

An edition of LNP and LFM MEDIA GROUP Inc.

Vol. 61 No. 4

www.lancasterfarming.com

Five Sections

Saturday, October 31, 2015

\$49.00 Per Year

Single copy \$2.00



Nick Maravell, owner of Nick's Organic Farm in Buckeystown, Md., shows off his organic heritage turkeys

Photo by Rick Hemphill

## Biodiversity and System Stability Key to Maryland Farmer's Operation

RICK HEMPHILL

Md./Va. Correspondent

BUCKEYSTOWN, Md. — Nick Maravell of Nick's Organic Farm near Buckeystown, Md., would describe himself as a "carbon farmer."

"We are always trying to get more organic matter in the soil," he said. "We can grow our nitrogen, but we are always trying to get more carbon. Healthy soil makes healthy

plants, healthy animals and, in an organic system, pure, healthy food."

The key to Maravell's organic methods is diversity and value-added products. His 165-acre organic farm provides his customers with grass-fed Angus beef, Bourbon Red and Narragansett heritage turkeys and commercial white turkeys, chickens, free-range eggs, popcorn, grinding corn, non-GMO and organic seeds, and poultry feed.

With his beef herd, he breeds for parasite resistance and low birth weights. They are kept on pasture all day, all year. Some of the beef is processed into jerky on-site.

His poultry is another mainstay of the farm. Maravell is preparing for Thanksgiving, when about 50 turkeys will be processed. He also has chickens.

"We can harvest 550 to 600 chickens each year with two main

distributions per year in July and November," Maravell said. "We have a laying flock of 150 to 200 chickens."

Sales on the farm are self-serve and popular.

"We are sold out of our products all the time," Maravell said.

He sells chickens by the whole and turkeys by the eighth, quarter.

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## Researchers Hope to Determine Viability of Hemp

VIC BRAHLSHAW

Virginia Correspondent

HARRISONBURG, Va. — Seeds planted in the Virginia General Assembly this year could bear fruit in 2016 as three state universities plan to research the economic viability of industrial hemp.

Virginia Tech and Virginia State University, the state's land-grant universities, were joined by James Madison University in responding to a request for proposals to launch research projects on hemp. The Virginia Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services found all three proposals responsive to its request and is working with project managers to provide everything they need to begin planting next spring.

The research involves identifying which hemp varieties would grow best and comparing yields under different agronomic treatments.

"Hemp is to be a viable crop in this state," said John Fike, an associate professor at Virginia Tech. "We need to know which varieties are best suited for which parts of the state, what the production potential is, how management factors affect productivity and how we can integrate it with other cropping systems."

The proposals submitted by Virginia Tech and VSU are similar. Fike said Virginia Tech researchers will study Canadian and European hemp cultivars to determine

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## Fresh off the Vine



Photo by Rick Hemphill

Vicki Fedor of North Gate Vineyard in Purcellville, Va., checks her merlot grapes just processed for fermenting. The vineyard was featured in this year's Loudoun Fall Farm Tour. See more on Page A3.

## Midwest Company Buys Va. Ethanol Plant

LINDA MCNATT

Va./N.C. Correspondent

SUFFOLK, Va. — Grain farmer Jimmy Oliver said he plans to put his trust in an old adage. A positive one: The third time is a charm.

Two companies have tried to operate the large ethanol manufacturing plant in tiny Hopewell, just south of state capital Richmond, and failed. Now, Green Plains Inc., an ethanol company based in Omaha, Neb., has announced it will purchase the plant for \$18.25 million. A company spokesman said in a news release that the plant is expected to start producing ethanol again as early as December.

"Hopefully they can do it," Oliver said. "This will be the third time somebody has tried to run it. They apparently couldn't make it because the price of ethanol went down with gasoline. Let's hope this time they make it."

In the news release, Green Plains, with 13 similar facilities across the U.S., cited the Hopewell plant's close proximity to ports in Norfolk as a reason to purchase it.

Operating at full capacity, the ethanol plant will increase Green Plains' production capacity by approximately 60 million gallons to nearly 1.1 billion gallons per year.

"This moves the Hopewell plant into a larger portfolio of facilities located across the United States, potentially leading greater stability to the operation," according to the press release.

The plant was previously owned by two British companies, most recently Vireol Biofuels. Vireol owned the plant for more than a year, generating ethanol and distillers grains from corn.

The hope was to manufacture the fuel, which is usually added to gasoline, from corn, wheat, barley and other locally produced grains. Many Virginia farmers, including Oliver, saw it as an opportunity to produce more barley in their fields.

"We are confident in our ability to significantly improve the plant's production economics by applying operational and commercial expertise," Todd Becker, Green Plains' president and CEO, said in the press release. "We plan to make several capital investments before restarting the plant to increase its operational efficiency and production volume."

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