

# Hay! Field Classroom Offers Insights

BY RANDY DOCKENDORF  
randy.dockendorf@yankton.net

GAYVILLE – Amy Freeburg made sure her guests had a real “hay day” at her family farm.

Freeburg and her husband, Gary, run a hay operation in some of the nation’s prime territory near Gayville and Volin. The business offices and storage site are located along S.D. Highway 50 near Meckling.

This week, Amy Freeburg hosted members from the South Dakota Agricultural and Rural Leadership (SDARL) program. The 32 “classmates” and two staff members are learning more about the state’s ag economy while building leadership skills.

Freeburg is no stranger to the SDARL, founded in 2000 and now in its eighth “class.” She took part in the second class and is considered an alumnus of the program.

“Professionals have continuing education,” she said. “I consider this (SDARL) as continuing education.”

The current participants, ranging in age from 25-50 years old, will attend 12 seminars during the 18-month program, according to SDARL executive director Lori Cope.

“The SDARL has an extensive application process to be selected. We average 25 to 30 class members. This class is the exception because we have 32,” she said. “Our goal is to have two-thirds production agriculture and one-third agri-business. We are looking for a cross section so they can learn from one another. A lot of the self-education can take place when you have this diversity within the group.”

SDARL member Amy Pravecek of Winner listed the wide variety of her classmates’ occupations: farmers, ranchers, ag bankers, animal health company, seed representatives, implement dealer, dairy, soybean association, and feedlot and business owners, to name a few.

“It’s a very diversified group,” she said.

In the same manner, the group has learned about the state’s very diversified ag economy, including areas not normally considered agriculture by some people. They have toured logging, aquaculture, a hay operation, a winery, meat packing plant, dairy, ethanol plant, wildlife management and ranching.

“It exposes us to all the aspects of agriculture in South Dakota,” Pravecek said. “Without this program, I never would have been exposed to or learned about it.”

The SDARL program holds 10 seminars at various locations around South Dakota, visiting Yankton this week.

One Yankton session focused on zoning and its role with economic development, said SDARL member Dusty Schley of Stratford.

“We compared our counties to places ... where they may be more progressive (with zoning),” he said. “We need to change and help our businesses here.”

The SDARL group doesn’t stay within the South Dakota borders. The members traveled to Washington, D.C., to meet lawmakers and learn about the formulation of national ag policy.

Shawn Freeland of Caputa said he enjoyed the opportunity, as a citizen, to see how Washington operates. “It was awesome for us to see what it takes to run the country and to set policy. It was pretty impressive,” he said.

The SDARL group will hit the road – or more, accurately, take to the air – one more time when it concludes its program with a trip to Spain and Portugal next February.

## HAY, HAY, HAY!

But this week, they experienced the “hay day” with Amy Freeburg.



RANDY DOCKENDORF/FOR THE PRESS AND DAKOTAN  
**Members of the South Dakota Agricultural and Rural Leadership (SDARL) class check out the Freeburg Hay crop near Gayville and Volin. Gary and Amy Freeburg operate their business in one of the prime hay production areas in the nation. Amy led this week’s tour for the SDARL visitors and is herself a graduate of the SDARL program.**

At one stop at the Freeburg farm, the class members examined the hay’s quality. They marveled at the large operation and the rapid pace of the workers moving through each field.

Freeburg offered them the chance to “ride” along with the workers. A number of class members took advantage, while others relaxed on bales.

In contrast to many of the SDARL members’ dry conditions back home, Freeburg said her hay operation worries about too much rain.

In addition, the water table lies close to the surface, she said.

“Here in the (Missouri) river bottom, we have high tide and low tide. The moisture starts to come up out of the bottom as well as in the air. You especially see it this time of year,” she said.

“In 2011, when the Missouri River was full bore (with historic flooding), it was a pistol,” she said, pushing her foot on the grass as if squishing soaked soil.

Freeburg fielded the SDARL members’ questions about harvesting the hay, determining its quality and marketing the product.

