

Farm Bureau Young Farmers aim to network, tell the farm story

BY JOLENE STEVENS
Contributing writer

Kirk Kneip, like other young farmers, enjoys watching the crops coming up in the spring and the livestock standing in a lot feeding and being readied for market.

And like others his age, 35-year-old Kirk says he sees the benefits that come with membership in a farm organization, in his case the Iowa Farm Bureau.

"My dad, Roddy Kneip, was a Farm Bureau board member, and I can remember how important he felt this was to him," the younger Kirk, a five-year Farm Bureau member, said. "When I was asked to serve on our American Township Board (Plymouth County), I thought about it briefly and said yes."

Kirk is both a member of the Farm Bureau's Young Farmer Program and one of four Plymouth County members who participated in the group's state Young Farmer conference earlier this winter in Des Moines.

He points to what he sees as the benefits gained through the program.

"It's an opportunity for us network with other farmers, to be active in agriculture and to voice our concerns," he said. "It's an indication, as I see it, to acknowledge our commitment to farming."

"Our membership gives us a way to share our concerns with our political representatives to help them understand our industry and to let urban residents know that what we do out here is the best possible we can do for our animals," Kirk said. "There are a lot of people out there who say just the opposite and talk louder than we do. It's our responsibility to counter this oppo-

sition to our agricultural industry."

Mark Bohner, regional manager, Iowa Farm Bureau, Le Mars, agrees with the importance of participation of young farmers (those between 18 and 35 years old) in the Iowa program to assist the agricultural community at all levels: county, state or national.

"We're blessed here in Plymouth County to have a good — and solid — number of young farmers," Bohner said. "These members need to continue to play an active role in our Farm Bureau organization now, and in the future."

Staying part of the silent majority doesn't do any good, he said.

"It's a matter of these young farmers not allowing others to speak for their generation," Bohner said. "If they don't speak up, other people with certain agendas will guide the future of agriculture."

