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WINTER 2026

Raised on Dirt & Hard Work

DIGGING DEEP IN
WISCONSIN CLAY WITH
GEORGE'S GRADING &
SON | **PG. 8**

A Partnership With Purpose

FRATCO & THE
CITY OF MOUNT
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Fratco family,

Winter has a way of revealing what's working—and what's not. The ground may be frozen, but the learning doesn't stop. This season reminds us that progress isn't always loud or fast. Sometimes it's quiet, deliberate and built one smart decision at a time.

In this issue, we highlight those who use the off-season to get better. Contractors like George and Tim Karczewski, who run a two-man operation with zero shortcuts. Employees like Janell Odom, who brings science and heart to our Francesville plant. And communities like Mount Pleasant, Iowa, where long-term relationships are making an impact beyond pipe.

We're also preparing for what's ahead. The 2026 GPS datum shift will change how we think about precision, mapping and fieldwork. It's one more reminder that what got us here won't keep us moving forward—and that staying sharp matters.

At Fratco, we're committed to doing things the right way. That means investing in people, in technology and in relationships that last. Drainage isn't just about pipe. It's about land, water and time—and how we manage all three to build something that holds up.

To every customer, contractor, employee and partner who's reading this: thank you. Your work doesn't go unnoticed. Your feedback shapes what we do. Your trust keeps us moving.

Stay safe out there. Stay sharp. And don't forget: even frozen ground has lessons if you're willing to dig for them.



