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Sauk Rapids Herald

THURSDAY, JULY 6, 2017

PHOTOS BY OH SNAPPY DAYS PHOTOGRAPHY  
Dan Christensen and Lori Stewart's farm was the setting for Dan's eldest daughter, Erica's, wedding June 17. She married Jesse Jusczak.

# A haymow wedding

## Jusczaks marry at Milaca farm

BY NATASHA BARBER  
STAFF WRITER

**MILACA** — When Dan Christensen and Lori Stewart, of Milaca, began remodeling their property after purchasing it roughly seven years ago, they did so for themselves. Recently, with help from family members, they had the opportunity to make more changes to the farm and spread that joy and happiness to a special couple in their lives.

"We did it all for Erica," said Stewart. "All the family did everything for Erica and Jesse — to

Hay bales were removed from the haymow before it was decorated for the wedding meal and dance.

make their dream come true."

Erica is Christensen's eldest daughter. She married her high school sweetheart of 11 years, Jesse Jusczak, on the Christensen-Stewart farm June 17. The 4 p.m. ceremony took place outdoors before an estimated 130 guests traveled inside the barn and up to the haymow for dinner and dancing.

"It came together better than I ever thought it would," said Erica Jusczak, of Big Lake. "It was pretty amazing to see the whole process, from there being a bunch of hay up there to a month later it being completely clean and decorated with a brand new floor. It was truly really amazing. I definitely did not think it would look as good as it did."

The Christensen-Stewart property is a working hobby farm north of Milaca with a variety of

animals including donkeys, goats, ducks and chickens, along with draft, regular and miniature horses. The large red barn that stands on the property was redone a couple years ago after it showed signs of deterioration.

"It didn't look like this a couple years ago," Stewart said. "It was falling down. We redid it for our animals. They are in the pasture every day and at nighttime every inch of our barn is filled with animals."

Jusczak said she appreciated the hard work her dad and Stewart put into the property since they bought it.

"Even a couple years ago I knew I wanted to get married there because it was so beautiful. I was

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# SWCD launches irrigation application program

BY JENNIFER COYNE  
STAFF WRITER

**FOLEY** — After a year of pilot programming, the Benton County Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD) recently released the Irrigation Scheduler Program for crop producers near Little Rock Creek and surrounding areas in Benton and Morrison Counties.

"About 10 years ago we started a program with farmers in Rice and other areas in Benton County by providing an in-field estimate of current soil moisture levels. Benton County has about 159 irrigation permits that were using a calculation that took a fair amount of effort. At that point, we realized there was potential and needed to provide assistance," said Gerry Maciej, SWCD District Manager.

The online program provides accurate information to landowners, indicating how much moisture is currently available in the soil and when water needs to be applied. This in turn, could create a better environment for trout in Little Rock Creek, and also a better business

plan for farmers.

Rice area farmer Dan Gottwalt was part of the test-pilot program in 2016 and continues using it this season for his potato, kidney beans and corn fields.

"We use it as a tool, along with soil moisture probes and old-fashioned hand squeeze tests, to determine the timing and amount of water to apply via the irrigation system," Gottwalt said.

Farmers access the program online ([www.soilandwater.org](http://www.soilandwater.org)) and create an account tailored to the characteristics of their field.

"Right now, you can develop a map of your field and input all of the information, such as planting date and soil type, among other specifications," Maciej said. "Using data collected from area weather towers and the USDA's digital soil survey, the program can determine the needed water for the effective rooting zone of that particular field and crop."

Currently, the program provides information for four crops — corn,

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Dan Gottwalt (left) works with Travis Janson to determine how much moisture should be added to a corn field. Gottwalt was a part of the irrigation program's pilot project, and now uses the online tool for all of this crop fields.

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By Leigh Rubin

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**SWCD**

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soybeans, edible beans and potatoes. However, in a newer version set to release in the coming weeks, alfalfa will be included in the program's capabilities.

This particular program incorporates the University of Minnesota's algorithm, which determines how much moisture stress the soil can undergo before seeing negative effects on yield and quality of the fields.

"That formula can predict the moisture level in the soil so many days out and recommend how much water should be applied and when," Maciej said. "The calculations work, but it's a cumbersome spreadsheet to use and takes time."

With funding from the Legislative Commission on Minnesota Resources, Maciej and his staff created the online tool using the established formula, but in a way that was more user-friendly.

