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**Whisker Wisdom**  
By Debby Hurst



**Hello HC Residents**

**Question: Why do cats love boxes so much?**  
They feel safe, it's warm because the heat from the cat makes it feel cozy, also they feel like they are hiding, like the big cats in the wild.

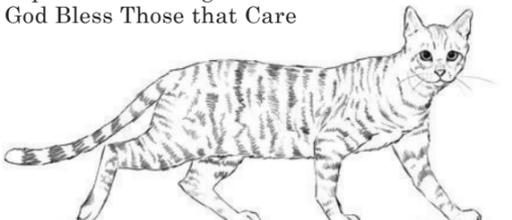
**Question: Can I give my cat catnip?**  
Yes. I add catnip to their scratching posts & beds. It causes euphoria or relaxation in many cats.

If it causes a lot of extra excitement, only give every two weeks.

If you give them too much it can cause a stomach ache in some cats, and they may lose interest in it totally. It's meant as a treat. Not a daily thing.

**Question: How can I tell if my cat is sick?**  
You will see a change in their eating, more sleepy than normal, vomiting a lot, diarrhea, hiding more, and aggression toward their favorite person. If you see this in your cat, take notes on their actions and call the Veterinarian and make an appointment immediately, as it may take a few days to get them in, and you do not want your cat hurting, or making the matters worse by waiting.

Thank you for the interest in my column! Keep the questions coming.  
God Bless Those that Care



**Stevie Jackson**

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co and cattle, and still keeps a few cows today.

The son of Charles and Jane Jackson, he is a Hancock County High School graduate and attended Boyce College, a Christian college affiliated with the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, at the Owensboro campus.

He said he plans to use a familiar slogan for his campaign: "When my dad ran for jailer, his motto was, 'Lock up your vote. Jackson for jailer.'"

Jackson has been a contractor for many years, specializing in carpentry and brick-laying throughout the area. He has served as pastor of Patesville Baptist Church since 2009 and previously pastored Blacklick Baptist Church in McQuady. He has also filled in for nearly every Baptist church in the area over the years.

"There are two deputy jailers now," he said. "If I

## Keith Pritchard

—continued from page 1

ator of the year honor. Baker said he stood out for his long-term involvement with conservation district programs, his strict adherence to program guidelines and his willingness to help neighbors whenever needed.

Baker explained that he brings several names to the conservation district board each year and recommends only farmers who actively participate in district programs. He said Pritchard regularly comes into the office with questions about how to improve his operation, increase net farm income and make daily work more efficient, and he follows all of the requirements attached to any cost-share funding he receives.

Over the last 15 years in the program, Pritchard has consistently used conservation district resources, including state cost-share opportunities, to improve his cattle and hay operation. Baker noted that these programs can cover up to 50% of the cost of certain approved practices or equipment, but they also come with strict rules and documentation.

Despite the paperwork and what Baker described as a lot of hoops to jump through, Pritchard has continued to participate and comply, which increases his chances of being approved in future funding cycles. Baker added that peers such as local beef producer Gerald Nugent often praise Pritchard for stepping in whenever they need a hand, calling him a farmer who not only improves his own operation but also supports the broader agricultural community.

"We live in a small community, and I always stress the importance of helping your neighbors and friends out, if anyone needs help," Baker said. "Keith is always willing to help a neighbor with their farming operation when needed."

The cost-share programs that benefit producers like Pritchard are funded by Kentucky's agricultural development fund, which is supported by tobacco settlement money tied to product sales. When tobacco sales rise, more money flows into county-level agricultural development funds; when sales drop, local districts see less funding to distribute.

In the most recent funding cycle, Hancock County received about 30% fewer dollars than before because tobacco product sales in Kentucky declined by roughly the same percentage. During the pandemic years, however, the dis-

trict saw an increase of 10% to 15% in funding as tobacco use temporarily rose. Those swings directly affect how many producer applications the district can approve in any given year.

"This program has been going on for more than 20 years, with the ag development fund money and the tobacco buyout," Baker said. "Unfortunately, we had to approve a lot fewer applications this time."

He emphasized that successful cattle producers like Pritchard must plan several years ahead when managing their herds. A heifer cannot be bred until she is about 15 months old, then carries a calf for roughly nine months, and it can take another nine to 12 months before that calf is ready to sell. It can take close to three years from the time a heifer is added to the herd before her first calf generates income.