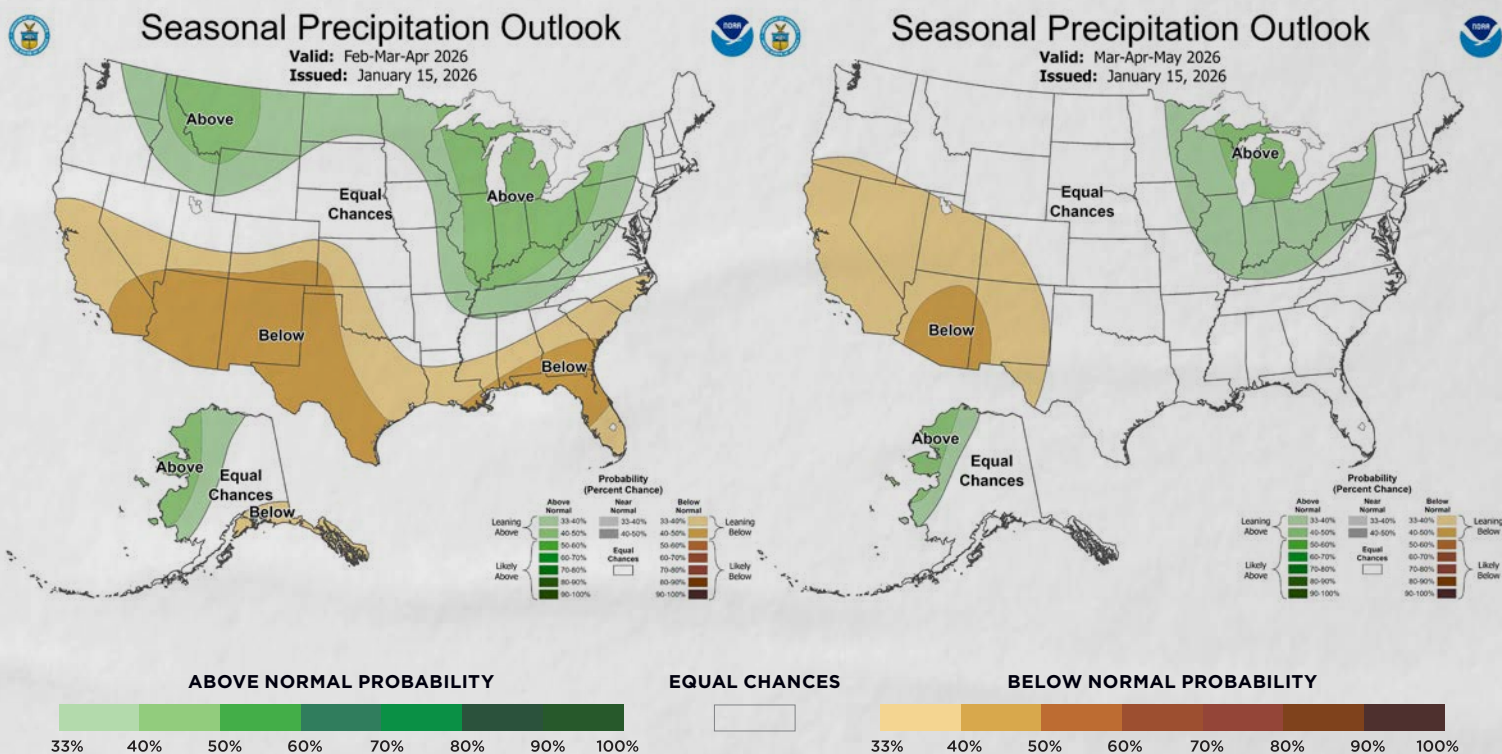
Chris Overmyer
President and CEO

Precipitation Outlook

FROM THE NATIONAL WEATHER SERVICE

FEB-APR

MAR-MAY



The future brings a constantly shifting landscape, and weather predictions are no exception. In an industry where preparation is the cornerstone of success, having a glimpse into what lies ahead can make the difference between a normal day or an unforeseen setback. Staying vigilant with daily and weekly weather updates is essential. Take proactive steps towards a successful future by considering seasonal forecasts for a broader perspective on the coming season.

For the latest weather information, visit the National Weather Service's website.

www.weather.gov



Blueprint for Success

The way to get started is to quit talking and begin doing.

- WALT DISNEY, AMERICAN ENTREPRENEUR, ANIMATOR AND FILM PRODUCER

Do the Work

There's a moment between having an idea and taking action—and in that space, a lot can get lost. We hesitate. We overthink. We wait for the timing to be perfect, for the conditions to be just right. But as Walt Disney reminds us, *the real momentum begins when we stop talking about it and just start.*

Success isn't built on great ideas alone. It's built by people who *do the work*. The ones who show up early, dig the trench, double-check the measurements and follow through on their word. It's the effort in the field, the quiet decisions

behind the scenes and the consistent willingness to get moving—even when the task is tough or the outcome isn't guaranteed.

At Fratco, we see this every day. Across job sites, factories, farms and offices, progress happens when action takes the lead. It doesn't always look flashy. It might not feel groundbreaking. But steady, honest work—done with purpose—is what moves projects forward and builds real, lasting success.

Talking has its place. Planning matters. But at some point, you've got to pick up the shovel. Make the call. Take the first step. *Because the truth is, doing something—anything—is better than standing still.*

So wherever you are right now, stop waiting for the perfect moment. Start where you are, use what you have and take that next small step. You don't have to have it all figured out. You just have to get started. ■

INDUSTRY NEWS

FREE DRAINAGE INSTALLATION

ONLINE COURSE FROM PPI

Fratco is proud to support continued education in our industry, and this free PPI course is a great resource for anyone involved in drainage installation. Whether you're new to the field or sharpening your skills, it's a practical guide grounded in real-world best practices.



Enroll for free today. Scan here to learn more from elearn.plasticpipe.org

STUDY SHOWS RECYCLED PLASTIC

PIPE HOLDS UP UNDER MINNESOTA ROADS

A new field study by the University of Minnesota and MnDOT found that corrugated HDPE pipe made with 60% recycled content performed just as well as virgin material in highway culvert installations—at a lower cost and with clear environmental benefits. At Fratco, we've long believed in the power of recycled materials when engineered right, and this research helps validate what we see every day in the field.



Read the full study to see how recycled pipe is shaping the future of infrastructure.

REGENERATIVE AG PILOT PROGRAM

OFFERS NEW SOIL HEALTH

INCENTIVES

The USDA's new \$700 million Regenerative Pilot Program is streamlining conservation funding and support for farmers focused on soil health, erosion control and long-term productivity. At Fratco, we know healthy land starts with smart water management, and this initiative helps producers adopt practices that align with resilient drainage systems.



