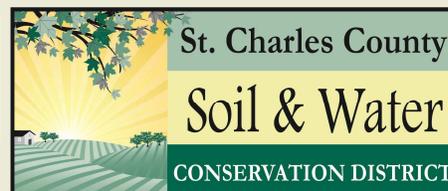


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Wentzville Farmers Try Chicken Tractors

Sam and Dorothy Harris laugh a lot. That's one of the first things noticed during a recent visit to this hardworking couple's 100-acre farm near Wentzville. The couple seems to use humor frequently – to gently tease each other, to make their guests feel comfortable, to tell their stories. And as the stories unfold, one begins to sense that Dorothy may be the one bringing most of the bubbles into the relationship. While Dorothy's happiness is clearly evident in her ever-present wide-eyed grin; Sam's more stoic appearance belies a thread of mischief running through his veins.

When asked how they met, Dorothy immediately smiled and began to relate the story of how a girlfriend of hers invited her to a corporate party at Boeing so many years ago. She mentioned that the couple had attended high school together, but "didn't associate with one another because we had different friends." She continued to explain how she really didn't want to go to the party but went out of kindness to her friend.

"So it was at the party that you caught his eye", the interviewer asked. And Dorothy began to answer – "he was way on the other side of the room..." But just then Sam cut her off – not verbally, but silently, with a big

Missouri is Among Top States for Farmers Markets

According to the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), Missouri is among the top 10 states in the number of farmers markets with 245 listed in the National Farmers Market Directory.

"Part of the Department of Agriculture's mission is to provide value-added opportunities for Missouri's producers to connect with their customers," Director Richard Fordyce said. "Farmers markets are one way we can build that relationship between those who grow the food and those who eat it."

"Farming has always been a part of Missouri's rich history and economic makeup," says Mike Downing, director of the Missouri Department of Economic Development. "Farmers markets provide an excellent way for customers to connect with local producers and learn about the food grown in their communities."

exaggerated smile and huge hand waving (in an embarrassing 'look at me' display) as he pretended to be Dorothy all those years ago, grabbing the attention of a young Sam.

"That's not at all right," she said with exaggerated exasperation. "I ought to come over there and smack you." And Sam just smiled and giggled.

So the humor goes both ways: Surely a wonderful tool to aid in dealing with life's challenges. And like most couples who've been together more than 42 years, they know which chords to strike and which ones to avoid; when to laugh and when to cry; how to support each other and how to enjoy each other...and how to share their love and happiness with others.

Sam and Dorothy are not farmers by birth. Neither of them came from a farming family, but Sam's mother wanted a farm; so Sam's father, entrepreneur and owner of Harris Taxi, bought the land near Wentzville in 1953. It quickly became the family's weekend place, and Sam would spend all his summers there. Portions of the land were leased to local farmers.

Sam and Dorothy were married in 1972, and soon built a house on the property and began their family. They raised four children: two girls – Devon and Denise; and two boys – Sam and Heath. All of the children are grown, and two have given their parents grandchildren. All four of the children have done quite well for themselves – a testament to the love and guidance of good parents.

Shortly after Sam retired from his position as an accountant with Boeing, he and Dorothy started their own business, Harris WestPlex Medical Transport, which is now run by their youngest son, Heath; although Dorothy still takes an active role in daily operations. They now have five transport vans, and work with nursing homes to transport wheelchair bound patients to doctor visits and medical appointments.

The Harris' have been raising cattle and egg-laying hens for some time, but they have recently added a new project on the farm. Sam took a small farmer class at Lincoln University and became interested in raising chickens. His neighbor and friend, Keith Raspberry, was actually

News & Notes

The Missouri Envirothon Committee recently announced that Missouri will be the host state for the 2015 National Envirothon competition to be held in Springfield, Mo., at the end of July. The high-school level, natural-resource-based competition draws competitors from over 30 US states and several Canadian provinces. The program was recently adopted as an outreach program of the National Conservation Federation, and it has been a program sponsored by SWCDs since it came to the state in 1998. Students learn about natural resources from practicing professionals, and then compete for scholarship prizes. The theme for the 2015 season is Urban Forestry.

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Harris, from pg. 1

interested in growing blackberries; so Dorothy and Sam brought back information for him.

"We got together and started talking," Sam said.

"We decided us two old retired farmers ought to come together," Keith added.

And so began "Green Gate Farms", Sam and Keith's chicken raising adventure. They were interested in the chicken tractors they'd learned about at Lincoln University and had seen in action at an Amish farm near Bowling Green. Keith soon set to work constructing their first tractor. A chicken tractor is a mobile coop made of chicken wire and plastic pipe, set on small tractor wheels and giving the birds full access to the pasture.

"I played with the design a little," said Keith. "Each one gets a little better than the last. Next year we will have 6 or 8 in operation.

