

AP PHOTO
The Scratch n All, designed for use in stables, barns, kennels, etc., allows animals to self-groom and scratch.

IN BRIEF

Pad lets animals scratch themselves

DILLSBURG, Pa. — Animent has created its first animal care product, Scratch n All, a high-quality, silicone rubber scratching and grooming pad created to allow animals to safely satisfy the need to self-groom and scratch. The pads are designed for use in stables, barns, kennels, zoos and homes.

The self-enriching pads — based on curry brushes familiar to all animal owners — feature a unique, four-sided interlocking design allowing owners to create grooming surfaces in any size or shape needed for their animals simply by adding a pad.

Each package includes rust-proof, stainless-steel mounting screws and washers to firmly and safely anchor the pads to any solid surface. Uniquely, this product can be mounted flat or at a 90-degree corner. There are four colors from which to choose.

Scratch n All pads are available directly from the manufacturer and at a few select retailers in the Greater Dillsburg area. More information, including specifications and how to order, is available at scratchnall.com or by phoning 1-888-972-7282.

Slaughter of sick cows disallowed

WASHINGTON — Agriculture Secretary Ed Schafer announced Tuesday a total ban on meat plant slaughter of cows too sick or weak to stand.

The planned change comes in the wake of the nation's largest beef recall. It would shut down an exception — which critics call a loophole — that allows a small number of so-called "downer" cattle into the food supply if they pass veterinary inspection.

Downer cows pose increased risk for mad cow disease and other infections, partly because they typically wallow in feces. They are already mostly banned from slaughter, but under current rules can be allowed in if they fall down after passing an initial veterinary inspection, and then are re-inspected and pass that second inspection, too.

Some lawmakers and the Humane Society of the United States have lobbied Schafer to eliminate that exception, and the meat and dairy industry last month reversed its opposition and endorsed the change too.

Schafer announced the planned new rule at a meeting with reporters following a 60-day review of conditions at the nation's slaughterhouses. The department plans to expedite publication of the rule and hopes to finalize it within several months.

CONTRIBUTED AND WIRE REPORTS

Wednesday, May 21, 2008



CONTRIBUTED PHOTO, DAVID HASBURY
Anita Hasbury-Snogles is seen competing on her horse Jazz in a TREC event in the U.K., where she was named English Reserve Champion.

A race to the finish

It has been quite a month on the equine sporting front, what with the Rolex CCI, the Kentucky Derby and the Badminton Horse Trials (phase 2 of the Rolex Triple Crown event) back in the U.K.

For those of you unaware of the Rolex Triple Crown, it is a series of three, three-day international cross-country events (rated four star — the highest rating given to an event), in which horse and rider are judged. Day one of the competition tests their dressage skills; day two looks at the partnership's ability and speed over a four-mile cross-country course involving some extremely large and complex jumps; and then day three tests their agility and precision over a set show jumping course.

Horse and rider are naturally tired after the previous two days of activities, so the competition is often won or lost on this last phase. The three events of the Triple Crown are based in Lexington, Ky., followed by Badminton, Gloucestershire and finally at Burghley, Lincolnshire, both in the U.K.

To win just one of these events is an amazing and, at \$120,000, quite lucrative achievement, but the real objective is to be the winner of the entire series, Kentucky, Badminton & Burghley for an additional prize of a cool quarter of a million dollars — but the twist here is that those victories all have to be in the same year!

That is not a feat easily achieved by even the most proficient riders, and in fact only one rider to date can ever claim to have completed the "Grand Slam" — the U.K.'s delightful Pippa Funnell.

Pippa won the Triple



DAVID AND ANITA HASBURY-SNOGLES

Crown back in 2003 on her horse "Primmore's Pride," who is still eventing today, by the way, but hasn't been able to repeat the experience since.

Australia's Andrew Hoy came close last year with two wins out of three, but that is as far as it gets! Incidentally, I met Pippa back in the U.K. before coming to the States to do our crazy trip when both she and the Queen's granddaughter, Zara Phillips, signed my "special" T-shirt.

