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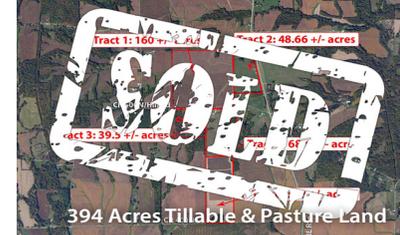
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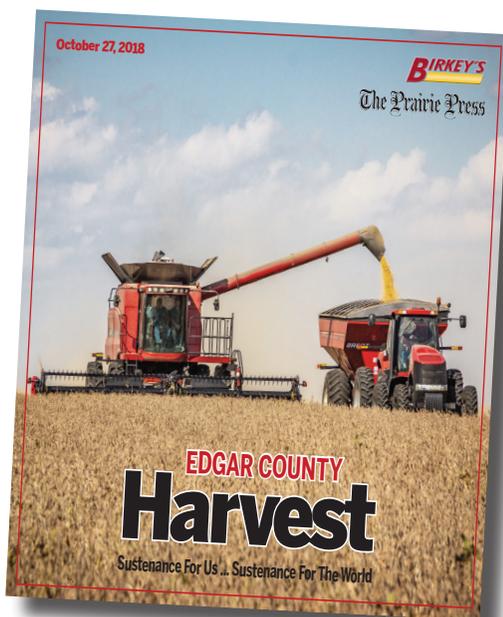
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Sy: 2018 harvest is good, but not a record

Grain prices continuing as a worry for U.S. farmers

BY GARY HENRY

ghenry@prairiepress.net

Work hard, make a great product and be successful is the American way of thinking.

Farmers work hard, produce a great product but the third part of the formula is not always present for them.

"2014 was one of the best years on harvest but prices went down, and they have been in a slump since then," said Roger Sy. "Last year it was hard to break even. The price is low this year but the quantity is there. That better yield may offset the price."

Sy, of Newman, is vice president of the Illinois Corn Marketing Board. At the time of the interview in early October the local harvest was well under way. He said the information coming to him indicated it was a good harvest, but not a record. Still, farmers seemed pleased with yields.

"Corn is over 200 bushels in most cases," said Sy. "Beans are phenomenal this year."

According to Sy, a 60-70 bushel range on beans makes farmers happy but some area farms were seeing yields of 80-90 and perhaps a couple of instances where the yield went over 100 bushels per acre.

He said weather during the growing season was near perfect with rains arriving when the beans needed it.

"The bean technology has improved so much," said Sy, adding he saw plants with three and four pods while checking fields.

In addition to improved plant genetics, it appears a 15-inch space between bean rows is best for yield. Such spacing allows the plants to bush out better and set more leaves, which in turn encourages more stem production and increases pods on the plant.

The weather was also good for the corn, which was tall and formed ears high on the stalk.

"A lot of guys waited to put their inputs on in the spring. That was partly because of the price, but it also made sure the nitrogen and phosphorus was available when the corn needed it," said Sy.

It wasn't all good harvest news in other places. Sy said rains came during the early part of harvest for both Iowa and Ohio, which not only caused delays but raised concern about stalk integrity when farmers did get into the field. Snow arrived in northern Minnesota and the Dakotas during early October and complicated the harvest in those locations.



Gary Henry/The Prairie Press

A bountiful corn harvest on the Fell Farm in Kansas Township flows from the combine to a waiting grain truck for a trip to the Oakland elevator.

There was belief adverse weather was having a negative influence on yields for Iowa, Ohio and Minnesota.

Prices are always a concern as farmers start harvest and weigh the advantage of an immediate sale against the risk of storing the crops and hoping for a better price.

"Grain went way down before harvest, but it is coming back," said Sy.

He noted finalizing trade deals with Mexico and Canada helped prices as did news of harvest problems in other parts of the country. Anticipation of lower yields in South America provided some price boost but buyers are not pushing prices up much because they do not see a shortage of grain now or expect one in the future.

