

Land Investment Monthly - March 2019

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Goodbye, city life: Iowa's first 'agrihood' promises country living on edge of Des Moines

CUMMING, Ia. — Steve Bruere asks if he should dress like a farmer or a developer when he meets up with a photographer.

The 38-year-old is joking. He rarely strays far from an unremarkable suit and cowboy boots that take him from farmland auctions to corporate offices.

But the question is appropriate: Bruere and his partners want to build what amounts to a small town on about 400 acres near Cumming, with an organic vegetable farm, vineyard, orchard and residential gardens anchoring the massive home, condo, apartment and retail development.

If the Cumming City Council green-lights the roughly \$260 million project next month, the Middlebrook development could be Iowa's first "agrihood," a planned community anchored by a working farm or community gardens. [Read More](#)

Farm real estate prices holding up, but USDA worried about a fall

The U.S. Department of Agriculture is concerned about a potential decline in farmland real estate prices, but has seen no sign of that happening so far, USDA chief economist Robert Johansson said.

Farmland prices are a key pillar of equity for the U.S. agricultural heartland, which has been suffering from lingering weakness in commodity prices and loss of key export markets such as China due to President Donald Trump's trade disputes.

A potential significant price-drop in farmland is something "we are concerned that may happen," Johansson told Reuters in an interview on the sidelines of the USDA's annual forum. "But land has been consistently able to withstand some of these pressures on farm income over the past five years for sure," he said. [Read More](#)

The Current: The little guy struggles to survive in tree fruit industry

YAKIMA, Wash. -- For the past 15 years or so, a strong export market and excitement over new varieties are two factors that have helped the tree fruit industry remain strong, even amid the recession of the late 2000s and, more recently, retaliatory tariffs from countries in trade disputes with the U.S.

At the same time, smaller apple growers, packers and marketers have struggled to stay in business. Continued consolidation of the grocery industry favors large fruit companies that can supply a sizable product volume.

The two seemingly contrasting trends were quite visible when International Farming Corp., a North Carolina-based agribusiness investment firm, recently acquired Legacy Fruit Packers, Valley Fruit and Larson Fruit, three family-owned firms in the Yakima Valley.

According to a news release from International Farming late last month, the acquisition of the companies, now called Columbia River Orchards LLC, included about 4,000 acres of orchards and two facilities that pack about 4 million boxes of fruit annually. International Farming also acquired an interest in Sage Fruit, a Yakima fruit marketing company and Pacific Coast Cherry Packers in Wapato. [Read More](#)

Farm Bankruptcies in 2018 – The Truth is Out There

Here's what we know: Caseload statistics from the United States Courts indicate that in 2018 Chapter 12 family farmer and family fisherman bankruptcies nationwide were down from prior-year levels. Chapter 12 farm bankruptcy provides a flexible and seasonal repayment schedule, and at times may provide lower interest rates and reduce the overall debt burden.

Chapter 12 filings in 2018 totaled 498 and were down 1 percent, or three filings, from the 2017 calendar year. This echoes recent Farm Bureau analysis that revealed that Chapter 12 bankruptcy filings were lower when comparing filings from fiscal year 2017 to fiscal year 2018 (Chapter 12 Bankruptcies Lower Across Farm Country). Statistics from the U.S. Courts also show Chapter 12 filings during 2018 were down slightly from the 10-year average of 504 bankruptcies per year.

We also know, however, that Chapter 12 bankruptcy filings in 19 states were higher than prior-year levels. In these states there were 303 bankruptcy filings, up from 204 filings the year before. In the Midwest, for example, bankruptcies totaled 223 filings and were up 19 percent from prior-year levels. Bankruptcies in the Midwest were also double what they were in 2008 and at the highest level in more than a decade. So, farm bankruptcies are both up and down. Today's Market Intel seeks to provide perspective on 2018 farm bankruptcies by reviewing historical trends and year-over-year changes. [Read More](#)

Google to spend \$13 billion on real estate in 2019, expand into four states

Tech giant Google will invest \$13 billion in data centers and offices in the United States over the course of 2019 as the company expands its U.S. operations and breaks ground for the first time in four states.

In a blog post Wednesday Google CEO Sundar Pichai wrote that the investments would include "major expansions in 14 states" including Ohio, Texas, Nebraska, and Nevada, which CNBC reports will be the first time the company has built facilities in those states. [Read More](#)

State board approves land purchase for ‘largest research dairy in the country’ near Rupert

The board voted to let UI buy land near Rupert for the Idaho Center for Agriculture Food and the Environment, otherwise known as CAFE. The university and the Idaho Dairymen’s Association will together purchase 540 acres from the Whitesides family for a total of \$4.5 million.

The land will house a research dairy, one of several south-central Idaho-based facilities planned as part of the CAFE initiative. The program also plans an outreach and education center in Jerome and a food processing facility for training and research on the College of Southern Idaho campus in Twin Falls.

“One of our key focuses will be to have this dairy represent what this industry looks like in the West,” said Rick Naerebout, chief executive officer for dairy association, in a statement after the vote Thursday. “Being the largest research dairy in the country will help support the industry and put Idaho on the map as a premier location for environmental research.” [Read More](#)

South Africa’s land reform advisory panel makes progress

With a deadline of 15 March 2019 on the horizon, a ten-member expert advisory panel held its second colloquium on land reform to present, debate and suggest ideas on how to deliver an effective, productive and just reform policy.

The ten-member expert Advisory Panel on Land Reform has its hands full with a looming deadline to submit a policy perspective to the Presidency that will drive land reform in the country.

The work of the panel is partly informed by a resolution of Parliament to consider expropriation of land without compensation.

The colloquium saw industry players converge at Saint George Hotel in Centurion to thrash out challenges and possible solutions to land reform.

Addressing the colloquium, Planning, Monitoring and Evaluation Minister Nkosazana Dlamini-Zuma said land is a key asset to drive development, the reform of which must address socio-economic issues.

“Land is the centrepiece in the development strategy towards the South Africa we want.”

“Land is the most important asset because that is where all activities take place. It is not just important for agriculture but anyone who has a business must have land. If you have a residence you must have land,” said Dlamini-Zuma. [Read More](#)