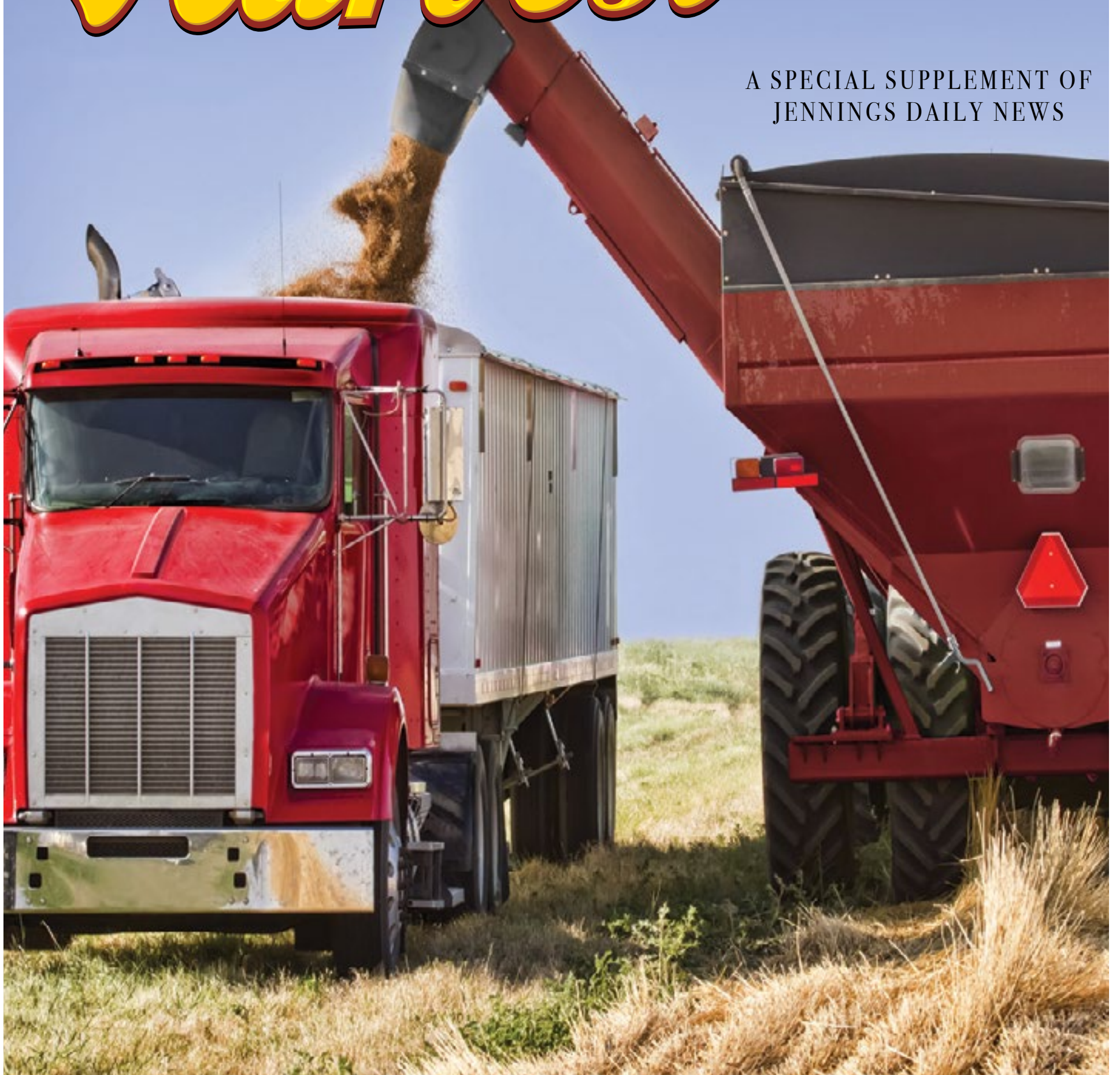


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How to support local agriculture this fall

The global pandemic that has upended daily life has exacted a toll on many industries. Businesses have been asked to close or temporarily scale back operations, while organizers of recreational gatherings have been tasked with reevaluating the practicality and safety of annual events.

Throughout the United States and Canada, autumn fairs, exhibitions and activities provide revenue for many people. But due to the outbreak of the COVID-19 virus, many of these annual events have been postponed, adversely affecting local agricultural industries as a result. Governments in certain places have responded to the cancellations and offered assistance to local farmers and agricultural industries. For example, the Province of Ontario is providing nearly \$1 million to assist organizations that had to cancel fall events due to the coronavirus pandemic. In addition to supporting such efforts, the general public can pitch in to help offset some of the financial losses accrued by local farms.

- **Check for virtual events.** Some fall fairs or livestock events have been moved to the digital realm. That means competitors who were entering livestock or even home crafts into competitions can still participate. Organizers may ask for videos or photos of entries and then a committee will vote on the winners. This is one way to keep entry fees and even cash prizes moving along.

