie Farms-Bismarck. “We process 6 million gallons of milk every year just at our site.”

Headquartered in Illinois, Prairie



**“A lot of pride goes into our products, and we always keep farmers’ best interests in mind.”**

Tara Stiles-Rath, *quality manager for Prairie Farms-Bismarck*

Farms has 52 dairy-processing plants throughout the Central Time Zone. The cooperative includes more than 700 farm families.

“A lot of pride goes into our products, and we always keep farmers’ best interests in mind,” Stiles-Rath says. “In North Dakota, we work with 12 family farms – the same farms we’ve worked with for decades.”

– Jessica Mozo



# Pride & Perseverance

Entrepreneurs transform their businesses during a tumultuous year

**2020** was a difficult year for many business owners, including Pride of Dakota members. The state's brand program created in 1985, Pride of Dakota promotes products and services made, manufactured, processed or produced in North Dakota and includes more than 500 members. Throughout the pandemic, these resilient Pride of Dakota members adapted in various creative ways.

## Utilizing Talents

Jeremy Olson got notice of his first event cancellation shortly after the shutdown was announced. From there, it was one cancellation after another.

Olson, the owner of 241Ink Productions, was ready to bring his expertise in storytelling through live events and audio-video production to multiple national events in 2020, including fishing

tourneys, conventions and corporate events. Instead, Olson had to look for other ways to utilize his talents.

"We started getting requests from churches and schools to livestream their services and graduations," Olson says. "A lot of them had tried streaming but were not set up to stream on a large scale." Olson and his team rented out equipment to local organizations and began to assist in designing infrastructure.

"The churches are really grateful because they realize what they've been missing. One church we work with has 30 to 40 people who attend regularly. In the heart of COVID-19, they were reaching 400 people a week by streaming," he says.

Going forward, this Pride of Dakota member plans to continue designing audio and video setups for local businesses and is optimistic that events will continue in 2021.

## Count Down to Positivity

Pam Emmil, owner of the 5 Second Rule Bracelet, launched her business during a dark time in her life. Recovering from addiction, she needed a daily reminder to remain positive.

"When I was feeling shame,



Before COVID-19, small events with an audience of 200 to 500 people made up a majority of 241ink Productions' business throughout the year.





Pam Emmil created the 5 Second Rule Bracelet as a way to help others with anxiety – something that resonated with many during the isolation that accompanied the pandemic.



anxiety, any sort of negative emotion, I was counting down from five and taking a deep breath or setting a positive intention at the end of my countdown,” she says. “The principle is that if you have an idea, you need to act on it in five seconds or your brain will crush it. I knew I wanted something physical to touch to help me with the countdown.”

The bracelet she designed features series of four pink zebra jasper stones followed by one clear

aura stone, which is the “go” stone.

A member of Pride of Dakota since 2019, Emmil – who usually sells at vendor shows – had to pivot to social media sales and virtual one-on-one consultations. Every sale comes with personal directions from Emmil.

“The bracelets have helped a lot of people. The pandemic brought on a lot of challenges and anxiety for people, and the bracelets have helped customers find some calmness,” Emmil says.

**“2020 was a tumultuous year, and Pride of Dakota members did what they do best: pivot. Pride of Dakota members are entrepreneurs; they have an innate desire to fill gaps in the market and they did just that in 2020.”**

Doug Goehring, *North Dakota Agriculture Commissioner*

### Looking to the Future

While the past year challenged Pride of Dakota members to think outside the box, many businesses are hopeful for a brighter future.

“2020 was a tumultuous year, and Pride of Dakota members did what they do best: pivot. Pride of Dakota members are entrepreneurs; they have an innate desire to fill gaps in the market and they did just that in 2020,” North Dakota Agriculture Commissioner Doug Goehring says. “Whether they were shifting their sales from vendor showcases to the retail market, producing new products to suit the needs of the citizens of North Dakota, or taking the time to regroup and adjust their business models, they are now better equipped for the future. There were a number of obstacles to overcome, but our companies are stronger and smarter for it.”

– Brianna Gwartz



# What's Trending?

Younger farmers utilize technology to connect, innovate and advance





**W**hether hitting send on a Facebook post or analyzing data points on an auto-generated graph, today's young farmers are smart, savvy and innovative, readily embracing the latest technologies to push North Dakota agriculture forward.

