Where Female Farmers Are Flourishing

Nearly half of all farmers in Alaska are women, well above the average of about 36% nationwide. There are several factors behind the trend, Modern Farmer magazine reports, but two of them are the financial resources available to female farmers and a blossoming of peony growers. The U.S. Department of Agriculture’s Farm Services Agency sets aside loan money for underrepresented groups, including women and beginning farmers. And Alaska’s brief summer growing season allows peonies to be harvested later in the season than in other regions where the showy blooms are grown.

FUN FACT
To flower, many peonies need 100-300 hours of temperatures below 40 degrees Fahrenheit. That’s why they love Alaska!
US HEALTH RANKING
Clean ‘Green Mountain’ Living

Vermont scored bragging rights as the nation’s healthiest state in this year’s “America’s Health Rankings Annual Report,” which compares the 50 states on more than 30 health metrics. The report, produced for 30 years by the United Health Foundation, offers a “state and national snapshot” of health trends over time.

Vermont topped the ranking because it decreased rates of smoking and mental distress and has low incidences of violent crime and certain sexually transmitted diseases. Rounding out the top five, in order, were Massachusetts, Hawaii, Connecticut and Utah.

MARYLAND
Putting It Plainly

Writing the way people talk—limiting syllables per word and words per sentence—can go a long way toward making statutes and government documents more understandable to the public. The U.S. government and some states have adopted such “plain language” standards for that very reason. But writing at a grade school level doesn’t guarantee the message can be easily understood. A proposed Maryland law would require that ballot questions be accompanied by statements of the measures’ purpose—on the ballots, not in a voters’ guide or elsewhere. The statements must be written so they can “be understood by” people with a sixth grade level of reading comprehension. For now, the bill’s sponsor, Senator Cheryl Kagan (D), is unsure how the plain language requirement would be tested. What she does know is that ballot measure language “shouldn’t sound like a legal document.”

HOGS WILD
Porkers on the Prowl

Most of the United States’ 6 million feral pigs live in the South—about half of them in Texas—but they’re on the move, The New York Times reports. Their range expanded to 38 states from 17 in the last 30 years. That means ranchers and government officials as far north as Montana are keeping an eye on this smart, destructive invader. (Annual damage estimates run as high as $2.5 billion.) Adding to the challenge, the hogs are already at home in Canada, surviving the winter cold by developing thick coats of fur and burrowing “pigloos” into the snow.

CALIFORNIA
A Pot App for Your Smartphone

After California legalized marijuana in 2016, it struggled to keep up with licensing requests, which, along with stiff taxes on legal weed, has contributed to a flourishing illicit market, including unlicensed dispensaries. Now, consumers can find out if a shop is legit by using their smartphones. A new program run by the state’s Bureau of Cannabis Control encourages licensed retailers to post QR codes in their store windows. When consumers scan the code, they can check the retailer’s license information. The United Cannabis Business Association, which represents licensed retailers, supports the program because consumers can be sure the products they buy are “legal and safe.”