- **Support local farms or orchards.** Fall is harvest season in many areas, making this a popular time of year to visit nearby farms and to purchase fruits and vegetables directly from the source. Many farms have implemented safety protocols that align with COVID-19 health recommendations to safely welcome visitors. Things may look a little differently at orchards and farms, but smaller crowds and wearing masks should not compromise the fun of picking your own foods.

- **Explore farm-to-table.** Private individuals as well as restaurant owners can develop relationships with area agriculture producers to increase the availability of farm-to-table offerings. Restaurants can revamp menus to include a greater share of items sourced from nearby farms. Individuals also can rely on produce stands and farmers' markets to stock their pantries. Some farms may offer delivery and mail-order as well.

- **Offer financial services.** Financial advisors can



help farmers who are struggling with finances work through their options. Institutions may be able to extend the terms of loan repayments, refinance loans, restructure debt, or get credit extensions. Lower interest rates have created some new opportunities farmers may not be aware of. Financial advisors can help

farmers navigate an uncertain financial time.

Farmers and agricultural organizations are facing greater challenges as fall fairs and other events are being canceled. The public can support agriculture in different ways to offset the financial losses stemming from the pandemic.

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LAFA to provide acres for new rice mill

Jeff Davis Parish Police Jury recently extended their Industrial Park Lease with Louisiana Agricultural Finance Authority (LAFA) and sublease with the South Louisiana Rail Facility, LLC (SLRF).

This extension is for LAFA's Industrial Park facility in Lacassine at a new rent rate of \$1,755.26 per month until the year 2026.

Parish officials entered the Industrial Park Lease on March 23, 2011 for \$1,620 per month with the intention of creating a sublease with the SLRF to facilitate the construction, operation and maintenance of an agricultural rail loading and storage facility.

"The Industrial Park lease started out as an opportunity for rice farmers to sell their rice at a better cost," said Police Jury President Steve Eastman. "Before we entered into

these agreements, rice farmers were having a hard time selling, storing and exporting their rice."

Eastman said that with the extended lease, LAFA is providing additional land to the police jury for development and operations of a new rice mill at the industrial park by a private party.

"The rice mill will be operated by the SLRF," said Eastman. "The police jury has no financial obligation to this project. The proposed rice mill will be funded by public monies from the State of Louisiana or the SLRF."

Adding a rice mill to LAFA's Industrial Park will allow for local rice farmers to produce, store, mill and export their rice from one location.

"Usually the rice has to be sent off to another facility to be milled," said Eastman. "However, with the addition of a rice mill to the industrial park, the

entire process of producing and milling can happen on site."

In 2020, SLRF announced the development of the \$11.6 million rice mill at the Lacassine Industrial Park, according to the Office of the Governor. The facility will handle up to 25,000 bushels of rice per hour for storage and export. The project creates seven new direct jobs with an annual average salary of \$43,103 plus benefits.

"Rice cultivation and distribution has been a bedrock agribusiness for our state since its earliest days, and today I join the South Louisiana Rail Facility in announcing a new chapter in its history," Gov. John Bel Edwards said. "SLRF's new rice mill will reward the hard work of more than 200 Louisiana rice farmers with added value for their operations and diversified products for international

markets. This new facility will be built to last and to provide opportunities for Louisiana farmers for decades to come."

Development of the 15,000-square-foot facility will result in the creation of 20 construction jobs.

"The South Louisiana Rail Facility is excited to partner with Agreeta to continue to provide new marketing avenues to the region's rice growers," said SLRF Manager Mark Pousson. "This collaboration will ensure that sustainably sourced Louisiana rice is available to consumers in Southwest Louisiana and beyond."

SLRF helps Louisiana farmers market rough rice internationally for more competitive prices. The facility will be situated on land owned by LAFA, which will retain ownership of the mill. With the support of Agreeta and the ultimate increase in

international activity, the project represents a major international and agricultural win for Louisiana.

"Investment in agricultural infrastructure will markedly grow our rural and state economy," stated Louisiana Commissioner of Agriculture and Forestry Mike Strain, D.V.M., in a press release. "Louisiana-produced rice is valued at more than \$350 million annually. The new rice mill in Jeff Davis Parish will give our farmers another avenue to add value to and sell locally produced rice. Value-added process-

ing not only adds greater value to our crop, but also increases our ability to market our rice domestically and internationally."

SLRF was launched in 2010 to receive, preserve and distribute paddy rice to international markets. SLRF partnered with the India-based Agreeta Farmer Network to optimize the facility's logistics and to prepare local farm products for international markets. The SLRF rice mill has an expected life span of several decades and will serve hundreds of rice farmers and investors in Southwest Louisiana.




The Southwest Louisiana Rail Facility was originally launched in 2010 to receive, preserve and distribute paddy rice to international markets.



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One Hive at a Time

The basics of backyard beehives

Scientists and environmentalists have been warning the public for years that honeybees are disappearing at alarming rates. Scientists were initially uncertain in regard to what was decimating bee populations. Even though no single cause is to blame, data has pointed to pesticide use and the mysterious colony collapse disorder, which is a name given to the dwindling colonies seen around the world.

National Geographic News says bees are essential because of their roles as pollinators. Agriculture industries rely on honeybees, especially managed honeybees, to keep commercial crops pollinated and productive. Estimates indicate that roughly one-third of U.S. crops rely on honeybees — accounting for more than \$15 billion in crop production. Without bees, the costs of everything from blueberries to apples to broccoli would rise, as farmers would have to use a different, more expensive pollination method.