Because of that long timeline, producers need to think three or four years ahead when deciding whether to expand, downsize or replace older cows. Herd numbers will always rise and fall as calves are born and sold, but careful planning helps ensure that a farmer does not fall behind on herd replacement or cash flow.

Andrea Pritchard stressed that good hay yields begin with healthy soil and attention to nutrient balance. She said the family relies on soil testing to monitor nitrate, phosphate, potash and lime levels and to keep the soil's pH in a range that supports strong pasture and hay growth. If those levels are out of balance, she said, the pasture will not produce the forage needed to feed cattle through winter.

The Pritchards typically cut hay twice a year, once in the spring and again in the fall, and apply fertilizer in the spring to support robust growth. Maintaining soil fertility, she added, is essential not only for production but also for conservation, since keeping nutrients in the soil and the pH properly adjusted reduces waste and runoff while protecting long-term productivity.

Baker said that in recent years, cattle prices have finally risen to levels that allow local beef producers to see a healthier profit after years of slim margins. Higher cattle prices have helped offset the steep costs of fertilizer, machinery and fuel.

Participation in conservation district programs is growing, according to Baker, who said he has not seen a decrease in the number of farmers seeking assistance at his office. He believes producers increasingly recognize the value of the district in helping them improve their net farm income

and streamline day-to-day work.

By using cost-share funds to purchase equipment or adopt practices that reduce labor and input costs, farmers can keep more of the revenue generated by their operations. The goal is to help producers be the best operators they can be, both as stewards of the land and as business owners navigating inflation and volatile markets.

When asked how the community can support farmers like the Pritchards, Baker encouraged residents to buy as much local product as they can, particularly freezer beef purchased directly from area producers. He said when customers buy a side or whole beef and fill their freezer, the cost typically averages about \$7 per pound for all cuts combined, compared with about \$20 per pound for a ribeye steak at the grocery store.

Customers often notice a clear difference in taste, freshness and quality when they buy directly from local farms. Baker said he frequently connects residents looking for freezer beef with local producers, and that most people who make the switch rarely return to store-bought beef because of the superior flavor, freshness and absence of preservatives.

Pritchard said he was surprised when Baker called to tell him he had been selected as Cooperator of the Year. The call came as he was on his way to a Thanksgiving dinner at Southwire, and he initially thought Baker was joking.

Once he realized the honor was real, Pritchard said it felt good to be recognized for his work on the farm and in conservation programs. Baker said the joking between the two is typical, but he made clear that there was nothing lighthearted about the decision: in his view, the Pritchards are very well deserving and represent the kind of family he hopes to see more of in the community.

Pritchard credited several people with helping him build and improve his operation

over the years. He said his papaw, Tom Freeman, guided him early on, and neighbors Gerald Newton and the late Harold Wayne Newton played major roles in advising and assisting him as he took on more responsibility at the farm.

Baker said that spirit of neighborliness is one of the strengths of Hancock County agriculture. He noted that producers like Pritchard are often the first to answer a call for help, whether it is working cattle, sharing equipment or simply offering advice.

Even with strong cattle prices, the biggest challenges in Hancock County remain the gap between what farmers receive for their products and what it costs to produce those goods. Fertilizer, machinery, chemicals, land and fencing have all risen sharply in price since 2020, while wages and income from farm products have struggled to keep pace.

As spring approaches, many producers will face difficult decisions about how much fertilizer they can afford to apply to fields, with prices high for key nutrients. Baker said farmers, including himself, often must juggle limited dollars to stay afloat, and he believes most have become adept managers and budgeters in order to continue operating and avoid sliding backward.

Farmers and landowners who want to learn more about conservation programs, cost-share opportunities or technical assistance can contact the Hancock County Conservation District office in Hawesville. The district is located at 1605 U.S. Highway 60 West, Hawesville, KY 42348-6720, and can be reached at 270-927-9616.

The office works with producers on soil and water conservation practices, funding opportunities and long-range planning for their operations. Staff members, including Gary Baker, can provide guidance on eligibility, application requirements and best practices for improving both conservation outcomes and farm profitability.

**The Hancock Clarion**

**Staff**

Chelsea Boling, Publisher  
Steven D. Wimmer, Sports Editor  
Jennifer Wimmer, News Editor  
Brooke Poole, Account Executive  
Charlie Shadwell, Delivery

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**Contact Us**

[hancockclarion@gmail.com](mailto:hancockclarion@gmail.com)  
P.O. Box 39, Hawesville, KY 42348  
[HancockClarion.com](http://HancockClarion.com)

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