

OPINION

DENGLER DOMAIN: Newspapers



Sean Dengler

The North Tama Telegraph and the previous iterations of the Traer Star-Clipper and Dysart Reporter are recording history. While the content and people have changed over the years, the mission of informing the public has always stayed the same. While this newspaper might not have the most subscribers in the state, the Telegraph is just as important.

Journalism highlights important stories like community events, local agriculture stories, articles from elected officials, and the Tama County wind turbine story of the last half decade. These stories reflect a moment in time. A few years ago, I wrote about the Dysart baseball team, and it could only be done based on old Dysart Reporter articles. Like the Reporter, the Star-Clipper archive still exists, but the important question is if these newspapers go away, who will tell the story?

Traer's biggest festival is based on the Winding Stairs, which were made famous from the Traer Star-Clipper. I can still remember the image of people standing on the stairs waiting for their newspaper from my grade school trip to the Traer Historical Museum. Journalism and newspapers have their place in northern Tama County, but despite the value they

bring, newspapers have been on the ropes for years.

The ongoing evolution of the internet has sapped advertisements and eyeballs from newspapers. Some may consider this the way it goes, but it still is not good for any community to lose its newspaper. Journalists are vital to the communities they serve, and the stories they tell. Not all the stories are about creating the loudest reaction. It is to highlight what is important to the community at that moment in time.

What fortunately appears to have gone to the wayside could have been a significant blow to newspapers this year. The Iowa Senate recently passed SF2434 out of committee. Part of this bill was to allow government entities to no longer post public notices (legals) in newspapers. This is a huge issue for newspapers because a significant amount of revenue comes through these notices. While an argument has been made that it is costing taxpayers more money to have the government use newspapers, I disagree. According to a 2018 study by the University of Notre Dame and the University of Illinois, the loss of local news coverage also came with higher long-term borrowing costs for cities. They also found long-run municipal borrowing costs increased by as much as 11 basis points following a newspaper closure.

By keeping newspapers in communities, they are better serving the tax-

payer. They are providing a defense against unchecked government power and giving a voice to the community. Fortunately, SF2434 was amended and the section about public notices was removed. Unfortunately, this was the farthest this type of bill has made it before – and such legislation can always return next session.

I am biased towards newspapers despite my youthful age. I will not claim I read the Telegraph from front to back every week, but the role it serves in this community is vital. Reading the Telegraph and the Waterloo-Cedar Falls Courier is one of my first memories of enjoying something to read. I love learning and newspapers are vital for this. I owe my writing career to the Traer-Star Clipper and the North Tama Telegraph. In fact, my love of writing blossomed in high school when I wrote for the Walnut Street Journal. Community newspapers mean more.

It is imperative for the North Tama Telegraph to keep kicking. If you are a subscriber, please keep subscribing – maybe even gift a subscription to someone else – and tell your legislators to protect community newspapers. It is good for everyone's bottom line, even the taxpayers.

Sean Dengler is a writer, comedian, now-retired beginning farmer, and host of the Pandaring Talk podcast who grew up on a farm between Traer and Dysart. You can reach him at sean.h.dengler@gmail.com.

Q&A: Farm Policy and National Agriculture Week

Q: How are you working to address uncertainty in the farm economy?



Sen. Chuck Grassley R-Iowa

A: With planting season around the corner, I'm hearing a message loud and clear from Iowa farmers. High input costs are hammering their bottom lines. Rising diesel prices add fuel to a fire already burning brightly in the farm economy that's impacting the entire food supply chain. From my seat on the Senate Agriculture Committee, I'm leading a bipartisan call to boost consumption of American farm products and lower input costs. That includes ramping up domestic biofuel markets and ending the Biden-era tariffs on phosphorous, anhydrous ammonia and potash that are driving up fertilizer costs for farmers. Specifically, I'm pushing to get year-round E15 across the finish line. Congress needs to stop pussyfooting around and get this bill to the president's desk. President Trump announced in Iowa he's ready to sign it into law. Making E15 available 365 days a year across the country would pump \$14 billion into the farm economy and lower prices at the pump for consumers. Don't forget, home-grown biofuels help displace foreign oil and boost our nation's energy and national security.

Witnesses at a recent Senate Agriculture Committee hearing delivered a no-nonsense consensus from farm country: producers are hurting. Chairman John Boozman of Arkansas described what farmers across the country are facing, "If you're putting something in the ground today, you're losing money."

That's because commodity prices are below the cost of production. This is an unsustainable situation. Farmers want to earn money from the marketplace, not the federal treasury. As a lifelong family farmer, I won't let Washington take farmers for granted. I often remind policymakers that only two percent of the population feeds the other 98 percent. Food doesn't grow in supermarkets. Last year, I worked to strengthen the farm safety net and supported increases to reference prices and crop insurance subsidies to reflect the downturn in the farm economy. These updates take effect Oct. 1. I'm also working to finalize the new farm bill that's been extended twice since the 2018 farm bill expired on Sept. 30, 2023. I'm glad the House Agriculture Committee passed its bipartisan farm bill on March 5. From the U.S. Senate, I'll continue pushing to deliver a farm bill that brings certainty to farm country, protects natural resources, boosts research, expands markets and empowers the people who grow the nation's food to earn a living and pass on their livelihoods from one generation to the next.