Even though backyard beehives or bee farms may not be crucial to consumer agriculture, bringing healthy colonies back to various areas is ben-

eficial to the environment overall. The art of beekeeping has become an important endeavor, and just about anyone with some time and resources can start their own apiary.

- **Start by studying bees.** Interested beekeepers can begin their journey by reading all they can on beekeeping. The American Bee Journal or backyard beekeeping books and articles are great places to start. Local beekeeping associations also are invaluable resources for information on local bee species and traits.

- **Know the laws.** It's important to get the go-ahead from local authorities before introducing bees into the community. By checking city or town ordinances, potential beekeepers will know how



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With time, homeowners can become successful beekeepers and do their part to replenish much-needed bee colonies.

many hives are allowed and which type of property sizes are amenable and allowable.

- **Get the right supplies.** Research can help prospective beekeepers understand the type of equipment they will need. One can purchase this equipment, but some beekeeping organizations may be willing to lend or rent it to inter-

ested parties. Hive boxes, bottom boards, a veil, a jacket, a smoker, and a top feeder are just some of the supplies needed.

- **Order bees.** Bees can be acquired from other beekeeping enthusiasts or can be ordered online. The bees will need to consist of the queen, drones and worker bees. According to the resource Bees Brothers, a starter set of bees is called a "nuc." Bee suppliers start selling in the winter for spring swarms.

- **Place the hive.** It's important to set up hives away from foot traffic. In addition, face hives away from strong winds, with the ideal directions being east and south. Hives need sunshine and some shade on summer afternoons, advises BackYardHive.



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5 tips for gardening with kids

(Family Features) After months of cool weather, the first hint of spring will likely have the whole family eager to dive into outdoor activities. This year, as you begin tackling the garden, find ways to get the youngest family members in on the action, too.

Not only is gardening an activity you can enjoy together, there are numerous ways to incorporate age-appropriate, teachable moments from counting and colors to responsible care of living things.

Creating a positive first experience with gardening can start with this simple advice:

- Dedicate a spot for a junior garden, which allows you to instill a sense of pride and ownership in the little gardener while protecting your own garden areas from ambitious young hands.

- Provide appropriate tools in child sizes. Just as you would teach a child the finer points of baseball using a bat and glove, demonstrate the joys of gardening with tools such as a rake, hoe and trowel, all of which can be found in sizes more manageable for little helpers.



- Let the kids choose what to plant. Whether flowers or food plants, allow children to make their own decisions (within reason) about what they would like to grow. This can help them engage in the magic of watching items they selected emerge from the ground and grow into

their finished forms.

- Encourage exposure to unfamiliar plants that entice the senses with appealing smells and flavors. Herbs such as chives, mint and basil are good choices, or consider edible flowers such as pansies or violets.

- Set an example for your child to imitate by

giving regular and proper care to your own garden.

Remember to bring the lesson full circle by enjoying the bounty of your garden together, whether it's a small hand-cut bouquet or a meal featuring your child's fresh-grown produce. Find more tips for gardening with your kids at eLivingtoday.com.

WHAT IS SUSTAINABLE FARMING?

Many transitions have taken place in the agricultural industry over the last several decades. The widespread adoption of various technologies over the last 20-plus years has helped farmers streamline their operations, making their farms more efficient and less wasteful as a result. In addition, many farmers have embraced sustainable farming, which is a relatively recent approach to agriculture. Sustainable

agriculture intends to contribute to a robust economy by making farms profitable. Farmers who embrace sustainable agriculture also aim to have a positive effect on the environment and their surrounding ecosystems. That's accomplished by embracing strategies that focus on building and maintaining healthy soil, managing water wisely, minimizing pollution, and promoting biodiversity. The Na-

tional Institute of Food and Agriculture notes that sustainable agriculture encompasses a wide range of production practices, including some associated with conventional farming and some linked to organic farming. As a result, sustainable farming should not be mistaken for organic farming, or vice versa. However, there's a strong likelihood that certified organic produce at local grocery stores are byproducts of farms that embrace sustainable agriculture.

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Fresh veggies not exclusive to spring and summer

Spring and summer may be the seasons most often associated with gardening. But people who love to grow their own vegetables can do so even when the weather outside is frightful.

Various vegetables thrive in cool temperatures. The home and garden experts at HGTV note that some winter vegetables are hardy. That means

they can handle frosts in temperatures as low as 25 F without being damaged. Others are even sturdier in the face of all that winter can throw at them, capable of tolerating temperatures that dip into the high teens.

Growing vegetables in winter requires a different approach than growing in spring and summer, as gardeners must

be ready to prevent damage from frost if temperatures get especially chilly. For example, the experts at Michigan State University Extension note that gardeners may need to utilize floating row covers to protect sensitive crops from frost. Gardeners interested in planting winter vegetables can speak with a local garden center professional about which

crops to plant and what to do if temperatures push winter vegetable gardens to the brink.