### The Prairie Californian

Jenny Dewey Rohrich is a native Californian who grew up in the meat industry as the daughter of butcher-shop owners. At the beginning of the social media age, one of her friends encouraged her to use emerging internet platforms as a new way to connect to consumers.

"At the time, Twitter and blogging were really the two popular platforms," Rohrich says. "I started a blog for my parent's butcher shop to try and educate consumers about the industry."

Little did she know, one of those social platforms would lead her to North Dakota.

"I actually met my husband on Twitter, fell in love and moved to North Dakota," she says.

Rohrich's husband, Mark, is a third-generation farmer who grows corn, soybeans and wheat with his father and brother in Zeeland.

"Where I grew up, it was mostly rice and almond farms," Rohrich says. "When I moved out here, it was all row crops that I was never exposed to."

To help with the transition, she turned to what she knew: blogging. What started as a personal blog called Prairie Californian turned into a platform where Rohrich could share about farm life, her family and agriculture.

### Going Viral

Initially, Rohrich only shared the blog with family and friends. But as she transitioned to life as a farmer's

wife, she wrote a post that resonated with a bigger audience.

"It was my first year of marriage during harvest, which was a totally new thing," Rohrich says. "I wrote an article called '10 Ways Marrying a Farmer Will Change Your Life,' and it went viral. I was adjusting and used some comic relief, like how date nights will be in the tractor, or you'll start finding corn in the laundry. It went viral on social media and then HuffPost picked it up. That was my first introduction to people outside the world of agriculture."

Since then, Rohrich has been using her platform to go beyond sharing her personal life and into advocating for agriculture. By utilizing social media and the internet, Rohrich shows readers what's happening on the farm in real time, often debunking myths in the process.

"It's been incredible," she says. "I can livestream from a tractor and give people a real-time look. It's given us the opportunity to participate in panels and show consumers that farmers are real people, too, just like them. I've had such great conversations through social media about all different aspects of agriculture."

### From the Screen to the Field

While social media is an easy and efficient tool for all farmers, Agro-Tech Inc. provides a more advanced technological service.

Owned by Suzy and Curt Lee in north-central North Dakota, Agro-Tech provides research and development services for the agricultural sector. These include performance-testing new products in the current environment – such as seed treatments, fertilizers and more – and also regulatory trials, which are field trials that generate



Mark, Jennifer, Levi and Lily Rohrich

**“I can livestream from a tractor and give people a real-time look, [to] show consumers that farmers are real people, too, just like them. I’ve had such great conversations through social media about all different aspects of agriculture.”**

Jenny Dewey Rohrich,  
*farmer and social media maven*





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data points for the registration of new pesticides and genetic traits.

“Not all, but most pesticides, seed traits and fertilizers used by North Dakota farmers have been tested on this farm,” Curt Lee says. “The tests were done to prove different factors like safety or efficacy, but in my mind, we’re filling a very important role while remaining almost anonymous to most producers.”

Lee comes from a family of cattle farmers and now works with his 26-year-old son, Colten, on both the family farm and at Agro-Tech. Lee says that forming Agro-Tech has given his son the opportunity to return to the farm and gradually take over, while still being able to be his own boss, learning and innovating.

“I think the younger generation is much faster to adapt and better at embracing technology,” Lee says. “They better understand the potential of and what to do with all the data being generated.

They’ll be the ones that implement most of the changes and will benefit most from it.”

Colten echoes this sentiment. “As a young farmer, I have seen farming practices, equipment and technology change drastically in a short period of time,” he says. “In order to stay progressive, you need to have an open mindset.”

– Rachel Bertone



Colten Lee



@stolzjordan



### SOCIAL MEDIA SPOTLIGHT: #STILLFARMING

Across North Dakota and beyond, farmers and ranchers haven’t let the pandemic slow them down. They are **#stillfarming**, producing essential food and fuel. Use this hashtag to find inspiring photos on social media, like this one from North Dakota farmer Jordan Stolz.