The Freeburg operation currently has 2,500 to 3,000 acres in hay, she said. “We start in mid-May and get four cuttings a year. But this year, we’re on track to get a fifth cutting,” she said.

And contrary to that old adage, the Freeburgs don’t always make hay when the sun shines.

“If the weather lets us move, we do. But if it’s hay we have to cut, we’ll cut it,” Amy said. “Hay cut at the right stage is better than hay that waits for the weather.”

The Freeburgs aim for quality, not quantity, with their operation. Valley Ag tests and certifies the hay.

“Timing is everything, whether you plant, rake, cut or bale it,” Amy said. “Our top priority isn’t tonnage. We want to see how much quality hay we can get.”

After they finish haying in the fall, the Freeburgs devote their time to marketing their product. Customers include dairies, zoos and Amish men with milk goats, with the primary markets in the eastern part of the nation, Amy said.

The Freeburgs have remained active members of the National Hay Association (NHA). Gary served as president in 1993, and Amy currently serves on the board. The Freeburgs also attend the annual World Dairy Expo, giving them more important connections.

Customers remain loyal, even if they aren’t always placing regular

orders, Amy said.

“Gary and I have been doing this for over 40 years, and there are customers we haven’t heard from for 10 years,” she said. “Then, that person will call and say, ‘We’re having a bad year, we need hay.’ Our clientele hangs with us really well.”

The Chinese have shown a strong interest in the Freeburg hay, but the Freeburgs don’t see it as a viable market because of the high transportation costs.

After this week’s tour, a number of SDARL class members described the Freeburg operation as progressive.

Bjorn Nelson of Huron said he was visiting the southeast corner of the state for the first time and found the tour showed a different crop.

“To see the Freeburg operation is so unbelievable,” he said. “We talk corn and beans, but they went with alfalfa and made it a niche market.”

Jim Kanable of Ipswich agreed. “It was cool to see the Freeburg operation. You don’t see that many operations that have alfalfa as the main crop,” he said.

The SDARL classmates talked about the hay tour, like other parts of the 18-month program, as offering valuable lessons.

“You’ve got to think outside the box,” Freeland said.

Schley agreed. “A lot of it is changing your mindset. It’s also about leadership. You see how other people think so differently and how you can apply that knowledge to your business,” he said.

Doyle Renaas of Nunda sees the opportunity to learn from others. “We all know something, but we don’t know it all,” he said.

Nick Scott of Valley Springs looked at it another way. “As one speaker said, it’s all about ‘educate, educate, educate.’”

Pravecek has found SDARL to be rewarding. “This is a fantastic program. It’s definitely worth the time commitment,” she said.

Nelson also sees it as a life-changing experience. “It broadens your horizons, and you meet a lot of people,” he said.

Kanable noted he can gain advice on agriculture not only from his SDARL class but from the roughly 210 graduates of the previous seven programs.

“The biggest benefit has been the contacts and the people you meet along the way,” he said. “It’s been quite an experience.”

Follow @RDockendorf on Twitter.



Without missing a beat  
COURTESY PHOTO DARA LOHNES  
**Roger Kehm donating his beloved 1942 “Radio King” drum set to the National Music Museum**

## WW II Vet Gives Rare Drum Set To The National Music Museum

There wasn’t a dry eye in the exhibit hall at the National Music Museum in Vermillion recently, as 90-year-old World War II vet and life-long drum enthusiast Roger L. Kehm sat down to skillfully play, one last time, on his vintage 1942 Slingerland “Radio King” drum set, before donating it the NMM.

It was an understandably emotional moment for Mr. Kehm. “This drum set was really special to me. I have so many great memories of playing,” he said. Kehm has played since he was 17 (which would seem to confirm popular claims about drumming’s long-term cardiovascular and intellectual benefits).