Though it's up to gardeners what they want to plant, the following are some popular winter vegetables that can make for wonderful, fresh additions to any dinner table even after the traditional gardening season has come and gone.

- Arugula
- Broccoli
- Brussel sprouts
- Cabbage
- Carrots
- Collard greens
- Endive
- Parsley
- Parsnips
- Kale
- Radishes
- Rutabagas
- Spinach
- Swiss chard



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GETTING

Figs are easy
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The LSU Gold fig makes large golden fruit. Photo by Heather Kirk-Ballard/LSU AgCenter

A photograph of a farm scene with several cows in a field. The cows are brown and white, and the field is green with yellow flowers. The background is a blue sky with white clouds.

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We Appreciate Our Local Farmers

Figgy WITH IT

By **HEATHER KIRK-BALLARD**
LSU AgCenter Horticulturist

It's fig season in Louisiana! This year turned out an excellent crop here on LSU's main campus. Figs (*Ficus carica*) are native to the Middle East and Western Asia but have become naturalized here in North America. The trees are deciduous and can grow to an average of 10 to 30 feet with branches typically spreading wider than the height.

Figs are relatively easy to grow and care for. A few varieties of figs are available at local nurseries. One of the most

popular and reliable is Celeste, which produces small to medium-sized violet to brown fruit with a light red pulp. These are resistant to fruit splitting and souring.

The LSU AgCenter has released several excellent varieties. LSU Purple is a great one, and it has become a favorite. It produces medium-sized dark purple fruit with good resistance to diseases. It can produce two crops: a main crop in July followed by a later crop that sometimes lasts into December.

LSU Gold produces a flavorful yellow fig with light red to pink pulp; O'Rourke, named

after an LSU horticulturist, has medium-sized light brown fruit; Champagne has medium-sized yellow fruit; and Tiger has large light brown fruit with a dark brown stripe.

They also can be propagated very simply and in many ways. Figs root very easily either by air layering or by cuttings. Air layering is a propagation technique that allows you to start a new plant from the original while still on the plant. It involves the encouragement of new roots by causing a wound to the stem.

Air layering is also called girdling, and as the name suggests,

you create a wound by cutting a circular strip of bark from a stem. With figs, it is best to work on 1-year-old wood because it will produce new roots more quickly than older wood. Springtime is perhaps the best time to air layer figs, but you can also layer in the summer and fall as long as there are at least four to six weeks for the plants to make new roots before going into winter dormancy.

You only need a handful of supplies to be successful: a very sharp utility blade or grafting knife, sphagnum peat moss, Saran plastic wrap, aluminum foil, and electrician's tape or

thick rubber bands.

The procedure is to select a 1/4-inch-thick stem, measure back 8 to 12 inches from the tip and use a sharp, clean knife to make a circular cut just into the bark all the way around the stem. Clean your knife with 70 percent ethanol or a 10 percent bleach solution prior to making any cuts.

Peel back the bark about a half-inch and remove it or just fold it back. Wrap the area with moistened sphagnum peat moss, then cover the moss with a layer of plastic wrap sealed

See **FIGS** Page 12

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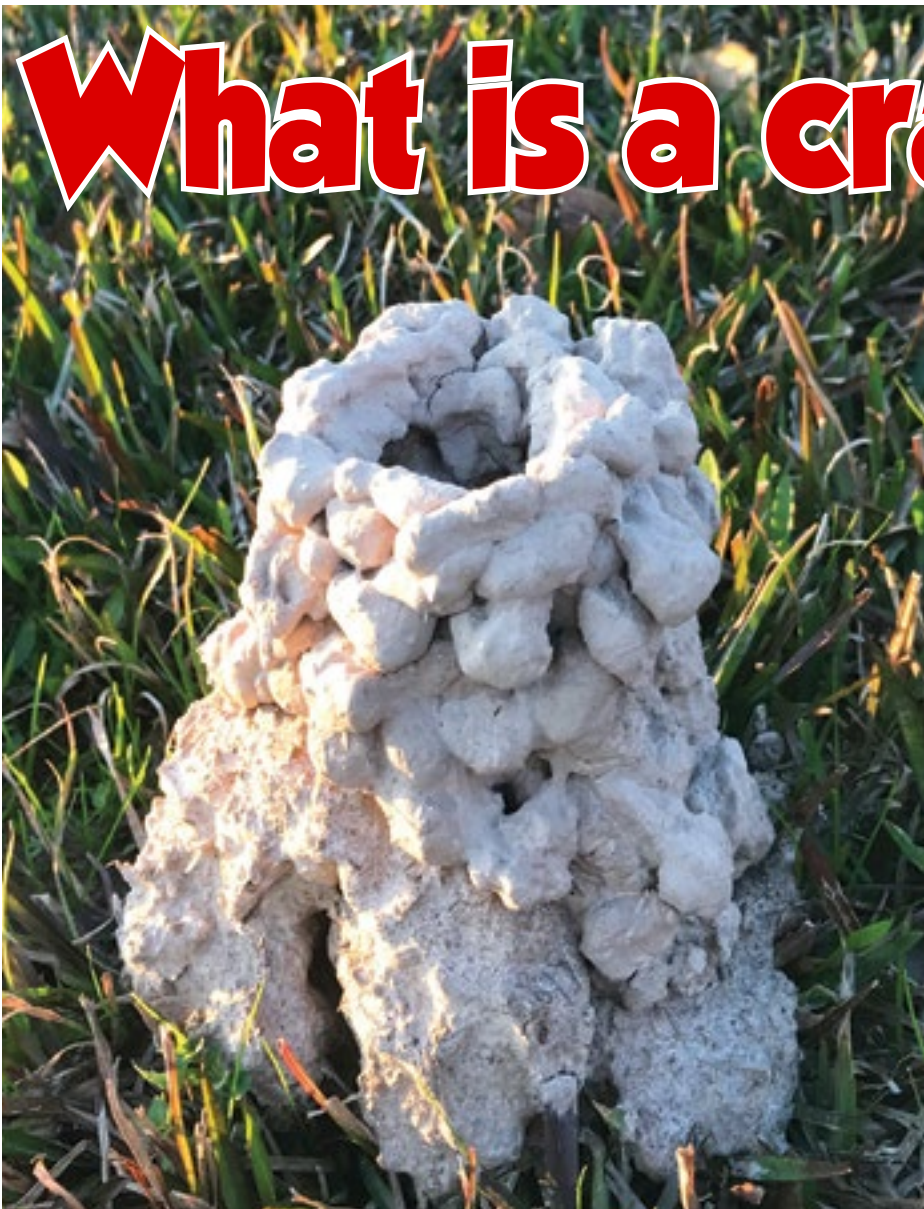
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What is a crawfish hole?