Q: What changes are underway at USDA to better serve farmers?

A: U.S. Secretary of Agriculture Brooke Rollins unveiled USDA's modernized "One Farmer, One File" initiative that's designed to serve America's farmers more effectively and efficiently. The new platform puts farmers first by improving services and how they interface with the USDA. Farmers don't have time to waste navigating bureaucratic red tape. "One Farmer, One File" replaces antiquated systems to ensure a farmer's records follow the farmer. With electronic sign-up options, the updates are designed to expedite approvals and get farm payments into farmer's pockets sooner, rather than later. The multi-year initiative will include an advanced acreage reporting platform to simplify the process for farmers. Importantly, farmers needing in-person support or preferring paper applications and traditional acreage reporting may continue to do so at their local Farm Service Agency county office.

Iowa crop farmers need to keep in mind the enrollment period for the Farmer Bridge Assistance (FBA) program is open through April 17, 2026. For those who filed their 2025 crop acreage report for eligible commodities, farmers may choose to expedite their payment by applying online through the USDA at this link. Farmers also can request a pre-filled application from their local Farm Service Agency office.

J.S. Sen. Chuck Grassley, a Republican farmer from Butler County, is the senior senator from Iowa and the longest-serving U.S. senator in Iowa history. National Agriculture Week is March 15-21, 2026. Sen. Grassley is honored to represent the family farmer and champion Iowa's farm economy that ranks No. 1 in corn, pig, egg and biofuels production.

Speak Out

How to contact your elected officials

U.S. Senate

Chuck Grassley, R-Iowa

135 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

202-224-3254

Web forum: grassley.senate.gov

Joni Ernst, R-Iowa

825 B&C Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

202-224-3254

Web forum: ernst.senate.gov

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Celebrating National Ag Day



BY MID-IOWA YOUTH BEEF TEAM

Please join our Mid-Iowa Youth Beef Team to observe National Ag Day on Tuesday, March 24, 2026, with the theme of "Together We Grow" as we celebrate 250 years of agriculture progress.

Agriculture producers have made great progress in their production since the 1960s. Today, cattle-

men and women are producing 75% more beef per animal with 43% less environmental emissions on ground that cannot be used for any other crop production and preventing wildfires through controlling the growth by grazing that ground. Cattle producers have contributed to each American farmer today feeding more than 165 people compared to only 25

people just sixty years ago.

The world population is growing fast, creating an even greater demand for the food and fiber produced in the United States. Agriculture producers provide almost everything we eat, use, and wear every day. Help us celebrate the progress in agriculture on March 24, 2026, and look forward to a bright agriculture future

for the next 250 years.

Andrew Beenken; Brayton, Shawna, and Dustin Cibula; Colbie Fevold; Maddy Kucera; Jack and Josie Monat; Rhianna and Skyler Murty; Hayden Pipert; Ryan and Tyler Putney; Easton, Taelyn, Caele, Dawson, and Dayton Sash; Bennett and Parker Schmidt; and Alaney and Ashton Sienknecht

Celebrating Ag Week: Agriculture has always been rooted in community

BY CHELSEA LLEWELLYN

As we celebrate Ag Week in Iowa, March 23-30, 2026, and look ahead to America's 250th anniversary, we are reminded strong communities don't come from any one person or one farm — they grow when people show up for each other.

As a farmer, we see every day how closely agriculture

and our local towns are connected. When farmers, store owners, local officials, families and volunteers all invest in their communities, it strengthens local businesses, creates local jobs and helps our towns remain places people are proud to call home.

That same teamwork shows up in how we support local youth. Whether it's Tama County Farm

Bureau providing scholarships, community members volunteering with 4-H or FFA or local businesses sponsoring youth programs, it takes all of us investing time and resources to help the next generation succeed.

Ag Week is a good reminder that agriculture has always been rooted in community. That spirit of cooperation is part of what has

carried our country forward for nearly 250 years, and how we'll keep rural Iowa thriving.

If you are interested in learning more about the Tama County Farm Bureau Board or finding out how you can volunteer with us, contact the Tama County Office at 641-484-3361.

Chelsea Llewellyn is secretary of the Tama County Farm Bureau.

Letters to the Editor Policy

Limit your submission to 400 words. The deadline to submit letters is no later than Monday at 10 a.m. for publication in that Friday's newspaper. Letters may be edited for libel and grammar. We reserve the right to shorten letters and reject those deemed libelous, in poor taste or of a personal nature. Letters must be signed with the author's real first and last name and must include a street address and a daytime phone number for verification. Individuals may submit no more than one letter per month. Send to: rmaharry@timesrepublican.com.