

Not Your Typical Online Auction

NICOLLET — Some may think farming and the Internet are two opposite ends of the technological spectrum, but Joe and Liza Domeier are proving they work well together. And profitably at that. They run Pehling Bay Farm near Nicollet. Joe's mother grew up on the 30-acre property established by her grandfather. Liza was raised on a hog farm near St. Clair.

The couple sells pasture-fed livestock and poultry, as well as fiber from their sheep flock. They are building a healthy business utilizing the Internet and direct marketing to draw buyers who are willing to pay premium prices for local grown products.

The small acreage would pay like a part-time job if they attempted traditional row crop farming. So a different approach was chosen: raising pasture fed animals to sell to very select markets. Their sheep, hogs, chickens and beef are all pasture-fed, which may mean slower growth. However, Joe said it makes for healthier and more flavorful meats.

They don't sell meat or fiber retail or wholesale, only directly to customers. Direct marketing allows more money to be generated from the land. Their web site, www.pehlingbayfarm.com, advertises their meat and is a place where they can take product orders. In fact, most of their sales come via online sources. "Direct marketing without the Internet is like not having a phone," Joe said, "And you reach a much larger audience."

Joe says he is able to get about twice the market price for lambs as he would at a sale barn. Raw fleeces bring even higher rates than the meat. "It's almost like doubling our flock," Joe explained.

Internet auction site EBay and etsy.com are two places where the Domeiers are successful selling their fiber and craft items. They offer raw fleece to hand spinners on EBay and sell nearly all. The cheapest raw fleeces they sell through the sites bring about \$10 per pound while wool buyers pay about 20 cents a pound for high quality fleeces. Liza sells fiber products, including hats and yarn, from her store Wiley Wren via etsy.com, which caters to craftspeople and artisans worldwide.

Along with livestock and fiber the couple are into community-supported agriculture where people buy shares in the farm's garden in exchange for weekly distributions of the harvest. "I'm really surprised it is taking this long to catch on in Minnesota," Joe said. "You see it a lot in California and on the coasts." Each share in the garden yields a sack of produce each week for about 18 weeks, which Joe estimates is enough for a family of four to enjoy fresh produce. Shareholders can save some money by putting in some labor during the season. The cost is less than certified organic vegetables, but slightly higher than commercial produce.

"They have the benefits of growing their own garden without having to worry about it," he explained. "The customer knows exactly where their food comes from." The Domeier's enjoy their unique farming enterprise. The long-term goal is to make a living at it.

Joe advises anyone thinking about branching into third-crop farming to read as much as possible and to learn from other peoples' mistakes. "There's no manual that says here's how," to do conservation and farming, he said, adding that there are niches for people to get into. Marrying modern technology to time-tested endeavors can prove to be the ticket for sustainable third-crop methods.

Rural Advantage is a nonprofit corporation based in Fairmont, Minnesota. Their mission is to promote the connections between agriculture, the environment and rural communities in order to improve ecological health, economic viability and rural vitality. Their work centers around efforts to reduce agricultural nonpoint source pollution with major programming focused on the 3rd Crop

Initiative, ECoPayPack development and building the Madelia Model concept. Contact them at 507-238-5449 or visit their website at www.ruraladvantage.org for more information.

FLOW: The World War Crisis

Recommended viewing: FLOW--From both local and global perspectives, this documentary examines the harsh realities behind the mounting water crisis. Learn how politics, pollution and human rights are intertwined in this important issue that affects every being on Earth. With water drying up around the world and the future of human lives at stake, the film urges a call to arms before more of our most precious natural resource evaporates. For more information: <http://www.flowthefilm.com/>

Paddle enthusiasts save money and rivers

By John Branch

(CNN) -- With family vacation budgets tight as ever, one Georgia organization is offering an inexpensive vacation alternative that is at once economically and environmentally friendly. Paddle Georgia is a seven-day river trip for 300 kayakers and canoeists of all skill levels. In what is considered the largest organized, long-distance paddle trip in the country, 2009 marks the fifth year for the event known simply as Paddle Georgia. Organized by the Athens, Georgia based nonprofit Georgia River Network, the trip features 300 kayakers and canoeists of all skill levels, ranging from age 4 to 74.