A Sioux Falls native, Kehm purchased his Radio King drum set from the John Sampson Drum shop in Sioux Falls before he graduated from high school in 1942. While anticipating being drafted, Kehm and some of his buddies organized a small dance band, playing for dances at the Sioux Falls USO. He also played with the Varsity Club dance band at South Dakota School of Agriculture and Mechanical Arts (now South Dakota State University) in Brookings, before being drafted in 1943. Kehm served in the U.S. Coast Guard, stationed on the South Pacific islet of Atafu, working on the then-secret Loran (Long Range Aids to Navigation) program.

After the war, Kehm enrolled at the South Dakota School of Mines, Rapid City, where he played with the Clyde Keyes Combo and the Sophisticated Swingsters. As a veteran, Kehm continued to play his drums professionally for several decades at American Legion Clubs, VFW halls, and other regional venues. He performed for many years with the Milt Askew Orchestra at the Arkota Ballroom in Sioux Falls.

Introduced between 1936 and 1937, the “Radio King” was Slingerland’s flagship product. Unlike other drums of the era that were built with layers of wood, the “Radio King” sported drumshells made of steam-bent maple. Kehm’s drum set includes a bass drum/footpedal/spurs, a snare drum, two cymbals, wood block, cow bells, two tom-toms, and a Hi-Hat cymbal stand. The Radio King was Slingerland’s most famous product line through the mid-1950s.

Until Labor Day 2015, Kehm’s beloved rare drum set will be part of the World War II section of the NMM’s special summer exhibit “Banding Together: The American Soldiers’ Musical Arsenal.” After the exhibit comes down, the drum will take its place in the NMM’s outstanding antique and vintage drum collection.

At press time, the NMM’s Facebook post about Mr. Kehm’s drum donation had surpassed 63,300 Facebook views, making it the most viewed, most liked, most shared, and most commented on National Music Museum Facebook post ever.

## GIVING BACK



SHAUNA MARLETTE/ FOR THE PLAIN TALK  
**Jackie Williams, media consultant for the Plain Talk presents the Vermillion EMS and Fire Departments with donations raised through ad sales for special sections held this summer.**

## Buffington Named To Creighton U. Dean’s List.

OMAHA, Nebraska – Luke Buffington of Gayville, a senior in the Heider College of Business was named to the Creighton University Dean’s List for spring 2015.

Full-time students who earn a 3.5 grade-point average or better on a 4.0 scale are eligible for the Dean’s List.

About Creighton University: Creighton University in Omaha, Neb., enrolls 4,000 undergraduates and 4,200 graduate and professional students among nine schools and colleges. No other university its size offers students such a comprehensive academic environment with personal attention from faculty-mentors. Jesuit and Catholic, it affords incomparable interprofessional education, bridging health professions programs with law, business and arts and sciences - all on one walkable campus. Creighton has been top-ranked by U.S. News & World Report for 20 years.

For more information, visit our website at: [www.creighton.edu](http://www.creighton.edu).



It’s more than just a mortgage.

[firstinterstate.com](http://firstinterstate.com)

It’s the place you’ll call home. Our experienced staff can help you get the job done right. Home buying success—it’s you and **FI** together.

MORTGAGE REVIEWS AND HOME LOANS

**Forbes 2015  
BEST BANKS  
IN AMERICA**

©2014 Forbes Media LLC. Used with permission.

ADAM EBEN | NMLS# 16762, 605-977-8503  
DICK GROEGER | NMLS# 406176, 605-997-8501  
HARLAN NIELSEN | NMLS# 402097, 605-977-8510  
BECKY TAYLOR | NMLS# 400288, 605-977-8502  
DARREN MELSTA | NMLS# 400286, 605-977-8511  
TIM BARBETTA | NMLS# 400288, 605-977-8509  
PAUL LEMS | NMLS# 464386, 605-977-8512

COMPETITIVE RATES • ONLINE APPLICATIONS • RD LOANS  
CONSTRUCTION-PERM LOANS • CONVENTIONAL • FHA • VA  
FIRST-TIME HOMEBUYER PROGRAMS

**First  
Interstate Bank**

4930 South Western Avenue  
Suite 100  
Sioux Falls, SD 57108

Member FDIC. Equal Housing Lender.