

AGRICULTURE

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Because the farm is run solely by Annie and Roger, and two people can only do so much, they decided to offer customers two options: a “U-pick” choice, where individuals pick blueberries, split the harvest in half with the farm, and take their half home for free, or an “already-picked” option, where individuals do not have to go into the patch and simply purchase blueberries that have already been picked. This format has worked well for the Stradley’s, with the farm amassing more customers each year.

**LIFECYCLE OF THE BLUEBERRY PLANT**  
Unlike other crops which are planted each year, a properly cultivated blueberry bush can produce fruits for decades. The growing season of blueberries in Kentucky typically starts in March, when the plant begins to

emerge from dormancy and the buds begin to swell. These buds begin flowering within a few weeks and then transform into young fruits in May. Harvesting mature berries at Annie’s Art Farm normally starts in early June, and the season lasts approximately one month. According to the Stradley’s, the best time to harvest their blueberries is between 7 to 11 a.m. Picking during this timeframe helps ensure juicy berries because the hot afternoon sun hasn’t stolen away all the fruit’s moisture, which is gained back throughout the cool evenings. Operation Challenges It would in no way be a stretchy to say growing blueberries can have a slew of challenges. With soil requirements, including needing an acidic soil that is both well-draining and moisture-retaining, weather sensitivities on both sides of the temperature spectrum, pest and disease threats, labor-intensive harvests and necessary plant maintenance schedules, one could argue the fruit

sometimes has a mind of its own. To reduce potential challenges as much as possible, the Stradley’s have implemented various preventative measures, including installing an irrigation system, utilizing bird deterrent devices, spreading fertilizer at the end of every season, conducting pruning and other maintenance as needed and much more. Although beneficial, these proactive measures have not been able to stop all problems. Over the past seven years, the duo has been forced to endure everything from late spring frosts to droughts to pests, and everything in between. The results of these events — which are mainly out of any farmer’s control — range from damaging a few rows of blueberries to completely devastating the entire crop. Another impediment that is more of a nuisance than a detriment is weeds. Because the roots of a blueberry bush are shallow and can very easily consume any pesticides sprayed on the ground, the

Stradley’s have forgone any chemical use. This also allows the farm to deliver berries with no unhealthy additives. Although a consequence of this is ever-growing weeds, it’s a price the duo is willing to pull time and time again. At the end of the day, being blueberry farmers is not the Stradley’s main form of income — it’s simply a hobby that generates enough profit to sustain itself. While this might not be appealing to some, having the ability to not only provide the local community with fresh produce — but to also see families and children searching through their bushes for ripe berries ready to be picked — is something neither of the two are willing to lose. Editor’s Note: This is part three in Articulating Agriculture, a series dedicated to featuring the agriculture commodities produced right here in LaRue County. Come back next week for a glimpse into Grandview Farm and how acquiring bees almost a decade ago has since come full circle.

HEARING

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The public hearing will be held at 7 p.m. on Thursday, June 26 at the LaRue County Courthouse, located at 209 W. High St., Hodgenville. The meeting is required to include “the taking and weighing of evidence if such is offered, a finding of fact based upon consideration of the evidence, the making of an order supported by substantial evidence, and, where the party’s constitutional rights are involved, a judicial review of the administrative action.” Evidence will be accepted from any individual in attendance, whether in support or opposition of the matter, before the final vote is conducted.

TAX

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The Commission is required to utilize the funds for projects and undertakings that promote and develop recreational, convention and tourist activity within the city. Though the Commission is strongly encouraged to obtain approval from the council for any projects with an estimated cost of \$10,000 or more, the council is prohibited from dictating how funds are utilized; the only exception to this rule is in the case of projects relating to capital improvements, such as the purchase or acquisition of land, which does require council approval. A written report of all income and expenditures must be provided to the city council monthly. According to Hodgenville Mayor Jim Phelps, the first report is due Aug. 30.

SCHOOL

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The unknown individual’s first attempt to appeal the decision was conducted by Warren, who stated her decision would align with the recommendation of the review committee and the books would remain. The individual then asked that the appeal be presented to the school board. Meeting in regular session on Monday, June 16, the board heard from four community members before issuing its decision. Curt Peterson, who stated he was previously a school board member in Massachusetts, said that during his tenure, his board would remove books that had “a lot of sexual content or deviant material.” On account of this, and “for the children’s sake,” he asked the board to “not allow sexually explicit books, magazines or educational programs to happen in school.” Bill Manning expressed serious concerns “about the porn and the obscene literature available in our middle and high school libraries.” He said these types of books are a contribution to mental health issues, moral corruption, criminal behavior and sexual grooming and that most of the above-listed books meet the definition of federal/state obscenity laws. “Classified for the seventh to twelfth grade audience, the books feature an average reading level of fifth grade ... they possession zero academic values to the reader and serve only to dumb down and degrade the soul of the reader,