Devil crawfish live in a hole they dig in the ground, piling up mud above it in what looks like a chimney.



Crustacean’s muddy mounds explained

While many may be familiar with the muddy mounds left by the area’s favorite Cajun crustacean around yards after a good rain, there is more to the story of the burrowing mudbugs commonly called devil crawfish.

LSU Ag Center Southwest Region Agent Mark Shirley said the crustaceans live in a hole they

dig in the ground, piling up mud above it in what looks like a chimney. Such holes can be 2-3 feet deep or more, depending on the water table. They dig down for safety, but mostly to get to water.

There are 35 different species of crawfish in Louisiana, according to Shirley.

“The red swamp craw-

fish is the one we see at crawfish boils here,” he said. “Out of all of the species, there is one that burrows in the ground all year round and can be found in people’s yards. The devil crawfish makes little tunnels, feeding on vegetative matter like plant roots, as well as insects and worms.”

See **CRAWFISH** Page 11



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Without pollinators, more than 100 crops grown in the United States would not be able to thrive. Plants, including various fruits, vegetables, nuts and more, rely on pollinators to ensure to transport pollen. Though many plants are self-pollinating and others are pollinated by the wind or water, many others rely on insects and animals to become pollinated. The U.S. Department of Agriculture says birds, bees, bats, butterflies, moths, flies, beetles, and small mammals all can work as pollinators. Examples of crops pollinated by pollinators include apples, squash and almonds. Animals and insects help pollinate more than 75 percent of the world's flowering plants, and nearly 75 percent of all crops, according to the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service. Unfortunately, pesticide use can diminish the number of natural pollinators. Natural gardening and pest-control can help protect the habitats of pollinators.

CRAWFISH from page 10

The devil crawfish, or *cambarus diogenes*, can be found year round, but especially during the winter months, when the ground is saturated.

"When we have a lot of rain during the winter, the soft ground makes it easy to make new burrows," he said.

As the crawfish are making their tunnels, the dirt gets displaced into chimney-shaped mounds commonly seen in southwest Louisiana backyards.

"They help to aerate the soil by creating tunnels beneath the surface," Shirley said.

While for some, the chimneys may pose a problem, there is an easy solution, Shirley said.

"You can control them," he said. "Do not use insecticide because it will kill them, but you could contaminate the ground water with the chemicals."

Shirley said the safest solution to use is lye, or sodium

hydroxide, which is also used to make soap and in pickling.

"You can get lye at a hardware or department store," he said. "It is rather caustic, so you will need to put on some gloves. Take about a spoonful of lye and place it in each crawfish hole. You can kick the mound over put a spoonful in that hole. All of them should be gone after the first application."


For those crawfish enthusiasts and those that don't mind the muddy mounds, Shirley said the crustaceans can be observed building their chimneys.

"You must have a little bit of patience and diligence, but if you go out at night with a flashlight you can see them coming up out of the chimneys and displacing the dirt from the tunnel while digging," he said. "They are in their burrows almost all the time, but occasionally they will come out at night."



The devil crawfish burrows into the soft ground to make its mounds.

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JDP second in state for rice acreage, crawfish production

The parish has long been a leader in Louisiana for agricultural production.

Jeff Davis Parish stands second to Acadia Parish in rice acreage and second in the state for crawfish production. According to USDA Farm Service Agency Representative Steven Brown, Jeff Davis has a total of 82,616 acres of certified rice, while Acadia Parish contains 84,637 acres of rice. Crawfish production takes up over 68,000 certified acres in the parish.

Acadia and Jeff Davis parishes together make up 40 percent of the total rice acreage in the state. Rice, soybean and cattle production make up 70 percent of the parish's farming industry.