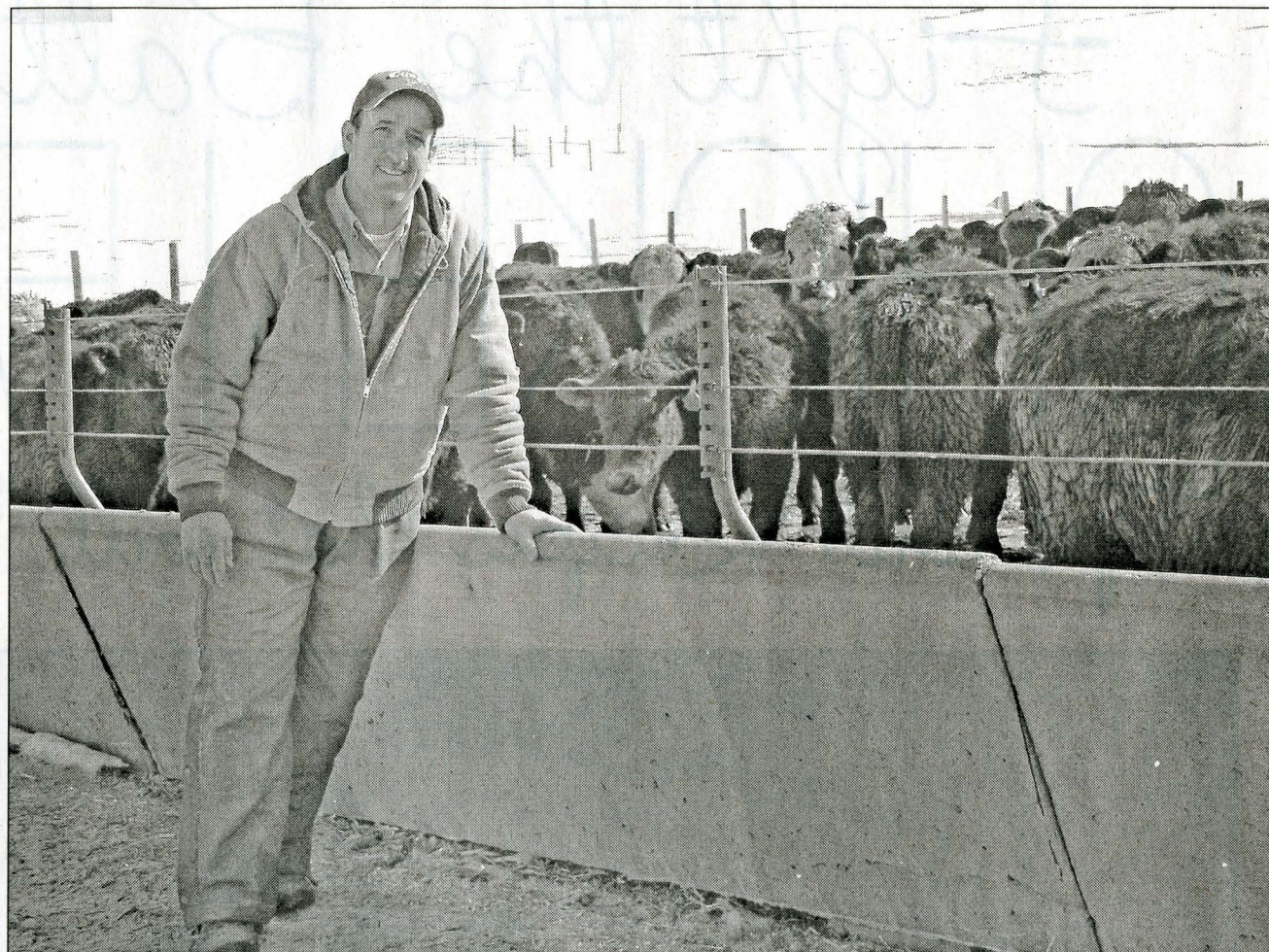
Kirk spends a portion of his time on an "in-town job" at Q-C Supply, in Storm Lake, along with assisting his father on the family's century-old farm southeast of Le Mars.

For Kirk, farming has become an integral part of his life.

"I expect the best way to describe it is to say I enjoy watching the cycle of life here on the farm, the growing of the crops in the spring, the spring calving, and the cattle and hogs being finished for market," he said.

Kirk admitted there are occasional difficulties in farming, whether they are natural disasters or everyday problems.

"What's important to me, however, is that you make your way through these problems and you can be outside watching the cycle of nature and see the benefits of your work at the end of a hard day," he said.



(SENTINEL PHOTO BY JOLENE STEVENS)

Kirk Kneip says the opportunity to share agriculture's story and to network with other farmers through the Iowa Farm Bureau's Young Farmer Program are among the benefits of his membership in the organization.

Kirk shares responsibilities with his father on the approximate 300-acre livestock and crop farmstead where he grew up.

Recalling his own enjoyment as a child on the farm, he shared his hopes of wanting someday to farm full time.

He also hopes he and his wife, Julie, can offer their own children, Kaleb, 3, and Ella, 1, an opportunity similar to his own.

Kirk said he and his father have shared their dedication to farming through the years.

He said by working together, the

two maintain a sound farm program that includes an approximate 175-head feeder cattle program, a 90-plus-head cow-calf herd and a 3,500-head annually wean-to-finish hog operation.

Kirk said each facet of the livestock operation lends itself to a message he feels necessary to share with others. And he sees his own role as relaying this message as a Young Farmer Program member.

"Consumers and our urban friends need to know the livestock produced on our farms are raised for healthy human consumption

and are raised a caring way with good livestock practices," Kirk said. "They need to know that the meat we produce is a food we ourselves feel comfortable eating."

The products raised are safe food products farmers are not afraid to share with a neighbor, a stranger or another country, he said.

"It's our responsibility to share this story to insure our future as young farmers and for the future of our agricultural industry," Kirk said.