

DREAM

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going to school here at USD, getting my graduate degree in biology, and I've always had a passion for the environment," he said. "As being part of a co-op, I'm able to select food items that I support based on the way that they're made – if they're more sustainable, or items that are organic, or grass-fed beef.

"Part of the reason I got involved with it (the cooperative) is there is no reason why we can't grow our own food locally," said board member Norbert Pinkelman, who farms on the Nebraska side of the Missouri River not far from where the Clay County Park is located on the South Dakota side of the river.

"We can't grow everything that we need, but we can produce a lot of it," he said. "Why shouldn't we grow good food locally instead of exporting the good food to other areas?"

Pinkelman plans to be a producer for the cooperative. He raises livestock on his farm, and also is involved in honey production. Audience members at Thursday night's concert dined on popcorn raised by Pinkelman's father.

"We're going to emphasize local foods," Munes said. "That is our main objective. It may be produce from local farmers, or local meats. We want to have those in the store, and to have less of footprint. Instead of getting goods in from far distances, we hope to rather support the community by supporting local ranchers, farmers and producers in the area."

Being involved with Red Earth continues to be an adventure, Pinkelman said.

"None of us on the board have been involved with a co-op, or been on a co-op board, so the learning curve is kind of tremendous," he said, laughing. "We are learning as we are going here. Sometimes, people may think we aren't doing things right ... we don't know. We're doing the best that we can, we're feeling our way through it, and we're hoping we're doing things right. Time will tell."

Pinkelman is confident that the cooperative will be successful.

"There is no reason

that this cannot work," he said. "People have to understand what a co-op means. It means that the members have to participate and support it. Along with that commitment is the fact that you get to have a say in it. As a co-op, we still have to be concerned with profit or loss, but at the same time, our members remain an important factor.

"Can it work? Definitely," Pinkelman said. "But it's up to the people to make it work."

The cooperative needs to attract fewer than 100 members to reach its goal of 250. "The reason we want 250 members is so we know we have a customer base," he said, "plus, it raises capital for the business, too. We are all on a shoestring budget. The board members are all contributing their time and talents and money, too. It's a great idea."

"There is no large investment; we're starting up based on the members who are pitching in \$40 for their yearly membership," Munes said. "That is going to be what enables us to buy the equipment, the shelves, the food items that go on the shelves, and pay a small salary to a person and pay the rent."

Contemporary agribusiness, Pinkelman said, involves shipping locally-raised crops and livestock out of the area for processing at plants owned by large, multi-national corporations.

"Every load of corn or

livestock that gets hauled out of the area means you're hauling economy out of the area," he said. "If we can produce it here, and purchase it here, and consume it here, we're generating economic activity. And we don't need the state to help us – the people can do that themselves, and it's real economy."

An enthusiastic audience of Red Earth Cooperative members greeted musicians Jami Lynn and Dylan James, of Rapid City. Others who are interested in learning more about the cooperative's mission and goals also packed the co-op's cozy store space Thursday to hear the duo.

Lynn is well known in Vermillion, having studied music at USD before launching her career as a regional folk singer. Lynn and James

recently began recording their first duo album together at the Historic Homestead Opera House in Lead. "Cluck & Croon" will include old-time tunes mixed with gypsied out jazz standards and originals. It is scheduled to be released this spring.

The doors of the cooperative's Main Street business have yet to open. The space, except for a couple coolers and some other equipment, is mostly empty. But the walls boast a fresh coat of paint; the ceiling and lighting also appears to have received substantial attention.

It is a place that seems to be very, very close to have an "open" sign appear on its front door soon.



Dylan James and Jami Lynn, in concert at the Red Earth Cooperative Jan. 24.

(Photo by David Lias)

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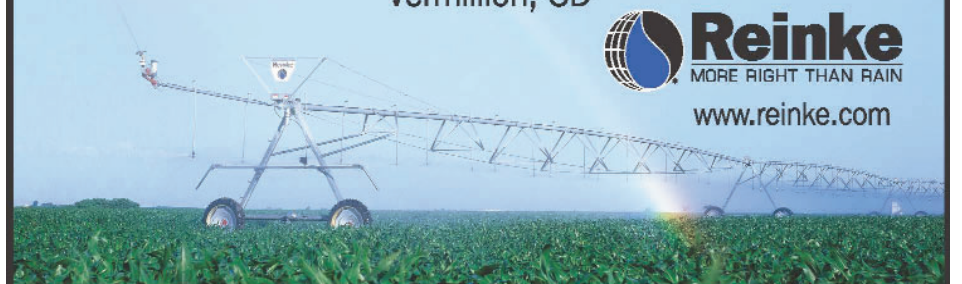
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