There is ample new grain coming into the market along with what remains in storage to meet demand.

"Some of last year's grain still hasn't been taken out of the bins. That could create problems," said Sy. "The ag community needs to be patient. When

we have big crops and prices are low, it creates a lot of anxiety. It will work itself out eventually."

In the meantime, farmers still have things to worry about. The trade war between China and President Trump is not helping to bolster prices but Sy said that situation won't last forever although the end result is not clear.

He is confident ways will develop for continued selling to foreign markets and getting around the tariffs.

"China is shrewd when it comes to their markets," Sy said.

He added the United States is the single largest supplier of soybeans to China so the Chinese government will continue buying even if it requires going through another country to purchase American soy.

There is also a growing world demand for ethanol, which is promising for American corn growers.

"Ethanol is huge for our exports," he said.

Livestock production is another avenue for grain consumption.

"We still have people in Asia that depend on us for poultry and pork," said Sy. "A lot of our corn and soybeans go out as meat."

The combination of the high cost to farm combined with low commodity prices presents a challenge regarding how American agriculture can continue. Sy said many young people who grow up on farms pursue other careers because farms cannot be economically divided in a way where every sibling gets a reasonable amount of acreage to start a farming operation.

That does not mean young people are disinterested in farming, but they often lack the financial resources to do a startup operation. The result is fewer young people are entering farming and the average age of an American farmer is 58. Sy said young agriculturists need to contact farmers approaching retirement and work toward taking over an existing operation. Society depends on farms being there.

"Everybody's going to eat," Sy said. "There's always going to be livestock."



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Gard, Bubeck planting alternative crop

Clark County farms plant a total of 330 acres of green beans

BY SUZANNE WILLIAMS

swilliamsprairiepress@gmail.com

Beans of a different type were grown in Clark County.

Dan Gard and Carl Bubeck, both of rural Marshall, planted green beans this summer for Razorback Farms, Inc., of Bentonville, Ark.

Gard planted 170 acres and Bubeck planted 160 acres of the specialty crop to produce canning grade beans. Razorback Farms dictated the varieties to plant such as Koala snap beans and Italian flat beans. Gard planted 80 acres of the white bean variety.

“They (Razorback Farms) tell me what they want us to raise, and it is based on what the cannery wants,” said Gard. “We really work hard at it, and we now have a good working relationship with the farm and farm representative Steve Brooks.”

Razorback Farms specializes in vegetable processing and provides regular snap beans, European beans, wax beans, Italian beans, spinach and other cole crops, and sweet corn on the cob and cut kernels using a mobile-processing method.

The sandy soil along the Wabash River and the two farmers’ irrigation systems create the ideal environment to raise green beans. Green beans are raised in a similar manner to soybeans, although the seeds are more expensive than soybeans.

It costs approximately \$1.85 per pound for seed and takes about one ton of the finished bean product to pay for the seed.

Because of the relatively short maturity time for green beans, Gard can raise two crops per year. The first crop is planted at the beginning of May and harvested approximately 57 days later at the end of June and the second crop goes into the ground the first of August for picking at the end of September.

This is not the first time Gard has commercially raised green beans. More than 20 years ago he farmed for Stokely’s and in recent years returned to the specialty crop.

Green beans require some additional work like daily watering.

“The crop requires more management during the growing season,” said Gard. “We put water on daily. It’s not a large amount only a few tenths of an inch to keep the beans refreshed. “The beans don’t like their feet to be



Barb Gard/The Prairie Press

Specialized Pixall harvesting equipment from Razorback Farms move through the Dan Gard farm in rural Marshall. Gard and Carl Bubeck each farm green beans for the company. Once the beans are picked, Razorback utilizes a mobile processing machine to can the fresh green beans within 12 hours of harvest. Below, right, a load of green beans is dumped into cart for transportation to a waiting semi.

wet.”