Having floated the Chattahoochee, Etowah, Ocmulgee and Flint rivers over the past four years, this June the group journeys down the Coosawattee and Oostanaula rivers of northwest Georgia. Charting a 92-mile course, the week-long trip takes participants downstream from the Blue Ridge Mountains of Georgia to downtown Rome, Georgia. And with trip registration and meal fees for the journey amounting to \$57 per day per person, organizers are touting the event as one of the most economical week-long vacations around.

"You travel for seven days with a great group of individuals, seeing sights you'd never see from the highway or even back roads," said April Ingle, executive director of Georgia River Network. "You never have to stop to fill up your gas tank and never have to stand in line at airport security, but you're always just one paddle stroke from a great swimming hole. You'll be hard pressed to find a better vacation value."

Since the event's inception in 2005, more than 1,200 people have participated in Paddle Georgia, helping generate more than \$45,000 for river protection in the state. A host of volunteers and supporters from local watershed groups and the communities through which the event passes assist the Georgia River Network staff throughout the week. "Aside from bringing much attention to our rivers, Paddle Georgia also pumps a lot of money into local communities," Ingle said. Paddlers often spend evenings in local towns, shopping and dining at area businesses, and camping on the local high school football field.

When the group selected the Flint River for 2008, the event even grabbed the attention of former President Carter, who spoke to the paddlers and dined on fried fish with them at the traditional week's-end celebration dinner. Carter vetoed a dam project on the Flint during his tenure as governor of Georgia in the mid-1970s after exploring the river at the urging of outdoorsmen and environmentalists. ([The Flint River is the second most endangered river in the United States.](#))

More than just a canoe and kayak trip, Paddle Georgia includes educational programs on each river's cultural and natural history, tours of facilities and historic sites along the way, nightly games and entertainment, and a research program in which participants help collect chemical and biological data to give a snapshot of the current health of the river.

The trip is suitable for novice paddlers as well as experienced paddlers using canoes and kayaks. "We hope to have a lot of families," Paddle Georgia Coordinator Joe Cook said. "A week-long canoe trip is not an easy thing for a family to plan. This trip allows a family to participate in a great adventure without having to fret over all the logistics." The idea for the event was hatched during Cook's own 100-day, 540-mile canoe trip down the Chattahoochee in 1995.

"That trip from the mountains to the Gulf of Mexico was an incredible experience. It was really a lesson in how a river works, how it changes on its journey to the sea and how much it provides for us," Cook said. "Ever since that trip, I've wanted other people to experience Georgia's rivers. The best way to understand and appreciate a river is to get on it and follow in its path." Ingle and Administration and Outreach Director Dana Skelton embraced the idea of a paddling adventure in spring 2004 and decided that such an event would be a tremendous service to Georgia citizens.

The Georgia River Network has scheduled this year's event for June 20 through 26, and registration is now under way. The trip is limited to the first 300 registrants wishing to do the entire seven-day trip (thru-paddlers). Paddle Georgia Lite, a two day weekend-only portion of the seven-day paddle, is also offered. The article can be found at <http://www.cnn.com/2009/TRAVEL/getaways/04/08/paddle.georgia.trip/index.html>

More information about Paddle Georgia can be found at www.garivers.org.

Events:

April 16th (Thursday) is the **Citizen Monitoring Open House** starting at 7:00 p.m. at the New Ulm Civic Center, room 203. The Brown-Nicollet-Cottonwood Water Quality Board is looking for 15 volunteers to help assess the streams in the Middle Minnesota River Watershed. This is covering an area from Le Sueur to Morton along the Minnesota River. Please forward this invitation to any individuals or groups that might be interested. All interested parties should contact: Ed Hohenstein with the BNC WQB, 507-934-4140.

April 18th (Saturday) is the **Earth Day Celebration** at Prairie Woods Environmental Learning Center from 8 a.m. to 1 p.m. At 10:30 a.m. is the presentation: "Native American History of Minnesota" by Frank Joseph. There will be informational booths, kids' activities, hands-on workshops, Archaeology displays and artifact identification, climbing wall, bird-banding demo, renewable energy models and Youth Energy Summit project displays. For driving directions go to: www.prairiewoodselc.org/roadmap.html. For more information, <http://mavdisk.mnsu.edu/kudels/earthdayposter.pdf>