PHOTOS: FROM TOP: JESSICA LEE; INSTAGRAM@STOLZJORDAN



# CHAMPIONS of Conservation

North Dakota farmers work to ensure they leave the soil better than they found it

## Bare and windblown soil

never sat well with Gene Goven, so when he began farming in 1967, he decided to do something about it. After leaving North Dakota State University when his grandfather asked him to come help on the farm, Goven began farming his own 770 acres near Turtle Lake just a year later.

He learned the value of companion cropping – growing a cash crop alongside a cover crop – from his father and grandfather. Besides providing continuous cover of the soil, this method enriches soil nutrients, reduces erosion, increases water infiltration and allows beneficial insects to thrive.

“It’s the hundreds of little things rather than any single thing,” Goven says of his conservation efforts. Using cross fencing and cattle on both pasture and cropland provides a host of benefits, including carbon sequestration, increased soil fertility, water infiltration and biodiversity for soil health.

It’s been 20 years since Goven’s treated livestock with pesticides for things like flies and ticks. Instead, he rotates the livestock using timing as a biological control, no longer killing both harmful and beneficial insects.

## FARMING IN NATURE’S IMAGE

Just east of Bismarck, Gabe Brown and his son, Paul, are busy

regenerating their soil. After four consecutive years of failed crops due to natural disasters, Brown found himself desperate to make the land profitable without inputs – primarily because he couldn’t afford any. So, he began to take a no-till approach and soon saw success.

Brown’s Ranch has now been 100% no-till for 27 years, and the father-son duo also practices companion cropping. Additionally, they utilize cool-season plant species for winter grazing, allowing the plants to take carbon out of the atmosphere and feed the soil year round.

Since 1991, Brown has improved his soil’s organic matter by 6% and the water infiltration rate from half an inch to 30 inches an hour. “We have not used any synthetic fertilizers since 2007 and no fungicides or pesticides in 20-plus years,” Brown says. “We no longer need those things.”

These days, Brown’s Ranch boasts 5,000 acres of land containing 250 cow-calf pairs, grass-finished beef, grass-finished lamb, pastured pork,



Paul and Gabe Brown



free-range laying hens, broiler chickens, turkeys and beehives. Gabe spends most of his time consulting for other farmers while Paul manages the farm, selling nutrient-dense food directly to consumers and providing sustainability for future generations.

– Katie Murray



# North Dakota CARES

Grants, cost-share programs assist businesses, organizations working diligently to keep consumers fed and healthy



**With funding from** the federal CARES Act, North Dakota's Department of Agriculture (NDDA) awarded grants to businesses and organizations across multiple sectors that are working to feed more people or help keep them safe and healthy.

## **Biotech**

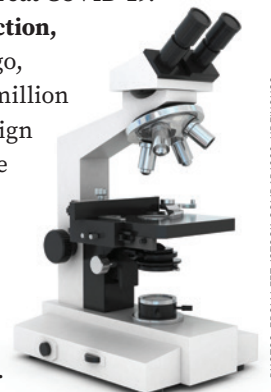
Richard Glynn is executive director of the Bioscience Association of North Dakota, an advocacy group representing the state's burgeoning biotech industry. "Our role is to help companies with proven ideas that are ready to commercialize," Glynn says.

Three such companies received Bioscience Innovation Grants through the NDDA for coronavirus research:

**SafetySpect, Inc.** of Grand Forks received \$1.5 million for contamination inspection and disinfection management in industrial, institutional and school facilities. "They developed a hand-held device that combines complex contamination identification of respiratory droplets and saliva with immediate remediation using UVC light," Glynn says.

**ImmunoPrecise Antibodies, Ltd.**, with U.S. headquarters in Fargo, and its subsidiary Talem Therapeutics, LLC, received \$1.5 million to develop antibody therapeutics to treat COVID-19.

**BiomedProtection, LLC**, also in Fargo, will use its \$1.4 million grant for the design and manufacture of vaccines utilizing the company's proprietary electronic biology platform.



PHOTOS: FROM LEFT: ISTOCK.COM/DAR1930, URFINGLISS



These technologies can be utilized to combat diseases and conditions in addition to COVID-19, according to Glynn, who notes biotech is becoming an important sector of the state's economy.