Keith demonstrated the ease of moving the light-weight tractors as he and Sam effortlessly pulled it forward, the birds moving quietly along inside.

The tractor is moved every day, offering the chickens fresh ground on which to scratch and feed. The chickens are pasture raised, mimicking free range foraging but with controlled grain feeding as well; and increased protection from predators. This arrangement also causes less stress on the birds, providing a more natural habitat as opposed to the large indoor facilities where birds are confined and can't even get sunlight.

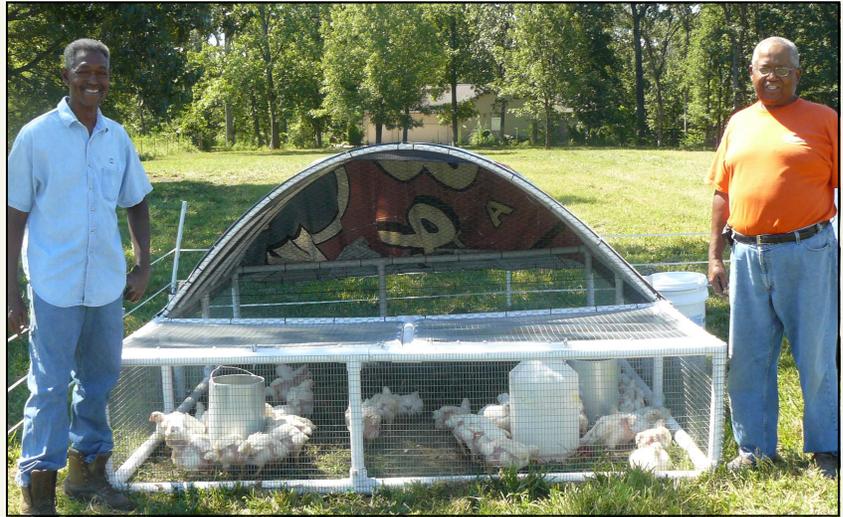
The men now have two chicken tractors and plan to build a couple more. They move the tractors around the pasture and within 10 days can re-use the previous spots. The tractors can follow the cattle that Sam owns, and this provides a richly fertilized pasture for the chickens.

"We move the cows out of a pasture, run the harrow to break up the manure, and after three weeks, we move the chicken tractors in," Sam explained. "This system satisfies two purposes: the chickens fertilize the pasture for the cattle; and after the cattle have grazed and we've drug the field, the chickens benefit from the nutrients left by the cattle."

A total rotation takes about two months, with time to allow grass to grow and recover between the foraging chickens and grazing cattle. Sam pointed out an area in front of their house where the chickens had recently been located. The grass there was so thick that he had to mow that spot twice

Sam and Keith are currently raising their third crop of chickens. They are processed at Hawk Point, chilled and packaged and affixed with a label designed by Sam and Dorothy's daughter, Denise.

Besides the chickens, Sam and Dorothy have a cow/calf operation rotating in eight paddocks for which they received assistance



Keith Raspberry (left) and Sam Harris with one of the chicken tractors.

from NRCS. They have also utilized the EQIP program for reseeding and fencing; and have installed watering systems in the paddocks.

Other animals on the farm include Dorothy's "hobby" – the laying hens, ducks, geese and turkeys running around the farm...and Oh yes – Bennie – the big white dog



that followed the guests around all morning. "Bennie was raised with chickens," Sam said. "He was kept with the chickens in the coop when he was a young pup. Bennie won't mess with the birds! And other dogs, foxes and hawks won't mess with Bennie!"

And so...Sam and Keith look after the chicken tractors; Dorothy looks after Sam and the other birds; and Bennie looks after them all...making for a good day at Green Gate Farms.

Compliance with Highly Erodible Land Conservation (HELC) and Wetland Conservation (WC) provisions continues to be required for participation in most FSA and NRCS programs.

These provisions place restrictions on the planting of an agricultural commodity on highly erodible land or wetlands. Further, they prohibit the conversion of a wetland to make possible the production of an agricultural commodity.

The Agricultural Act of 2014 also known as the 2014 Farm Bill, adds premium assistance for crop insurance as a benefit subject to compliance with HELC and WC provisions. New provisions are created for determinations, administration, and penalties relating to HELC and WC provisions that are unique to crop insurance. Farm Service Agency (FSA) will make HELC/WC eligibility determinations for crop insurance participants based on NRCS technical determinations of HELC/WC.

To be in compliance with HELC and Wprovisions, producers must agree, by certifying on Form AD-1026 with FSA, that they will not:

- Produce an agricultural commodity (for harvest or food plot) on highly erodible land without a conservation system;
- Plant an agricultural commodity (for harvest or food plot) on a converted wetland;
- Convert a wetland to make possible the production of an agricultural commodity (for harvest or food plot).