Learn how to apply or partner with the USDA here.

BIG GPS CHANGES ARE

COMING IN 2026

The National Geodetic Survey is updating the reference systems behind GPS, which could shift field boundaries, A-B lines and elevation data by several feet for some users. This practical guide breaks down what the datum shift means, who will be affected and how to prepare so your drainage, surveying and precision ag work stays on track.



Check out Iowa State University's article on the upcoming shift for more information.

MEET

JANELL ODOM

FRANCESVILLE PLANT MANAGER



For Janell Odom, joining Fratco was more than a career move—it was a homecoming. A native of the Francesville area and graduate of West Central High School, Janell returned to her roots after building a career in quality and manufacturing leadership. With degrees from Indiana State, Purdue and a master's from Notre Dame, she brings a strong foundation in chemistry, physics and lean manufacturing to her role as Plant Manager.

At Francesville, Janell oversees all aspects of plant operations, from production to process improvement. But no two days look the same. "One day, I might be reviewing overnight data, the next, I'm picking up a hammer to help with maintenance. I love that every day brings something new," she says.

Janell's scientific background gives her a unique perspective on pipe production. She's especially interested in how material chemistry impacts performance. That curiosity recently came into play when she was pulled into an issue and helped break down the problem from both a chemical and process standpoint. "It was a chance to learn and contribute—and I appreciated being trusted so early on."

Having spent much of her career in corporate environments, Janell values Fratco's close-knit culture.



At Fratco, people take the time to teach and share their knowledge. That level of support is something you don't always find.

She also resonates with Fratco's focus on quality and forward-thinking. "Some companies treat quality as a checkbox. Here, it's a requirement. And there's a real commitment to innovation—even with a smaller team, Fratco is constantly moving forward."

Outside of work, Janell and her husband run a small micro-farm, growing vegetables and raising chickens to help provide food for local families. With a six-month-old and a teenager at home, life is busy but fulfilling.

When asked what advice she'd give to someone considering a role at Fratco, Janell doesn't hesitate. "If you like to learn, grow and be part of a team that values doing things the right way, this is the place for you." ■

RAISED ON DIRT & HARD WORK

DIGGING DEEP IN WISCONSIN CLAY WITH GEORGE'S GRADING & SON

A FAMILY LEGACY BUILT ON CLAY, PIPE AND PURPOSE

Nestled in the fertile ground of Union Grove, Wisconsin, George's Grading and Son LLC has earned a reputation for quality through hands-on work and a no-shortcuts approach.

Founded by George Karczewski, a lifelong farmer and excavator, and now run alongside his son Tim, this two-man operation has carved a niche in the drainage world by combining old-school values with cutting-edge technology.

"We've always believed in doing the job right the first time," George says. "If you can't be proud of your name on it, you shouldn't be doing it."

FROM MILKING COWS TO MOVING EARTH

The story of George's Grading begins long before GPS or plows, back in the days of clay tile. George, born in 1954, worked on farms as a boy, hauling clay tiles by hand into trenches dug through thick Wisconsin clay. By 1972,

he'd purchased his first rubber-tire backhoe, a Case 680, and began offering tiling services to neighboring farmers while still milking cows.

"I bought that first backhoe just to do work on our own farm," George recalls. "But one thing led to another. I helped one neighbor, then another and it just grew from there."

In 1997, George left dairy farming behind for good, committing to excavation and drainage full-time. Tim joined him not long after, and the two have been working side by side ever since.

A TWO-MAN CREW WITH BIG CAPABILITIES

George and Tim are a rare breed in the industry, running large-scale jobs with only two people. It's a model that works for them, largely because of their philosophy of perfection and their investment in technology.



George (left) and
Tim (right), 2017



"We decided early on we didn't want to hire anyone," Tim says. "It's too hard to find people who care as much as we do. So instead, we invested in equipment that would let two people do the work of six."

Everything they run, from their plows to their tractors, is GPS-integrated. And Tim, who studied civil engineering, builds and manages their site plans and mapping software in-house.

"Our excavator can stop within a half-inch of a tile main," Tim explains. "That means one guy can make connections while the other is backfilling. No shoveling, no probing. Just precision."