### Meat Processing

A Meat Processing Plant Cost-Share Program granted \$6.2 million to help state-inspected, federally inspected and custom exempt meat-processing plants upgrade facilities and equipment to meet increased demand from the pandemic.

One recipient was Reister Meats & Catering in Streeter, which is run by Clyde and Penny Reister and other family members. The butcher shop processes beef, pork, buffalo, sheep, goats, elk, moose and deer. With the help of the grant, they were able to purchase a stuffer, a slicer and an incinerator, Clyde says. The stuffer precisely measures ground meat for burgers and quickly twists the brats and sausage for which Reister's is known. "The equipment basically takes the place of one man," says Clyde, noting he relies on family members to help run the business.

The incinerator "has helped immensely" because Clyde could no longer find a refuse operation to serve the company's isolated site in Stutsman County. Despite its rural location, "people will drive 50 miles to buy something good," he says.

### Food Banks

Great Plains Food Bank (GPFB), the only one in North Dakota, serves all 53 counties plus one county in Minnesota by distributing food to over 200 food pantries and soup kitchens. NDDA offered grants totaling \$2 million to help charitable food organizations and small grocers extend the shelf life of perishable foods.

At the Statewide Distribution Center in Fargo, Great Plains Food Bank stored perishable foods in a semi-tractor's trailer parked outside. Their \$66,000 cost-share grant was used to obtain a walk-in freezer and cooler. GPFB President Melissa Sobolik says the new cold storage ensures they can accept all food donations. "We tried to never turn any donations away, but this freezer and cooler now alleviate the pressure of scrambling to find storage."

In 2020, GPFB saw an unprecedented need for food assistance, distributing 17.7 million meals – nearly 5 million more than in 2019 – and serving a total of

145,587 individuals – over 43,000 more than in 2019. "Each of these increases is a record in our 38-year history," Sobolik says.

"So many of those we served in 2020 were seeking a food box for the first time," she adds. "This freezer and cooler storage allow us to put perishable food in an online inventory system to make sure every food pantry and soup kitchen we serve has access to fresh, nutritious products."

– Kim Hill



PHOTOS: FROM TOP: GREAT PLAINS FOOD BANK; ISTOCK.COM/PEPMIBA





Cloverdale Foods jumped into action once COVID-19 hit, installing safety measures and procedures to keep employees and processes as safe as possible.



# MOVERS AND SHAKERS

How resourceful North Dakota companies pivoted amid the pandemic

In March 2020, the small team behind Red River Biorefinery in Grand Forks was ready to open its doors and debut its “next generation biorefinery,” providing different grades of ethanol to customers. But that all came to a screeching halt when COVID-19 arrived. With a travel ban in Europe set to take place, international engineers and the commissioning team had to leave to make it home in time.

“They literally got up and left just as we were turning the facility on,” says Keshav Rajpal, president and managing member of the refinery. “At the same time, the whole ethanol transportation market completely cratered.”

## Thinking on Their Feet

The young company knew they had to think fast, so they turned their attention away from transportation fuel and over to alcohol that could be used in hand sanitizer. Appreciating the community support they had received to get started in the first place, Red River Biorefinery provided

thousands of gallons of alcohol at cost to companies who needed it for their employees to continue working safely.

“There’s a lot of support and a lot of help that we’ve had from the communities we’ve been in, so it was an opportunity for us to give back,” Rajpal says. “It was just the right thing to do.”

And as the demand for hand sanitizer ebbs and flows, the company continues to stay nimble, adjusting to the ever-changing marketplace. They’ve since found shipping partners

and started shipping to Canada and Mexico, as well.

## Flower Power

In April 2020, Maple River Winery in Casselton also made the switch to hand sanitizer; the small team was bottling up to 1,500 gallons a day. But they got a bit creative with the ingredients, swapping out the glycerin and replacing it with safflower oil.

“Anyone who uses sanitizer a great deal will tell you they very much dislike it; it dries the skin, smells bad and is sticky,” says Randy Lang, who took over as owner of Maple River Winery’s offshoot company (named SaffPower) in November.

“We offer an alternative in our brand. It moisturizes skin, smells pleasant and is silky to the touch.”