"The parish crops are made up of rice, soybean, wheat, sorghum, sugarcane and crawfish," Brown said. "Our farmers have gone to more of a rice-plus-crawfish rotation with less soybean planted lately. The farming industry has seen increased input and a very low profit margin."

LSU Ag Center Southwest Region Extension Associate and Master Farmer Alan Hogan explained why that's the case.

"It costs more to grow it than it ever has," Hogan said. "We have not seen corresponding increases in market

2017 SNAPSHOT

- According to the latest U.S. Census numbers, there were 703 farms in Jeff Davis Parish in 2017, which represents a 7 percent increase from 2012 to 2017.
- The average size of a farm in the parish in 2017 was 346 acres, resulting in a 14 percent decrease over five years.
- The top agricultural commodities in the parish were rice, soybeans, crawfish, sugarcane and beef cattle.
- Total market value of products sold in 2017 was \$73 million, representing a decrease of 14 percent since 2012. Crops composed \$57 million and livestock, poultry and products made up the remaining \$16 million.
- There were 1,129 total producers in 2017 including 737 men and 392 women, the majority ranging in age from 35 to 64.
- The data showed that only 69 percent of farms had internet access in 2017 and 96 farms are family owned.
- Rice crops comprised 64,497 acres in Jeff Davis Parish, while soybean crops totaled 11,465 acres. Forage such as hay was listed at 7,018 acres in 2017.
- There were 18,922 cattle and calves farmed in the parish; 282 goats; 169 hogs and pigs; 777 horses and ponies; 2,083 layers; 520 pullets; 160 sheep and lambs and 66 turkeys in 2017.

price for what the farmer receives for the crop. The potential profit margin has shrunk to become very narrow and the only way to overcome that is to increase your yield per acre."

Hogan said farmers here have done just that.

"Rice varieties now produce much higher yields than 30 years ago," he said. "We have bigger farms now because we need to produce more to make the same amount of money at the end of the day due to rising costs."

Brown said today there are 1,610 farms at an average of 500 acres each in Jeff Davis Parish. In 2017, there were only 703 farms at an average of 346 acres, according to U.S. Census Data.

Farming in the parish has changed

drastically over the last 30 years in Jeff Davis Parish, Hogan said.

"Soybean used to be the second-highest crop, but over the years it has shifted over to crawfish," he said. "There are also fewer farmers owning land, but growing much larger acreages due to technology. With rising costs, they have had to net the same amount of money at the end of the year somehow."

Hogan also said more farmers are moving towards crawfish production.

"The profit margin is better," he said. "Also, weather conditions adversely affect soybeans more than rice. Plus soybean has become more expensive to grow. It is a pretty risky crop, more so than rice. Also, unlike cattle, crawfish is a seasonal crop, allowing farmers to grow other crops such as rice in between seasons."

According to the LSU Ag Center, Jeff Davis's agriculture industry brought in around \$160 million dollars for all agricultural enterprises in 2019.

FIGS from page 9

with electrician's tape or thick rubber bands (cut and tie). Lastly, cover the area with a layer of aluminum foil.

Go back and check the status of the root production in a month or two. Roots will grow more quickly the warmer the temperature is. Once you see a nice mass of healthy white roots, you can cut the stem behind the roots and plant the root ball into 1-quart or 1-gallon pot filled with a well-drained potting soil.

Figs also can be propagated by cuttings. Cuttings are best taken when the trees are dormant. However, cuttings

from figs can still be taken in the spring, summer and early fall. Be sure to allow enough warm temperatures to develop a good root system before the cuttings go into dormancy in the wintertime.

Strip the leaves from the cutting to help conserve energy to the root making process. Work with 1- to 2-year-old wood that is 1/2 to 3/4 inch thick and 6 to 10 inches in length with at least four leaf nodes. Stick the cut ends into moistened potting soil and water in well. It will take a couple of months to get a good mass of roots.

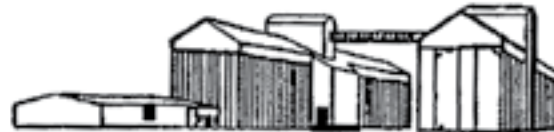
When planting figs,

make sure you have adequate space, as fig trees can grow 15 feet or more in height and width. Figs will need a minimum of full sun for six hours to produce. The fruit will be found on the new growth during the spring and early summer.

Trees ordinarily do not produce a good crop of fruit until the third or fourth year after planting. You will generally see small green figs where the leaves join the stem, even on very young trees. However, these fruit usually fail to ripen and just drop off. LSU Purple is an exception, often producing small crops one to

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Modern consumers have more choices than ever before. Whether they're buying appliances, books, clothing, or any of the myriad necessities of daily life, consumers have a wealth of products to choose from.

An abundance of options also is available at the grocery store. That's especially true in the produce aisle, where many stores have expanded their fresh fruit and vegetable offerings. That expansion reflects a growing preference among consumers for fresh products, including fresh produce. A 2018 report from the market research firm IRI and the Food Marketing Institute found that sales of fresh foods comprised just under 31 percent of food industry sales in 2017.