Even their farming operation, about 300 acres of cash crops, is treated as a "vacation" from the busyness of drainage. "It's our peace of mind," George says. "The kids ride along, it's quiet and it's just you and the land."

A RELATIONSHIP ROOTED IN TRUST

A cornerstone of the business is its long-standing relationship with Fratco. After years of working with another supplier, George and Tim made the switch and haven't looked back.

"Alan [Kruska, their Fratco rep] has been nothing short of tremendous," George says. "Fratco's been good to us, but to be honest, when we think of Fratco, we just think of Alan. That's how personal the relationship is."

For Tim, Fratco's flexibility, patience and honesty have made them an indispensable partner. "With just the two of us, sometimes billing or ordering gets delayed, but Alan has always understood that. Never pressured us. Never made us feel like just a number."

That trust goes beyond logistics. It's about accountability. When they had concerns about perforation on FlexCorr in hard clay, Alan listened and acted. "We weren't looking for a handout," Tim says. "Just a partner that stands behind their product and is willing to improve. And Fratco did. That means a lot."

Whether it's finding pipe last minute, tracking down a specific size or returning a pallet that doesn't meet their exact standards, Fratco has always shown up. "I've never once had to call someone else to find pipe," Tim says. "Alan always finds a way. He's part of our team, and Fratco has backed him every step."

TEACHING THE NEXT GENERATION

Between George and Tim, there's more than just a company, but a legacy. Tim and his wife, Becca, have six children: Magnolia (Maggie), who is 12; George, who is 10; August (Augie), who is 8; Sonny, who is 6; Harvest (Harvie), who is 4; and Ford, who was just born in October of 2025. While they're not pressured to join the business, the door is always open.

"If they don't love it, they won't be good at it," Tim says. "But if they do, we'll teach them everything we know."

CONTINUE READING >>>

Magnolia, or Maggie for short, has already shown an early fascination with equipment. George remembers her spotting a tractor from a window as a toddler, more excited about machinery than dolls. “She used to just stare at equipment,” he says, laughing.

And while the youngest, Ford, is still in diapers, Tim and his wife, Becca, see potential in all of them. “There’s a place for everyone if they want it,” Tim says. “The boys might be in the field. The girls might handle the office. Either way, they’ll learn what it means to take pride in your work.”

George and Tim’s wives, Debbie and Becca, are integral to the business. From drone photography and calendar creation to simply supporting the long hours, their belief in the work has been foundational.

“Without them, we wouldn’t be where we are. Period,” George says. “They’ve backed every decision we’ve made, trusted us through every challenge and helped us build something that lasts.”

BUILT TO LAST

The Karczewskis are proud of what they’ve built. Not the equipment or the projects, but the reputation. They operate within a 20-mile radius, and their local farmers won’t call anyone else. One client even waited two years for them to take on his project.

“We’re perfectionists,” George says. “We don’t cut corners. That’s why people trust us.”

And despite the long days, the hard clay and the ever-changing economic landscape, both men wouldn’t trade it for anything.

“This is what we love,” George says. “If you’re not doing something you enjoy, life gets boring. This keeps us going. And it’s a blessing to be able to do it with your son.”

As George looks ahead, he knows the work won’t last forever—but the lessons will. “We’re not just laying pipe,” he says. “We’re building a way of life. And if the kids want it one day, it’ll be here waiting.” ■



Maggie posing with heavy equipment, 2023



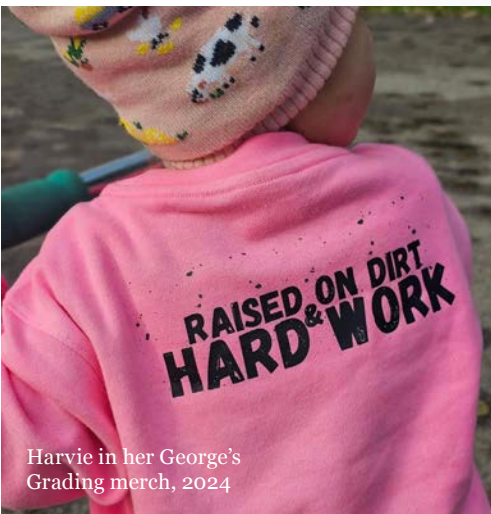
Augie and Sonny helping Dad and Grandpa, 2021