SaffPower even expanded its catalog of products to include a mask refresher. The mist comes in three scents – bubble gum, coconut and tropical – to refresh masks as people wear them throughout the day. To serve companies relying on large orders of







hand sanitizer, SaffPower also created a subscription program for companies to automatically get refills sent to their store.

Lang recently visited the North Dakota State Capitol building and gifted sanitizers to each of the state legislators as a way to give back.

“This product is so directly tied to North Dakota agriculture; I think it’s important to get that message out,” Lang says. “We really want to grow the brand, promote the state and give back to the local economy.”

## Safety First

For many companies, the changes hit closer to home. Founded in 1915 by the Russell family, Cloverdale Foods implemented changes at the protein plant the first week of March 2020 to keep their workers safe.

“The safety of our employees and customers was our No. 1 priority,” says Scott Staudinger, vice president of human resources and government affairs.

Knowing that 470 employees needed to support their families, the Mandan-based company’s pandemic planning team implemented one-way traffic, mandatory masks, social distancing, temperature tracking, adjusting shifts, infrared cameras and even voluntary finger-prick tests for COVID-19 screening. The company installed ultraviolet disinfection lamps for the break rooms, lockers and offices; Clorox Total 360 fogging machines; and antibacterial mats to disinfect employees’ shoes. They also regularly disinfect the shuttles used by 260 employees dozens of times a day.

In July 2020, the company further supported their workers by announcing that the starting salary at Cloverdale Foods would be raised to \$15 an hour. Exciting plans are in the works to expand the facility, creating more jobs.

“One thing that 2020 has really shown us – and the Russell family – is that together we can accomplish anything,” Staudinger says. “We truly have terrific employees. This was a way to say, ‘You know what guys, this is where we need to be, and we appreciate you.’”

– Christiana Lilly

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Since the 2014 Farm Bill opened the door for U.S. growers to begin experimenting with commercial hemp through state pilot programs, this nonpsychoactive variety of the cannabis plant has been putting down roots throughout the country as a potential cash crop.

North Dakota State University started experimenting with growing hemp in 2015. Then the state's Department of Agriculture began industrial hemp trials in 2016, working with five farmers to assess the possibilities for growing hemp for grain, fiber and cannabidiol (CBD). After the 2018 federal Farm Bill fully legalized hemp cultivation, North Dakota passed legislation establishing guidelines and a licensing process for growers.

### Learning Curve

By 2020, there were 81 North Dakota farms totaling nearly 3,400 acres licensed to grow hemp. As one of the five farmers who helped blaze the trail for the state's hemp program in 2016, Clarence Laub has seen interest in the crop increase steadily. "I'm constantly getting calls and questions about it," he says. "It's not only producers but

consumers as well trying to learn."

Working with Canadian seed partners, North Dakota growers have found that the varieties happiest in the state's arid climate are the same ones that thrive in Canada. Since hemp is grown without chemicals, alternative weed-control methods are imperative, according to Laub. "You want to get a good stand established right away," he says. And on the storage end, he adds, it's crucial to make sure the crop dries and remains mold-free in the bin after harvest.

Laub says the market for hemp grain has been good, with southern states like Kentucky and Virginia showing particular interest in North Dakota's products due to its inherently dry climate and storage conditions. He sees strong prospects, too, for the fiber market, but the state's processing infrastructure is still developing.

### Growing Markets

"It's a chicken and egg situation," says Doug Goehring, North Dakota Commissioner of Agriculture. "We have ample processors for grain, but for the fiber side, it appears not to be as competitive a product in the marketplace."

In the latest legislative session, North Dakota's lawmakers reconfigured the state's hemp program with clearer language and more effective licensing procedures around testing (the maximum legal concentration of the psychoactive delta-9 tetrahydrocannabinol, or THC, is 0.3%). Now, Goehring says, the expansion of the industry at state and national levels is a matter of market growth and commercialization. "We've created the framework for farmers to succeed," he says.

— Gina Smith

## HEMP STAT

While the number of North Dakota farmers licensed to grow hemp increased from **64 to 81** between 2019 and 2020, the amount of acreage used for growing it decreased from **3,940 to 3,392** during that same time frame.



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For more information on pulse crops from A-Z, visit the NPGA website at [www.northernpulse.com](http://www.northernpulse.com)

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