Customers who prefer fresh fruits and vegetables to frozen alternatives may wonder if they should be even more selective when purchasing their favorite foods in the produce aisle. That decision may come down to whether or not to purchase organic produce.

Organic produce can be significantly more expensive than non-organic fruits and vegetables, so it's understandable if budget-conscious consumers cannot afford to go entirely organic. However, it's important that consumers recognize the many ways that organic agriculture is having a positive impact on the health of humans and the planet they call home.

- **Organic produce**



Many grocery stores are increasing the availability of organic fruits and vegetables. Such foods can benefit human health as well as the health of the planet.

reduces exposure to pesticides and antibiotics. UC Davis Health notes that organic produce has been proven to reduce consumers' exposure to pesticides and antibiotics. That's a

significant benefit, as pesticide exposure has been shown to lead to neurodevelopmental issues and has been linked to higher cancer risk. Consumers shopping on budgets can

pick and choose which organic foods they purchase, as UC Davis Health notes that certain foods have been shown to have higher pesticide residues than others. Apples, celery,

grapes, spinach, strawber-

ries, and tomatoes have high levels of pesticide residues, so choosing organic versions of these foods may be a wise choice. Avocados, broccoli, cabbage, and cantaloupe are some of the foods that typically have low levels of pesticide residue.

- **Organic agriculture reduces environmental degradation.** The Organic Trade Association notes that synthetic pesticides and fertilizers used on some conventional farms can deplete the soil of valuable nutrients and increase environmental degradation. Organic farmers do not use such pesticides or fertilizers, instead utilizing such practices as composting, cover cropping and crop rotation, each of which

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What can and cannot be composted

Avid gardeners know that compost can add vital nutrients to soil used in gardens, container plants and lawns. The fact that compost is so versatile and nutrient-dense may not even be its most admirable quality. Made from items used in and around the house, compost costs just about nothing to produce.

The raw materials that make up compost come from organic waste. These can be disposables from the garden and kitchen, as well as other areas around the house. According to the United States Environmental Protection Agency, yard trimmings and food scraps add up to 20 to 30 percent of the municipal solid waste in the United States. Turning

waste into compost not only helps the landscape, but also the planet.

Compost is relatively easy to make, and there are scores of materials that can be put into compost. But it is just as essential to know which ingredients cannot be used in compost.

OKAY FOR COMPOST

Most organic materials, or items that were once living, can be used in compost. Plant-based items used in cooking, such as potato peelings, carrot skins, banana peels, cocoa hulls, coffee grounds and filters, corn cobs, apple cores, eggshells, fruit peels, kelp, and nut shells, can be added to compost.

Other items from around the house, like unused kitty litter, hair, shredded newspapers and



cardboard, leaves, flowers, paper, pine needles, ashes, and sawdust, can be successfully added to compost. Stick to items that are not treated heavily with chemicals.

SHOULD NOT BE USED IN COMPOST

Inorganic and non-biodegradable materials cannot go into compost. These are items like plastic, glass, aluminum foil, and metal.

Pressure-treated lumber, although a natural material, is treated with preservatives and often pesticides that can be harmful if they leech into the garden.

The small-gardening resource Balcony Garden Web indicates coated or glossy printed papers, such as those from catalogs, magazines, wrapping paper, marketing materials, and business cards, should not be added to compost piles because of the chemicals and inks used in these pages.

Planet Natural Research Center says to avoid pet droppings from dogs and cats. Animal products like bones, butter, milk, fish skins, and meat, may decompose and start to smell foul. Maggots, parasites, pathogens, and other

microorganisms can form in the compost. These materials also may attract flies and scavenger animals. Plus, they decompose very slowly.

Any personal hygiene products should be avoided because they are tainted by human fluids and that can pose a health risk.

While weeds are not harmful in compost piles, there is the risk that seeds can germinate and then infiltrate garden beds when the compost is used. The same can be said for tomato plants and some other hardy fruits and vegetables.

Compost is a winner in the garden and around the landscape. Learning which ingredients can and can't be added to compost piles is useful for any gardener.

Building a hydroponic garden

Hydroponic gardening can change people's perceptions of what's needed to grow vibrant plants. Rather than soil, all you may need for a hydroponic garden is water to grow a variety of healthy, strong plants.

Although it seems like a futuristic concept, hydroponics—or growing plants without soil—actually dates back many centuries. The hanging Gardens of Babylon and The Floating Gardens of China are two of the earliest examples of hydroponics.

According to Fullbloom Hydroponics, hydroponic gardening is a method of

growing plants in a water-based, nutrient-rich solution. Instead of soil, roots are supported by an inert material, such as pellets, perlite, or vermiculite. Some people use coconut fiber, sand or gravel as well. The key is that the substance not supply any additional nutrition to the plant. In some instances, the roots grow in water alone.

Hydroponics works so well because the person doing the gardening can directly control the nutrients, oxygen and light according to what the plant needs. A nutrition-based water deliv-

ery system delivers food to the roots in a highly soluble form, rather than the roots having to search through the soil and extract the same nutrients. Absorbing food with very little effort means the plant can divert its energy to growing and flower production.