rather than advance their academic and moral well-being,” Manning said. “It’s my understanding that our educational professionals and rational, moral adults have a fiduciary responsibility to ensure our students are provided the best of the best in literature.” Don Cutlit also spoke in favor of removing the books, stating that they have “questionable and arguably perverted material” that need to be kept away from the children and grandchildren of LaRue County. He argued the board has a responsibility to remove student access to the material displayed in the questioned books. Caleb Phelps, speaking in his capacity as a community member with children in the local school system, argued the books should remain available. He began by citing a similar request presented to the LCS board decades ago and the ultimate decision to keep those books because the board chair at the time believed it was the right of every parent to choose what their

child could and couldn’t read. He also advocated that, instead of banning books, the district should continue to allow members of the community to volunteer and do the hard work that takes time but ultimately creates positive change for students. “And I would go one step further to say that if you’re not willing to do the hard work of volunteering without the time or the credit, but you are willing to advocate that books be banned from our libraries, you’re advocating for something where you’re actually masquerading as a positive change agent without actually doing the work of being a positive change agent,” Phelps said. Similar to the community, members of the board were also divided in the decision to approve the appeal. Citing the fact that three of the four individuals — 75% — who spoke during the public comment requested the books be removed from circulation, Teresa Gilbert stated she believes the statistic is also representative of

the community’s desire regarding the availability of the books. Referencing the statement that parents have the right to prohibit their children from accessing reading materials, she argued that the district has little participation from parents and questioned if parents are actually taking the time to monitor what books their children are reading. On the other end of the spectrum, Joanna Hinton said it is unfair to say 75% of the community is in favor of banning the books after hearing from numerous individuals at the board’s previous working session. She also stated the question before the board was whether to uphold constitutional rights, and the decision does not indicate personal opinions. “Our legal duty to this district is to allow people to have access when they want,” Hinton said. “There are many opportunities for parents to be able to suppress what their children have access to. And, at the end of the day, much like other things that are not

in our lane, our job as a board does not, cannot not, should not be fueled completely by our personal opinions. You don’t sit here as an individual, you sit here as a representative of your constituents and as someone who upholds the law.” Stating that her decision had not been made lightly, Ashley Reding said she felt the need to support the screening committee’s vote to keep the books after finding numerous court decisions that called for upholding constitutional rights and not banning books. Referencing other arguments made throughout the meeting, she also pointed out that LCS is a public school, not a religious school, and the board therefore cannot allow or prohibit books based on spirituality and that the books are not used for educational programs and are not required to be read. “Quite honestly, I don’t want to read some of the things in the books. But when it comes to obscenity laws — these are not breaking obscenity laws,” Reding said. “My job in the district is to ensure we are following laws and following the court’s decisions.” After considering all provided information, the board ultimately agreed to uphold the screening committee’s decision to keep the 14 books and deny the appeal. The motion to do so was made by Reding, seconded by Hinton and passed in a 4-1 decision, with Gilbert being the sole nay vote. At the conclusion of the vote, Board Chairwoman Farrah Pruitt stated it would be unconstitutional to ban the books in question.

“The first amendment to the United States constitution, along with decades of Supreme Court precedent, clearly protects the rights of students to access literature, particularly when that literature has educational or a literary value. To ignore that would be to ignore our duty to uphold the constitution,” she said. “This board does not believe in government overreach. We do not believe it is our role to dictate what families or students are allowed to read.” “Instead, our responsibility is to support clear policies and procedures that empower parents that make choices for their own children,” Pruitt said. “We stand firm behind that principal; we support the rights of the parents, the protections of the constituent, and the rule of law as interpreted by the highest court in our land.” Other business conducted at the June meeting includes approvals of annual agreements with multiple counseling services and Cumberland Family Medical Center to offer a school-based satellite clinic for students and staff. Approval was also given to a memorandum of agreement between LCS and the City of Hodgenville Police Department for two School Resource Officers for the 2025-26 school year; the district will pay a salary of \$83,729.51 and the City is responsible for funding the balance of expenses, including the SROs’ benefits, vehicles and law enforcement equipment. The next meeting of the LaRue County Board of Education will be held at 6 p.m. on Monday, July 21 at the LaRue County High School Media Center.

You Have Everything to Lose

A DUI costs, on average, \$10,000, according to the National Highway Transportation Association, but that’s not all you have to lose. Impaired driving greatly increases your likelihood of causing an accident, putting yourself and others at risk for injury or death.

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