That's the thing with the horsey world — it doesn't matter where you are from, or how much money you have, the horse is the common denominator and all of us are equal (although some are a little more equal than others).

Anyway, I'd like to take a moment to look at the flip side of the coin here and spare a thought for the poor horses (and riders) who gave their all for the competition. Not just those who didn't finish in the money or those who just didn't finish the competition and went home empty-handed, but those who never got to go back home at all. At the Kentucky Rolex, two horses were killed during the cross-country phase, and one rider was seriously injured.

Perhaps even more notable was the recent Kentucky Derby, where the valiant horse "Eight Belles"

did actually finish the race, and did win a considerable sum of money for finishing second, but failed to hang on to the biggest prize of all — her life. It is just so sad that such a beautiful and noble animal should have to be destroyed so soon after almost winning the Derby.

I don't know the full facts of the case, but it did seem extraordinary to me that the decision to euthanize the horse was made so swiftly. Maybe I'm being a little too cynical here, but I expect the insurance money was worth a great deal more to the owners than the cost of rehabilitation would have been.

Now, before you all cry out that the poor animal needed to be put out of its misery, there are anaesthetics that can be administered, at least to allow time for a full examination of the injuries (including X-rays) to be given. It just doesn't seem to me that anyone could have properly diagnosed the extent of the injuries in that short a time. I'm stirring up a hornets' nest here, but when it comes to humans and big money, it appears that something as "trivial" as a horse's welfare cannot be allowed to get in the way.

We all still have so much to learn from the animals and nature around us, but so few of us are ever prepared to spare the time to listen, to look and, indeed, to learn. Those of us who try to develop a relationship with our horses learn much from them, but the biggest lesson we should all learn is that sometimes winning isn't everything, sometimes just having the chance to compete together is enough.

Until next week

David Snogles can be reached at david_hasbury@yahoo.com

Why the interest in local food?

Local food seems to be growing in its importance to consumers, as we see evidence of food moving through retail market channels like our own Culpeper Farmers Market. Here there are direct connections being made between local producers and consumers.

My daughter, Caitlin, works for Whole Foods in North Carolina where she tells me this specialty grocery store figures that local is a multi-state area several hundred miles across. For purposes of this article, we can think about local food being from our community or from a neighboring community.

Why all the interest in local food? It seems the consumer sees local food as a chance to find something unique or fresh and that they develop a relationship with the producer at the point of sale. This personal and friendly connection may mean more than anything else to the consumer in pursuit of local food.

You are also aware of the distance some food stuffs must travel to reach our store shelves and how this added freight eats up more energy. In some cases it may be more efficient to grow food locally, but not in all cases.

In fact, we can probably grow and ship a 25-ton load of white potatoes from the ideal potato-growing regions of the country cheaper than we could grow these same potatoes here in our own community. The efficiencies of mechanized planting and harvest, the economies of specialized large-scale production, make this important starch source readily available year-round and affordable at our grocery stores.

Still, there are plenty of gardeners interested in growing potatoes, and their numbers increase during times of economic trouble. Claude Minnich at Clarke Hardware tells me he sold out of seed potatoes early in the spring, an example of this surge in home gardening.

Potatoes are a traditional staple in most home gardens,



CARL STAFFORD

and it is no wonder he sold out so early. So, why not buy your potatoes from the store instead of growing your own?

There is a certain pride among gardeners in growing their own, and while this is not directly related to the local food discussion, it does reflect an influential factor that can drive the decisions of consumers. Buying local food could be the next best thing to growing your own for those who do not have a garden.

By now, most readers have seen the eye-catching, colorful flyer that came in the mail recently, featuring the Buy Fresh, Buy Local campaign. It offers up listings of foods from local sources here in the Northern Piedmont.

These copyrighted marketing materials were proven by the Piedmont Environmental Council in the Albemarle area over the last couple of years and have been adapted to our area using their successful model and generous support. We hope this helps our region's producers and consumers find each other. In the flyer you can also see the names of other BFBL supporters, including Virginia Cooperative Extension.