Hitching a ride with Grandpa George, 2022



Harvie hanging out with Grandpa George, 2024



Harvie in her George's Grading merch, 2024



Harvie getting a snuggle with Dad, 2023



The crew from the left: Sonny, Augie, George, Harvie and Maggie, 2024

WORK ANNIVERSARIES

Scott Elston	37 years	Shawn Klemm	5 years	Pedro Cedillo	2 years
Chad Watts	32 years	Cody Witten	5 years	Michael Franco	2 years
Timothy Ballard	29 years	Oscar Domingo Montes Franco	5 years	Myrna Garcia	2 years
David Diaz	15 years	Sergio Medina	4 years	Herson Giron Barrera	2 years
Terry Sifrit	14 years	Nicholas Symonds	4 years	Jose Jasso	2 years
John Schultz	14 years	David De Leon	3 years	Carlos Lopes	2 years
Kenneth Cocherell	12 years	James Schwartz	3 years	Juan Luis	2 years
Paul Liggett	9 years	Amaira Ruiz	3 years	Ryan Quezada	2 years
Bernard Pollmeier	9 years	Thomas Feathers	2 years	Benjamin Rodriquez	2 years
Mark Richardson	8 years	Juan Miranda	2 years	Jorge Cabrera	1 year
Felicia Wendt	8 years	John Penton	2 years	Maria Gutierrez Exposito	1 year
Isaac Harmon	6 years	Joel Lopez Jiron	2 years	Ivan Llibre	1 year
Noah Johnston	6 years	Matthew Bashore	2 years	Rubin Cain	1 year
Brooks Schoon	6 years				

WELCOMING NEW HIRES

Erik Abel	Christian Gonzalez	Janell Odom
Jordi Arvizo Perez	Cristian Gonzalez	Collin Penton



MOUNT
PLEASANT

A PARTNERSHIP WITH PURPOSE

FRATCO & THE CITY OF
MOUNT PLEASANT

In the southeastern corner of Iowa, Mount Pleasant is a community built on hard work, shared values and steady growth. For Fratco, operating a plant in this city has meant becoming part of a place where industry, agriculture and community support all intersect. The partnership between Fratco and Mount Pleasant continues to thrive through mutual respect, local investment and strong relationships.

A MAYOR WITH DEEP ROOTS

Mayor Steve Brimhall has led the city for nearly 16 years and brings decades of experience to the role. A lifelong Iowan, Brimhall's story mirrors the values of Mount Pleasant itself. Raised on a farm, he was encouraged to pursue education and eventually earned a business degree before being drafted into the military and serving in Vietnam. After returning from service, he earned a master's degree in secondary education, taught business for a year and then transitioned into banking, where he spent 37 years and served as market president for U.S. Bank.

His path to local government began with a city council appointment following a tragic event involving the town's previous mayor. He served on the council for 19 years before becoming mayor, the role he holds today.

"I've enjoyed it," he said. "There are tough days, but it's worth it to see the progress."

HOW FRATCO FOUND ITS PLACE IN MOUNT PLEASANT

Fratco's arrival in Mount Pleasant began with the sale of a local manufacturing building once used for Goodyear-related operations. The facility had been built by a local entrepreneur, also a friend and former teacher of Mayor Brimhall, who eventually sold it to Fratco after his own business closed. That connection helped pave the way for Fratco's presence in the city, turning a former risk into a long-term investment in the local economy.



Mayor Steve Brimhall



Mayor Brimhall and Stacie Baccam, among others, during Manufacturing Week in 2024

The mayor also has a unique connection to Fratco's Stacie Baccam. Years ago, he hired her to work at the bank. Today, she is the operations manager for the Mount Pleasant location and is involved in the local community, currently serving on the Chamber of Commerce board and set to take over as president in 2026.