This method of no-soil growth can be used just about anywhere. Although it has not yet edged out traditional farming methods, hydroponics is gaining popularity among entrepreneurs and hobbyists. An added attraction to hydroponics is its efficiency. The gardening

resource Maximum Yield says hydroponics is ideal where traditional farming is not an option, such as in large cities where there is little to no access to agriculturally amenable land. Hydroponics can even be merged with vertical farming methods, helping to save space and increase output. Hydroponic gardens can be placed anywhere there is access to water and natural or simulated sunlight. Empty warehouses, rooftops, old shipping containers, and much more can be turned into hydroponic garden locations with minimal effort.


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can have positive, long-term effects on soil quality.

• **Organic agriculture benefits local wildlife.** A 2015 study from researchers in Argentina

that was published in the journal *Agriculture, Ecosystems & Environment* found that small mammals were more abundant around organic farms than con-

ventional farms. That's not just good for those mammals, but also the farmers, as small mammals can feed on insects that would otherwise adversely affect crops.



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Area crops showing effects of frequent rains

Frequent rains have had the greatest impact on the growing season here, according to experts.

LSU Ag Center Southwest Region Extension Associate and Master Farmer Alan Hogan said rice crops are doing very well so far this year.

"The rice crops look decent," he said. "Like every year, we had some shaky starts, but by and large, what I have seen has been positive. We have had a lot of rain, which has caused some problems with disease, but nothing major."

LSU Ag Center County Agent James Meaux said overall, rain has been the most prevalent problem this season.

"It has just been a trying season all the way around," Meaux said. "The biggest thing is whether all these rains will slow down for us a bit. Hopefully things will get bet-

ter."

Meaux said farmers are currently starting to drain fields and let them dry out for the rice harvest.

"We need some drier weather as we get into harvest season," he said. "We are not sure how much the rains hurt us in June. During pollination, the rain can knock off some of the pollen and cause problems."

Harvesting for rice should begin in most areas of the parish within the next two weeks, Meaux said.

Soybean is typically harvested in Jeff Davis Parish in September and October.

"We don't have a lot of soybean planted this year because of the rain," he said. "However, what I have observed out there now looks good."

While timely rains are good for any crop, daily rain can negatively

affect the rice and soybean crops, and even the harvesting of hay.

"This hasn't been an ideal growing season for us with all the rains," Meaux said. "Raining every day is not ideal. Sometimes you want to let the rice crop get dry before you water it. When it rains everyday, we have no control."

Meaux said even cattle farmers have been affected by the extra precipitation this season.

"The cattle farmers are having trouble getting hay harvested because of the rain," he said. "They can't get out there to harvest it because of the mud and standing water in pastures. You really need two to three days of dry weather so it can air out in the sun. Finding three consecutive days of good weather has been a challenge. Those periods have been very few and far between."



According to LSU Ag Center County Agent James Meaux, rain has been the most prevalent problem this season.

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FALL HARVEST FRUITS AND VEGETABLES

Food is a big part of fall, and farms play a significant role in seasonal celebrations. Each fall, families plan apple picking excursions with their eyes on baking homemade apple pies. And while Halloween is made even more fun when carving jack-o'-lanterns, savvy celebrants know that carving sessions are not complete without some roasted pumpkin seeds.

The fall harvest is a great time to indulge in some freshly picked healthy foods. While the picking season may vary depending on where you live, and specifically the climate in your region, the following are some fruits and vegetables that might be ripe for the picking this fall.

- **Apples:** Apple-picking season typically begins in late summer and extends into fall. Many farms offer a variety of apples, which may be harvested at different times. For example, in the northeastern United States, Gala apples tend to be harvested in late summer, while Granny Smith apples may be best picked in early October.

- **Beets:** The Spruce:

Eats notes that beets may be in season in temperate climates from fall through spring.

- **Broccoli:** Fresh broccoli makes a healthy addition to any dinner table, and Pickyourown.org notes that broccoli can have a lengthy harvesting season. Early harvesting may begin in May in some regions, though it's still possible to pick fresh broccoli in late October. If you want to pick fresh broccoli, The Old Farmer's Almanac recommends doing so in the morning when the buds of the head are firm and tight.

- **Cabbage:** If you're looking to do some late fall picking, cabbage might be for you. The online resource Harvest to Table notes that cabbage can survive under snow without being harmed, making it an ideal late fall vegetable. Spoiled outer leaves can be pulled away after harvesting without affecting the quality of the remaining cabbage.

- **Peaches:** People who can't wait to whip up a peach cobbler may need to do so before fall even begins. According to Pickyourown.org, peach-

es can be ready for picking as early as July in the northeastern United States, and the picking season generally ends around mid-September. The season is even earlier in places like Georgia, a state known for its peaches where the picking season can begin in mid-May and extend through early August depending on the variety.

- **Pumpkins:** Thanks in part to Halloween decor and the popularity of pumpkin pie as a Thanksgiving dessert, pumpkins are synonymous with the fall harvest. And pumpkin picking season aligns perfectly with each of these holidays, typically beginning in early or mid-September and extending deep into October.

Fall is a great time of year to pick fresh fruits and vegetables at a local farm.



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