Through trial and error, Gard has discovered watering at 5 a.m. and letting the irrigation system run its circuit also keeps the beans cool during the hot summer days, which in turn produces more finished product.

Gard and Bubeck use center pivot irrigation systems, and Gard invested in the water equipment more than 25 years ago.

The crop also requires extra cultivating for weed control and minimal chemical application.

“We only use ounces of insecticide per acre because the beans are food quality,” Gard said.

In addition, the two farmers clean around the perimeter of the fields to ensure there is no glass or other littered trash that might inadvertently be picked up during harvest.

They try to avoid standing water to reduce the amount of crawfish near the beans for

See **BEANS**, Page 11



BEANS

FROM PAGE 10

those who have a food allergy to the crawfish.

When the beans are picked, Razorback Farms uses specialized equipment to harvest the beans. The company utilizes a mobile processing machine to can the fresh beans within 12 hours of being picked.

“They try to get them in the cans as quick as the can,” said Gard. He said 8 to 10 specialized Pixall harvesting pickers, moving slowly about 1.5 miles per hour, that look like they have a bristly brush on the front of the machine pull the pod off the green bean plants leaving the stems in the field. The average crop produces five to six tons of beans per acre.

“We raise the beans similar to soybeans, however, we also apply a little more nitrogen,” said Gard. “We don’t use Roundup® so instead we use older chemicals that farmers used over 20 years ago.”

No matter how much effort both Gard and Bubeck put into their green bean crop, Mother Nature still has the final say. Large amounts of rainfall this year reduced the harvest to an average three tons per acre.

The fields received 10 inches of rain in a five-day period during the first crop growing season, and in August five inches of rain fell in three days during the second season.

“Weather is a big factor,” Gard said.

While green beans are a specialty crop, they are still subject to market fluctuations and tend to follow soybean prices. Last year green beans were \$200 per ton and this year they are \$165 per ton.

Gard plans to continue trying alternative crops to adjust to the ever changing agriculture industry. In the past, he has grown pie quality pumpkins, sweet corn and even peppers.



Barb Gard/The Prairie Press

The specialized Pixall harvest equipment moves through Dan Gard's 160 acres in rural Marshall, harvesting a crop of green beans. The harvesting takes place anytime the beans are deemed ready — including the middle of night.

“I will try anything to make a profit,” he said. “We have to try something new to make money.”

Confronting continually rising costs for farm equipment, the small farmer must be a good manager of money and an excellent manager of the other tasks that accompany the farming

operation.

Just like soybeans, Gard rotates his crops and will not raise green beans for a couple of years.

“We rotate to get the disease out of the ground. Bubeck planted his field in wheat,” Gard said.

He does not consider growing green beans

hard, but neighboring farmers may have a different take on that opinion.

“One guy who watches me tend to the crop commented that we work really hard on it,” Gard said. “We are just trying different things to have a successful farm. I have been known to go out at 2 p.m. to turn the water on.”

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Keeping the family farm alive

BY SUZANNE WILLIAMS

swilliamsprairiepress@gmail.com

The desire to keep farm ground in the family was the reason behind a Paris native's move back to Edgar County.

Mike Curl, a 1994 Paris High School graduate, and his wife Kim Curl, also a PHS graduate, returned to Paris this summer with their three children to work the ground that has been in the Curl family for many generations. He is now farming alongside his father Dale Curl, 62, harvesting more than 750 acres of corn and soybeans located north and west of Paris, along with a few fields near Redmon.

"We came back in July," said Curl. "Farming takes a lot out of Dad, and it is getting harder and harder for him to do it alone as he ages."

After high school graduation, Mike Curl earned an agriculture engineering degree from the University of Illinois in 1998. He then worked for Caterpillar for several years before landing his longtime career choice with John Deere in Dubuque, Iowa. Curl was a test engineer running various forms of tests and trials on heavy construction equipment primarily prototypes and new upcoming models.