April 21st (Tuesday) is the **Minnesota River Watershed Alliance Quarterly Meeting** starting at 6:00 p.m. with a social hour and the formal meeting getting going at 7:00 p.m. The meeting will take place at the Hutchinson Event Center (1005 Highway 15 South Plaza 15). For more information, <http://mavdisk.mnsu.edu/kudels/april2109invitation.pdf>

April 28th (Tuesday) – **Would Mankato Benefit from a Co-op? – A Community Conversation** at the Elk's Nature Center in Rasmussen Woods (555 Stoltzman Road) in Mankato from 6 p.m. to 8 p.m. Over the past couple of years, conversation around the topic at hand has happened over coffee, in the grocery store line and as people of like minds and preferences cross paths. Meetings held recently have determined that there is a strong community interest in exploring the possibilities. Join interested community members the last Tuesday of each month and assist in moving this question into action mode.

May 7 – 8 (Thursday & Friday) is the **2009 Lakes and Rivers Conference** at the Mayo Civic Center in Rochester. Choose from more than 50 informational presentations on a variety of topics. For more information or to register: www.minnesotawaters.org

Check out additional upcoming events and workshops on the Minnesota River Calendar at: <http://mrbdc.mnsu.edu/calendar/index.html>

Water Quality Articles

For more information: <http://mavdisk.mnsu.edu/kudels/springflingneynature.pdf>

[Swenson committed to building bright future for wheat growers](#) (Agri News). Biotechnology is critical for wheat's future, says Minnesota Association of Wheat Growers president Scott Swenson.

[Ethanol plant not on board](#) (Fairmont Sentinel). An announcement Tuesday for a cellulose project involving the Corn Plus ethanol plant in Winnebago came as a surprise to Corn Plus officials.

[Expectations for Ethanol](#) (KAAL TV). You've seen the sticker on the pump, saying the gas you put into your car contains ethanol.

[Rothsay residents will try to cut energy use by 10 percent](#) (MinnPost). Gov. Tim Pawlenty will be in Rothsay, Minn., Thursday to help kick off an ambitious community project: cutting energy use by 10 percent.

[Xcel Energy investing in 17MW solar power plant](#) (MinnPost). Xcel Energy is partnering to build a solar power plant in Colorado using solar panels that tilt toward the sun as it moves across the sky.

[Lessons in conservation](#) (Faribault Daily News). Fifth-grader Kelly Kenow made a good guess as to how soil relates to getting a space shuttle off the ground.

[Minnesota Valley refuge's visitor center will be closed into fall](#) (Minneapolis Star Tribune). The refuge's Visitor Center will become more earth-friendly in function, but will displace some summer programs planned for the center.

[Ash borer is at the border](#) (Minneapolis Star Tribune). State inspectors are on watch in Houston County to see if the emerald ash borer has invaded Minnesota.

[A busy year for highway and bridge construction](#) (Minnesota Public Radio). The pain of Minnesota road and bridge construction season is about to intensify. MnDOT today announced 223 projects around the state.

['10 most threatened' designation a long time in coming for Lower St. Croix](#) (MinnPost). The curse of the Lower St. Croix River, perhaps, is its proximity to the sprawling Twin Cities metro area and development pressures that come with it – aided by timidity by state and local officials from enforcing seemingly simple things like setback requirements for home sites and allowing oversized mansions to be built on small “original” foundations.

[Foam in river remains unexplained](#) (Minneapolis Star Tribune). Reports of foam in Vermillion River at Hastings have watershed and city officials on alert.

[Thomas L. Friedman: Show Us the Ball](#) (New York Times). I am really encouraged by President Obama's commitment to clean energy and combating climate change. I just have three worries: whether he has the right policies, the right politics and the right official to sell his program to the country. Other than that, things look great!

[C. Ford Runge: The biofuel illusion](#) (Pioneer Press). One might imagine that the old adage about something too good to be true would have sunk in by now. But in the realm of biofuels, hope springs eternal.

[Rachel Maddow calls out Bachmann error in Strib op-ed](#) (Minnesota Independent). As we reported yesterday, Rep. Michele Bachmann has been saying that Barack Obama's cap-and-trade plan for global warming will cost households \$3,100 each year in energy costs. Only trouble is, [the author of the MIT study she's citing said last month she's flat wrong](#).