Producers planning to remove fence rows, convert woodland to cropland, convert grassland that has not previously been cropland, combine crop fields, divide a crop field into two or more fields, install new drainage, improve or modify existing drainage, conduct land leveling, filling, or excavation, must notify FSA and update Form AD-1026. FSA will notify NRCS and NRCS will then provide highly erodible land or wetland technical determinations.

Additionally, ephemeral gully erosion must be controlled in HEL fields in order to remain Eligible for USDA program benefits. Ephemeral gully erosion is caused by concentrated flow in small channels that form as the erosion process intensifies beyond sheet and rill erosion. Unlike sheet and rill erosion, which occurs as a result of the impact of raindrops and water flowing on the soil surface, ephemeral gully erosion occurs as a result of concentrated flow of surface runoff along defined channels. The channels are shallow enough to be filled with soil by tillage operations and reform in the same general location by subsequent runoff events.

A variety of structural practices – such as grassed waterways, terraces, and other vegetative barriers – are recommended by NRCS in conservation planning to address ephemeral gully erosion. For assistance contact NRCS at 636-922-2833, Ext. 3.

Rid Your Farm of Bush Honeysuckle and Help Stop the Spread

Bush Honeysuckle is a shrubby species, native to Asia, that was widely planted as an ornamental, a fence row shrub and wildlife cover. Unfortunately, this non-native plant is aggressively invasive and, left unchecked, will take over woodlands and fields in a matter of years.

The Missouri Department of Conservation has been fighting this culprit for more than 25 years, and doing their best to inform the public of the need to eradicate the species from private and public lands. Now MDC and the Missouri Natural Resources Conservation Service are looking at the practicality of initiating an assistance program to help landowners and agricultural producers remove the invasive shrub. The agencies are looking for areas in the county that have a medium to light infestation because a heavy infestation will not be a cost-effective place to start.

Why it's bad...

Bush Honeysuckle can quickly develop a monoculture in a woodland. This plant, in a matter of a few years, will spread from a spindly twig to a wide and spreading bush with multiple "trunks" and widely splaying branches, many reaching 20 feet tall. It tends to crowd out flowers, mushrooms, understory trees and other native bushes to the point where only the bush honeysuckle itself survives.

It actually has low benefit to wildlife. According to MDC, bush honeysuckle competes with native plants for pollinators, resulting in fewer seeds set on native species. Unlike native shrubs, the fruits of exotic bush honeysuckles are carbohydrate-rich and do not provide migrating birds with the high-fat content needed for long flights.

How to identify bush honeysuckle...

The shrubs are found state-wide. Unlike our native honeysuckle, which is a vine, bush honeysuckle grows on stout trunks up to 20 feet tall with leaves 2 to 3 inches long. They produce white or pink tubular flowers in the spring that turn yellowish as they mature, and red berries which mature in September to October. The seeds and young plants thrive in the shade of a forest canopy.

These shrubs are among the first to green-up in the spring, and retain their green foliage much longer into fall than most native plants. So if you are seeing green shrubs in November, it may be bush honeysuckle.

How to control bush honeysuckle...

Hand-pulling works great when the plants are young and the soil is moist. Learning to identify the young plant, and pulling it be-

fore it matures enough to spread seed is a good way to deter further spreading.

Established individual shrubs can be cut off at the stump. Cover the fresh cut with a 20 percent solution of glyphosate solution. The stump must be treated or it will regrow with vigor in the spring.

In larger areas of bush honeysuckle, where several plants need to be treated, you can use a foliar spray on the leaves with a 2 percent solution of glyphosate and water plus a non-ionic surfactant which improves the chemical's ability to adhere to the leaves. This should be done in early spring or late fall when there is less risk of drift to native plants.



Bush Honeysuckle tends to take over shaded woodlands and pastures, sending out multiple trunks and branches that often intertwine (right) making it difficult for wildlife and humans to move through the woods. In the fall, it produces red berries (above) that are eaten by birds, which furthers the spread.



Fire may also be an option in a larger area, if it can be done safely. Do not try to burn your woodland without having taken a prescribed burn class.

The nature of bush honeysuckle is to invade and take over shaded woodlands, pastures, old fields, and unattended areas. The sturdy crisscrossing branches of established plant colonies can make it very difficult for humans and wildlife to navigate the woods. However when the plant is young and

the soil is moist (after a rain), it can easily be hand-pulled—roots and all. Once you learn to identify the exotic invasive, an early spring or late fall walk of the area will allow you to pull young plants and identify problem areas.

MDC, NRCS and other conservation and agricultural agencies are trying to slow the spread of this species. It currently is found throughout the state, and has formed a monoculture in many urban woodlands in the St. Louis Metro area.

If you believe you have a light to medium infestation on your land and are interested in receiving information on removal, contact the NRCS at 636-922-2833, ext. 3.

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