He married his high school girlfriend Kim Kraemer. The couple has three children Austin, 18, a freshman at the University of Iowa; Ethan, 13, a seventh grader at Mayo Middle School and Logan, 10, a fifth grader at Wenz School. His wife, Kim, is a teacher at Mayo.

"Dad is a stubborn farmer and wouldn't give it up unless family took over," said Mike Curl. "A majority of the land we farm we have been doing it for generations. My grandparents and great-grandparents use to farm the land."

They also work ground owned by his uncle Ronnie Curl who lives in Fremont, Ohio.

For nearly a decade, Mike Curl has always returned to the farm for several weeks in the fall and sometimes in the spring to assist his father. Recently, after much careful consideration, he decided to make the move permanent.

"The transition is going good," he said. "I am helping him this year and then hopefully next year I will be making a majority of the business decisions, but Dad will always be involved with the farm operations."

Curl's younger brother, Tim, also assists on the farm and both he and sister Kelly Cusick are supportive of keeping the ground in the family.

"I didn't want to see someone else farm our land at least not on my watch," Mike Curl said. "I didn't



Special to The Prairie Press

After nearly 20 years working in the agribusiness industry for John Deere and Caterpillar, Mike Curl, standing far left, has returned to the family farm to take over from his father, Dale Curl. The Curl family has relocated to Paris from Peosta, Iowa. The family just completed the 2018 harvest.

want to let that happen, and Dad wouldn't stop doing it until someone in the family took over."

The new ag career is challenging.

"I have a lot to learn," he said. "I have been around the operation side of the farm for years with running equipment, but the business side and market side I am still learning. Dad is helping me perfect that aspect of the farm."

He also acknowledged the career change comes with many risks.

"It was one thing to get a paycheck on a set schedule," he said. "Farming profits depend on weather, the market and many other factors. Now I have whole different risks than what is

guaranteed and having security in corporate America. Farming is quite the opposite of that."

The farming risks are motivating Curl to look at the future and slowly increase the size of their family farm to ensure another generation of Curl farmers continue to work the land.

Talking from a business point of view, Curl noted, "Sometimes you have to take risks to make it payoff. It can even be a risk trying something new."

With harvest complete, the next task is to work some ground and clean and maintain the farm equipment during the winter.

He can fall back on his skills as an agriculture engineer, and that helps when it comes to compiling data

from today's farm machinery and precision farming.

"There is a lot going on in ag technology today specifically related to GPS and precision farming," he said. "As an engineer, I can handle that data. There is so much more technology and information available now for the farmer than what use to be."

Getting out of Edgar County and not coming back was important when he was in high school, but things change.

"My youngest is involved in the farm. So from my standpoint, I want to keep it going and if one of my boys wants to take over that would be great," said Curl.



Special to The Prairie Press

Corn is augered onto a pile at a central Illinois elevator.

Preserving grain quality

Storing grain at the right moisture content is key

SPECIAL TO THE PRAIRIE PRESS

Farmers are faced with at least two problems at this time of the year.

First is bringing in the harvest in an efficient manner, and second is storing the grain in a manner that will maintain quality.

Jesse Soule, a commercial agriculture educator with the University of Illinois Extension, offers these tips to assure maximum harvest and storage practices.

Make sure that combine settings are appropriately adjusted to minimize grain damage and fines, as both fines and damaged kernels are a haven for mold growth and insects.

Continue to check field losses throughout harvest in order to adjust speed and equipment accordingly. An easy way to calculate loss is by placing a 1-square foot frame at several locations in a just harvested area and counting the kernels within the square. Every two kernels found within the square is the equivalent of approximately one-bushel loss per acre.

Before harvesting a particular field, document any problems.

This includes the weeds that are present or any signs of insect and disease.