"We know there are



PHOTOS BY JENNIFER COYNE

The online irrigation application program can be accessed by computer and smartphone or tablet.

already tools out there for farmers to run their businesses successfully, but what we're hoping to do is provide a more accurate tool for them to use," Maciej said.

One of the unique features of the tool is the ability to estimate moisture level, considering evapotranspiration – the amount of moisture left in the

soil after evaporation into the air and transpiration from the crops.

For Gottwalt, he has seen the benefits of incorporating the online program into his business based on the features available.

"The program takes into account evapotranspiration of individual crops based on the current weather. That, along



PHOTOS BY JENNIFER COYNE

Gerry Maciej demonstrates how farmers can use the online program to determine how much water is needed on the fields. With each field, a graph is generated.

**Negotiating terms regarding NAFTA**

Despite the many distractions with this administration there is actually some serious work taking place that will directly impact agriculture and rural America. There have been several meetings to discuss the renegotiation of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) with some encouraging signs.

In a meeting that included the agriculture trade ministers from the United States, Canada and Mexico, the ministers issued a statement saying, "While even the best trading partnerships face challenges from time to time, our agricultural differences are relatively few in the context of the \$85 billion in agricultural trade that flows between our three nations each year."

Ag Secretary, Sonny Perdue says there are some "irritants" for each country, but "Now is not the time to talk about them." He said NAFTA is like a marriage and "These are family discussions

that need to take place."

Issues on the table include access to the Canadian market for U.S. dairy and wheat, a streamlined process for dealing with trade disputes and improving the process for the approval of biotech products.

The tweaking of NAFTA is primarily about manufacturing, but agriculture is a big part of the agreement and farm organizations and commodity groups are urging U.S. negotiators to move ahead cautiously and not jeopardize the positive terms of the original NAFTA. There's a real concern that if the U.S. isn't willing to negotiate its position, our trading partners could retaliate with stiff tariffs



**BY ROGER STROM**  
*The Business of Farming*

on our farm products.

In an interview, David Salmons, senior director for congressional relations for the American Farm Bureau Federation said, "We don't want to see anything rebound

on agriculture that would cause any new barriers to be constructed."

And speaking of farm trade, it looks like agriculture trade with Cuba won't be affected by the president's order to back off on trying to normalize relations with the country.

According to Minnesota Lt. Governor Tina Smith, "The president specifically exempted agriculture in his comments, which leaves a door open for us to continue

with recent rainfall events and previous irrigation, are part of the calculation to schedule the next irrigation needed for the growing crop," Gottwalt said. "For me, it helps make better use of water and allows more accurate irrigation timing."

Once the data is gathered into the program, a graph is developed, showing the many factors of moisture level and crop maturity from day one to it's current state.

As the program monitors the moisture level, farmers can look up the fields and a notification within the app indicates which fields need water. In newer versions of the program, Maciej hopes to incorporate a text alert for when fields need attention.

Farmers can also access all the information on their smartphone or tablet.

"We work with an individual who does not live near his fields, and rarely visits them more than once a week. With the program, it's like he's there looking at his fields," Maciej said.

While any farmer within the Little Rock Creek project area within Benton and Morrison County can use the program on their own for their crop fields, Maciej and his co-worker Travis Janson are only able to work directly with some of them. They estimated nearly 50 fields within their region are being monitored with the program.

Once a week Janson meets with the farmers and they rework the program as needed to improve accuracy and overall field performance.

"I think it's a really good program, especially for new irrigator operators," Gottwalt said.

With additional funding, SWCD would like to extend the program throughout central Minnesota, eventually across the state.

"Farmers want to do the right thing to protect the environment and make it easier for them to farm," Maciej said. "We want to be able to help them achieve that."

to explore opportunities to expand trade." Cuba is a prime market for U.S. corn, dried distillers grains and soybean meal.

Update: "Justice has been served." ABC News has settled with Dakota Dunes-based Beef Products Inc (BPI), a South Dakota meat company that filed a \$1.9 billion lawsuit over the network's use of the term "pink slime" in a series of reports in 2012.

The trial began on June 5 in Elk Point, S.D. It was settled before ABC began its defense and, as is the case with big lawsuits, they didn't say how much the settlement was.

It was probably a big number because I'm sure ABC was well aware that under South Dakota's Agricultural Food Products Disparagement Act, BPI could get triple the amount they were suing for.

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