"She's sharp," Brimhall said. "It's no surprise she's running things out there. I knew she wouldn't be at the bank long with that kind of talent."

CONTINUE READING >>>



AN EMPLOYER THAT MAKES AN IMPACT

Fratco's Mount Pleasant location currently employs about 30 full-time workers, many from the area's minority population. The company contributes approximately \$40,000 annually in property taxes, one-third of which supports the city directly. According to the mayor, the plant provides more than jobs. It helps keep Mount Pleasant's economy moving through consumer activity and local tax revenue that support streets, sewers and essential infrastructure projects.

From the mayor's perspective, Fratco's products also have a direct impact on the community.

"We use plastic pipe all the time in road construction," he said. "It's an important product. It helps our roads last longer by getting water away from the concrete. People don't think about it because it's underground, but it's working."

The mayor also understands the value of drainage pipe from personal experience. His family farms a few hundred acres of Iowa farmland, most of which was drained with clay tile, long before plastic became the industry standard. Though his property uses older material, he recognizes the importance of modern plastic pipe for both farms and city infrastructure.

A TOWN THAT WORKS

The Mount Pleasant plant opened in September 2011, and Brimhall says their impact is visible every day.

"Just look at the trucks," he said. "You can see the pipe heading out of town on a regular basis. That's product moving to other communities. It's a sign that things are working."

Mount Pleasant is home to around 9,000 residents, with a daytime population that grows thanks to its strong industrial base. In addition to Fratco, the city is supported by employers such as Walmart

Distribution, Continental ConTech, Beck's Hybrids, Sigma, Mid-Am and Lamont Molding, among others. The town also boasts a regional hospital and a range of small businesses, particularly in the historic downtown square.

Although small retail is challenged by online competition, the community still supports antique shops, restaurants, cafes and local services. The city is also actively encouraging growth, both through new developments and support of existing businesses.

"Our philosophy is, if you don't grow, you die," said Brimhall. "We want new business, and we do everything we can to support the ones already here."

A PARTNERSHIP BUILT TO LAST

Mount Pleasant's location on the Avenue of the Saints, a four-lane corridor connecting Minneapolis and St. Louis, makes it an accessible and attractive place for both industry and families. It offers small-town living with connections to larger markets and a community that values relationships.

The relationship between Fratco and Mount Pleasant is defined not just by business, but by trust. It is built on shared history, a common vision for the future and real connections between people. In a small town, those relationships matter.

"We know each other here," said Brimhall. "That's what makes it work."

Fratco is proud to be part of a community like Mount Pleasant, where progress is earned, neighbors look out for one another and partnerships make the community flourish. ■



**5 MILLION FEET OF
PROVEN PERFORMANCE.**

FLEX CORR



FROZEN GROUND, MOVING GOALS

WHAT WINTER TEACHES
US ABOUT SOIL



At a glance, winter seems like a time when the land rests. Fields sit idle, machines are parked and the ground freezes over. But beneath the surface, winter is anything but still. Frost lines shift. Water finds new paths. Soils lock up, release or reshape in ways that aren't obvious from above. If you're in the drainage world, this is a season worth paying attention to—because winter has a way of exposing what's working, and what's not.

THE LAND THAT NEVER SLEEPS

Every job begins and ends with the land. And even when you're not installing pipe, the land is still talking. Contractors who understand this use winter as a time to study field conditions, scout trouble spots and plan ahead. That's because what soil does during freezing and thawing has direct consequences for spring installs, long-term system performance and land productivity.

According to the University of Minnesota Extension, frost affects soil structure, moisture movement and compaction, all factors that influence how well a drainage system performs once installed. Even without digging a trench, winter offers valuable insight into how land behaves under stress.

Whether you're walking frozen fields, managing snowmelt or prepping for next season's installs, understanding how different soils react in winter gives you a real edge.

KNOW YOUR SOIL, KNOW YOUR RISK

Different soils respond to winter in different ways, and not all of them play nice with pipe.

CLAY SOILS retain moisture and freeze solid, making them highly susceptible to frost heave and poor drainage, especially in shallow systems. The USDA's Soil Survey Manual notes that clay's fine particles expand significantly when frozen, creating stress around pipe.