Record these observations to adjust manage-

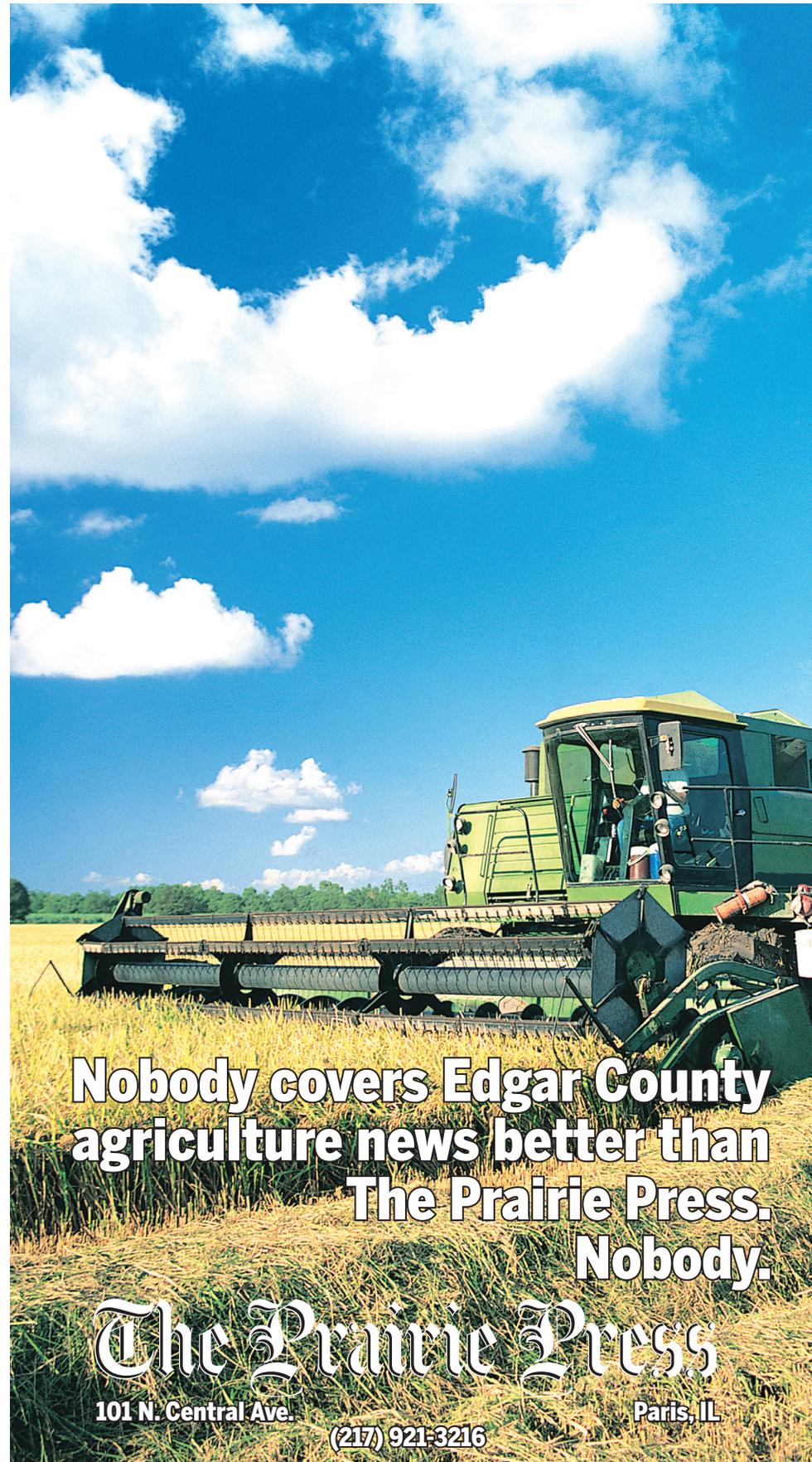
ment strategy in the following years. It's also important to pay attention to fields or areas in a field that appear to have mold issues, so as not to mix contaminated grain with clean grain during harvest.

It is important to store clean grain separately from damaged or contaminated grain, and any grain remaining from last year's harvest should be consolidated into one bin to keep the new harvest segregated from older grain.