[City looking for biggest ash](#) (New Ulm Journal). With the Emerald Ash Borer now massing just across the border in Wisconsin, the New Ulm Tree Advisory Commission wants to know: Where is the biggest ash tree in New Ulm?

[Edina residents will have a say in Nine Mile Trail](#) (Minneapolis Star Tribune). But a Three Rivers Park official warned that that doesn't mean everyone will be happy with the process, and ultimately, the decision will rest with the City Council.

[Best fate for kitchen scraps neither disposal nor trash can](#) (Minneapolis Star Tribune). The very best choice is neither trash can nor garbage disposal. Rather, recycle and compost as much as possible.

[Lake run-off plan runs into big opposition](#) (Minneapolis Star Tribune). Advocates see the pond as a way to improve water quality in nearby lakes. But Apple Valley neighbors see it as an eyesore in place of their park.

[Weak crop prices end feast in farm states](#) (Associated Press). Farming communities that were largely insulated from the recession last year by high crop prices and other factors are now feeling the nation's economic chill more acutely as corn, wheat and soybeans become cheaper and land values fall.

[Local food, one yard at a time – Backyard Harvest in your own backyard](#) (Twin Cities Daily Planet). The food revolution will begin in your own backyard, if the [Backyard Harvest](#) program takes off.

[Environmentalists tracking tax revenues dedicated to outdoor, cultural projects](#) (Finance & Commerce). Environmental and conservation groups are so far generally pleased with ongoing negotiations at the Capitol to spend new dedicated sales-tax dollars on habitat and clean-water projects.

[A slippery slope for Legacy conservation spending?](#) (Minneapolis Star Tribune). Environmental advocates Thursday warned state officials against using money from the new Legacy Amendment to replace existing funds for the outdoors, clean water and conservation.

[DNR raises red flag about zebra mussels in popular metro lake](#) (Minneapolis Star Tribune). A recent discovery of zebra mussel shells in a popular southwest metro lake has state conservation officials concerned.

[Legislators preparing outdoors spending plan, thanks to constitutional amendment](#) (MinnPost). Up to \$140 million in new spending for natural resources is shaping up at the Legislature, even though cuts are being planned in almost every other category.

[Opinion: Orienting toward clean water and conservation](#) (Pioneer Press). It's fair to say that the Legislature is up to two big things at the state Capitol in St. Paul right now: fixing a multibillion-dollar budget deficit, and creating the framework for spending a multibillion-dollar windfall.

[Cleaning Up The Water](#) (Fox Mankato). The Land of 10-thousand Lakes has pollution problems facing some of them. It's not just the lakes, but other waterways as well. News 12's Erick Lind found out that thanks to all Minnesota voters, the water will now be cleaned up.

[Report: Air quality around dairy poses health risks](#) (Minnesota Public Radio). A new report by the Health Department reiterates that a large dairy operation near Thief River Falls is a public health hazard that needs to be addressed.

[Communities eager to attract clean energy jobs](#) (Mankato Free Press). A green energy venture near Rapidan started at Greg Hawkinson's thermostat. More precisely, with the monthly heating bill he gets in the mail.

[Pond full of scum produces a tank full of cheap diesel](#) (Minneapolis Star Tribune). A local company produces diesel for \$1.25 to \$1.75 a gallon. And that attracted the interest of financiers, scientists and Uncle Sam.

[The decline of bumblebees -- and what we can do to help](#) (MinnPost). By now, you've probably heard about the decline of European honeybees, a phenomenon also known as Colony Collapse Disorder (CCD).

Water has no taste, no color, no odor, it cannot be defined, art relished while every mysterious. Not necessary to life, but rather life itself. It fills us with a gratification that exceeds the delight of the senses. – Antoine de Saint-Exupery

The Minnesota River Watershed Alliance (Watershed Alliance) is an organized network of citizens, public agencies, and private organizations dedicated to communicating the benefits of an ecology healthy Minnesota River Watershed to others and are actively working towards its improvement and protection. We meet four times a year and encourage landowners and recreational users of the river to be part of the effort. For more information on the Watershed Alliance: <http://www.watershedalliance.blogspot.com>

Please register at the Minnesota River Watershed Alliance's bulletin board at <http://mail.mnsu.edu/mailman/listinfo/mrwa> to receive regular updates on what is happening in the Minnesota River Watershed.

Thanks,

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