

## >> Cut 'Em Down, Swathers!

Just as a swather makes short work of cutting grain or hay, so too does the Swather football team when it comes to the opposition, earning top league honors for five years running. Before home games, an employee of AGCO cranks up the team mascot and tools it just up the road to the school, ginning up team spirit in the process. A caricature of the real-deal swather shows up on pep rally signs, sporting a frightening grin and squinty eyes designed to make competitors quake.

Zack Ledford, a junior offensive and defensive lineman, recalls when the team's swather competed in a 2013 *USA Today* state mascot contest. Alas, the Hesston High symbol came in second to the Goldbugs, a Fowler, Kan., team mascot named after an Edgar Allan Poe short story.

No matter, the Swather mascot does its job and "definitely draws attention," says Zack. "It kind of replicates that 'mean machine' look," agrees Zack's dad, Donnie Ledford, who is an AGCO employee along with his wife, Andrea. The manufacturing plant, he says, "brings a lot of jobs to town."

Swather team members are among that number. "I can think of five or six kids from the past 10 years that are working at AGCO now," Stoppel says of former students.

In turn, the town of 3,700 supports the Swathers. "You can pretty much shut down the town on Friday nights," says Stoppel, who recalls with pleasure interviewing for the athletic director position 10 years ago. "The principal asked me if I knew what a swather was," he says, then laughs. "I grew up running one on our family farm. I knew exactly what I was getting myself into with this job."

—Nancy Dorman-Hickson



## Virtually Visiting The Farm

**WHEN STUDENTS LEARN ABOUT JUDY KRALL'S EGG FARM**, they often don't do so by setting foot on the Enniskillen Township, Canada, property. Instead, digital technology allows the youngsters to make a "virtual visit."

Krall is with Lambton-Kent Agriculture in the Classroom, a volunteer organization that educates children about ag and food issues in a two-county area. The group began the virtual visits two years ago, reaching 500-plus students so far.

As well as helping inform the public about farming, the program is also designed to help families make better decisions at the supermarket. The digital approach also avoids biosecurity issues caused by having the public around livestock.

The program may also be catching on elsewhere: "It is beginning to roll out beyond our two counties," says Krall. "It is definitely looking like this could be a future possibility." —Nancy Dorman-Hickson /// For more info, see [www.lkaitc.org](http://www.lkaitc.org).



**STOLEN WATER, NOT SO SWEET.** Dry wells, soaring water prices and drought conditions have made water a target for thieves. That's why David Linn, district attorney for Madera County in Central California, formed a task force to address ag-related water theft. Linn made the move to thwart crimes, such as siphoning of water storage tanks, as well as the stealing of hoses, wiring and water pumps. "Since the business of Madera is agriculture, I intend to make its protection a top priority," he says.

To address ag-related crime, many municipalities have begun similar programs. "It is up to each jurisdiction as to whether they form any type of rural or ag crime task force," says Madera County Sheriff Jay Varney.

"Having the Madera D.A.'s office committed to rural crimes is encouraging to our deputies," Varney continues. "We know that these difficult cases will receive full prosecution and are a priority for his office."

In addition to fighting crime, the task force is educating rural residents on theft-deterrent measures, such as fencing and tank enclosures. —Nancy Dorman-Hickson

## FarmLIFE FIVE

**HIGH WATER MARKS:** Prices at home are on the rise and use is on the decline, but leaky pipes reveal cracks in the system.

**WATER WASTE.** In the U.S., landscape irrigation is estimated to account for nearly one-third of all residential water use, totaling nearly 9 billion gallons per day. Of that total, as much as 50% is wasted from inefficient methods and systems.