Look for the BFBL kick-off event coming up on Saturday, May 24 at 9 a.m. at the Culpeper Farmers Market on the east end of Davis Street in Culpeper, where we hope to tell the story of the connection between local producers and local consumers who share an interest in local food.

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Spring rains ease Southeast's drought

But forecasters say it's far from over and could grow worse

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

ATLANTA — What drought? Georgia's governor has given the go-ahead to fill up outdoor swimming pools. The five-ring fountain at Atlanta's Centennial Olympic Park is dancing once more. And some communities may soon allow homeowners to run lawn sprinklers again.

Weeks of rain have eased the drought that has gripped the Southeast for the past two years. But government forecasters warn that the crisis is far from over and could soon grow worse. And some worry that the spring rains have lured politicians into a false sense of security.

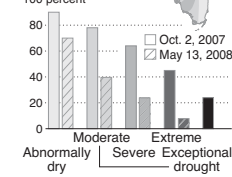
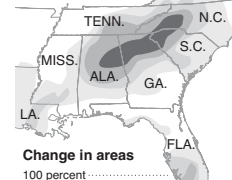
"We hope it turns around, but to assume it will turn around is dangerous. It takes time to recover, and with summer upon us, it's important for us to not move too quickly," said Mark Svoboda, a climatologist with the National Drought Mitigation Center. "We're still behind the eight-ball and we're going into high-demand season."

Most of the Southeast has gotten 10 to 20 inches of rain over the past three months. Some 8 percent of the region is now in "extreme" drought, and none of the region is in "exceptional" drought, the worst category. That is a welcome change from October, when 45 percent of the Southeast was locked in one of those two conditions.

Welcome relief

Most of the Southeast had 10 to 12 inches of rain in the past three months. Still, forecasters say it will take monumental storms to ease drought areas.

Current drought conditions



SOURCE: U.S. Drought Monitor AP

But most of the Atlanta metropolitan area of 5 million people is still in extreme drought, and the rain has not done much to recharge its chief source of water, Lake Lanier, because its watershed — the area that drains into the lake — is relatively meager.

Lake Lanier is still some 13.2 feet below normal — only a few inches from the lowest level on record for this time of year.

Forecasters say it will take monumental storms to bust the drought.

Despite the warnings, Gov. Sonny Perdue relaxed water restrictions in February to allow outdoor swimming pools to be filled.

Texas researchers developing contraceptive for wild hogs

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

GILMER, Texas — Broad areas of grazing land at Pete Gipson's farm have plow-like scars. But it wasn't an out-of-control mechanical device that left disjointed ruts and holes.

Gipson and other ranchers and farmers in the South are tormented by herds of voracious feral hogs. The beasts, up to 3 feet tall and 400 pounds, devour feed intended for livestock and tear up pastures in their incessant search for food.

The hogs show little respect for such barriers as barbed wire fences, which merely serve as backscratch-

ers for their hairy, leathery hides.

"They got in that yard a couple weeks ago and cultivated it," said Gipson, 67, as his pickup truck bounced across a once-smooth pasture at his 300-acre Red Cap Farms.

"I smoothed it out and I'll be damned if they didn't come back the next night and cultivate it again."

In Texas, the wild pig population — now topping 2 million — is exploding thanks to high reproductive rates and few natural predators.

The Texas AgriLife Extension Service estimates the hogs cause \$50 million in damage each year.

A solution to the pig problem might come from a lab at Texas A&M University, where a team of researchers is testing an oral contraceptive for the hogs and other pests. It may even become applicable for pets like cats and dogs.

The contraceptive, called a phosphodiesterase 3 inhibitor and in development for about a year and a half, is now in a capsule form and has been fed to captive pigs at the university's research facility. It prevents the females' eggs from maturing.

"It does appear to be effective," said Duane Kraemer, a professor of veterinary physiology and pharmacology who heads the research



AP PHOTO
Pete Gipson looks at the damage to a pasture caused by feral hogs Tuesday near Gilmer, Texas.

team. "The animals can continue to cycle and breed. Their behaviors are the same, except they don't get pregnant."