Grain must be stored at the appropriate moisture content, which is dependent on how long the grain will be in storage, temperature and the initial quality of the grain itself. For example, 14-15 percent moisture is typically recommended for corn to be stored until early or mid-summer. Grain needs a lower moisture level if it will be in storage for a longer period to keep it in better condition and help prevent mold growth. It is advisable to store lower quality grain around 1 percent lower moisture content than is recommended for better grain.

Once corn is dried and put into the bin, the work is not over. The grain should be checked bi-weekly for temperature and moisture content for the remainder of the fall and once per month once winter arrives.

Such a practice can catch problems resulting from changing weather and moisture movement within the bin. Regular checks of stored grain can also lead to the discovery of other problems such as crusting, condensation, mold, leaks and any musty or unusual odors.



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Local study examines how fertilizer migrates

County nitrogen ninjas helping with important research for Illini FS

BY GARY HENRY
ghenry@prairiepress.net

Nitrogen is essential for high corn yields but concern the fertilizer washes from fields and causes massive problems downstream such as the hypoxic zone in the Gulf of Mexico and algae blooms elsewhere also creates criticism about its use.

“Other studies focus on the environmental

side. I’m focusing on the loss of nitrogen,” said Howard Brown, manager of Agronomic Information and Environmental Stewardship for Illini FS.

Brown’s N-Watch research is an attempt to track how nitrogen moves with a specific emphasis on factors such as the time of the year the application is made and weather that may disrupt nitrogen remaining in the ground for the crop. The work is still preliminary and many more data sets are needed to reach a conclusion.

With funding from the Edgar County Foundation and assistance from the Paris High School agriculture program during for the 2017 harvest, Brown was able to pull numerous soil samples from a field near the school. Samples were taken monthly after the 2016 harvest through the next spring planting and into the early growth period of the crop.

“The main thrust was to bring to life the nitrogen cycle so kids understand where it is coming from,” Brown said.

Brown graphed the soil samples to chart any nitrogen shifts, and the information was posted to a website where it is available to area farmers.

The study for 2017 revealed that regardless of when the nitrogen was applied, it apparently remained in place because no loss was detected in the samples. Since it is only one field and one year, it does not make conclusive data.

Brown said because of time constraints it was not possible to repeat the methodology used for the 2018 harvest cycle. He only had two soil samples to study this year and loss was detected.

“This was a bad year for me not to have sampling sites,” said Brown. “The loss came after the last sampling when we had saturated soil in June. That’s when we lost – late in the game.”

Since then Brown has secured funding from Illini FS, the Edgar County Community Foundation and Koch Agronomics and has commitments from Paris, Shiloh, Unity, Fisher and Hoopston high schools to participate and obtain multiple soil samples for graphing results in 2019. The money from Koch Agronomics is purchasing soil probes capable of reaching a depth of three feet.

With so many schools participating, Brown cannot give each student group the attention he did with the first Paris class, but he will work with students teaching them how to take sam-

ples and he will he prepare online lectures for classroom use.

“The kids will become Nitrogen Ninjas,” said Brown. “I will have a network next year where we can sample soil five feet away from the crop because corn is taking up the nitrogen in the field.

Brown said the results from 2017 support his theory that farm fields do not lose nitrogen as easily as perceived. That is important for farmers to know so they do not assume the fertilizer washed away during a heavy rain and apply more when it is not needed.

“Modeling does not work,” said Brown. “We want farmers to be better aware of what’s available over time so they don’t panic.”

Brown regards agriculture as a loving, caring and serving activity, and he uses an acronym of MOM to explain what he hopes the research will ultimately do – Minimize environmental impact, Optimize harvest yield and Maximize input. He added with the current farm economy it is important famers are smart with input expenses and avoid unnecessary costs like over application when it is not necessary

“We are going to have to live with agriculture,” Brown said. “We need to use nitrogen.”

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