SANDY SOILS offer better drainage during warmer months but can quickly erode or lose structure during repeated freeze-thaw cycles. North Dakota State University Extension research shows that these soils are particularly vulnerable to washouts during thaws because their loose structure doesn't hold shape under stress.

CONTINUE READING ►►►

LOAM SOILS, a contractor’s gold standard, handle winter better thanks to their balanced composition. But even loam needs smart design and depth consideration to avoid cold-season failures.

SILTY SOILS are the wild cards. They shift, swell and compact easily—creating pressure points around pipe and increasing the likelihood of misalignment or settlement. The USDA notes that silt-heavy soils often exaggerate frost-related movement due to their water-holding capacity.

Soil that’s perfectly stable in July can be an entirely different material in January. And it’s not all about freeze depth, but how the soil holds or releases water, how tightly it compacts and what kind of stress it puts on your system.

FROST LINES AND SYSTEM DEPTH

Frost hits the surface and moves. The depth of frost penetration varies with soil type, moisture content and air temperature. In colder climates, it can reach three to four feet or more. According to the University of Minnesota Extension, frost goes deeper in dry, coarse-textured soils and shallower in moist or insulated soils.

This matters for one simple reason: shallow pipe placed without proper bedding or compaction is likely to shift, separate or crack. Poorly compacted backfill becomes brittle when frozen and no longer supports the pipe evenly. The Plastic Pipe Institute (PPI) emphasizes that proper installation depth, below local frost lines, is critical to preventing cold-weather system failures. And while a pipe might function fine during the warmer months, winter will reveal what was missed during installation.

SNOWMELT IS JUST WATER ON DELAY

That blanket of snow covering your field is more than a visual change. It’s stored water. And when it thaws, it often moves faster than your system, or your soil, can handle.

The U.S. Geological Survey (USGS) explains that when soils are frozen, infiltration slows or stops entirely. Instead of soaking in, meltwater becomes surface runoff. This can lead to pooling in low-lying areas, slope erosion and sudden pressure on tile systems, especially in fields with poor surface drainage or compacted soils.

From a soil perspective, snowmelt is a seasonal stress test. If the soil is poorly structured or compacted, it won’t absorb water effectively, even after the thaw. And if drainage systems aren’t tied into the natural movement of water through the soil profile, that water will find its own path—often one that causes damage.

The EPA notes that this freeze-then-flood scenario is a common cause of winter and early spring drainage failures. If you’re seeing standing water, ice buildup or saturated zones that should be dry, the problem may not be your pipe, but your soil’s inability to recover from frost.

NOW’S THE TIME TO ASK:

- Are your outlets exposed and clear?
- Is snowmelt running off or soaking in?
- Are there signs of erosion, ponding or surface instability?

These are all surface problems, and also signals about how your soil is functioning under pressure.

USE THE OFF-SEASON TO GET SMARTER

Good contractors use winter to learn by walking fields, digging test holes, checking frost depth, checking outlets and just monitoring how the land “feels” underfoot. They can even map problem areas with drones or GPS to

revisit in the spring. This is the kind of quiet work that doesn’t show up in a quote—but shows up in the results.

If you want to start simple, try this on your next winter walkthrough:

WINTER WALK CHECKLIST:

- Is there any standing water in areas that should be dry?
- Are outlets frozen, buried or blocked?
- Are tile lines draining during a thaw?
- Are there igns of surface erosion or runoff?
- Are previous installation areas stable and level?

It’s not glamorous, but it’s effective. The more you pay attention now, the fewer surprises you’ll face later.

THE GROUND MAY BE FROZEN, BUT THE LESSONS ARE ACTIVE

At Fratco, we believe drainage isn’t just about pipe. It’s about land, water and time. Winter has a way of teaching the hard truths—the stuff you can’t always see in the moment but feel when things go wrong later. That’s why we encourage our partners to look closer in the off-season. Not because the work is urgent, but because the insight is.

Frost is just the land showing you where it’s vulnerable. Pay attention. The land doesn’t rest. And neither should your understanding of it. ■



UPDATE

FORT PAYNE FACILITY
TAKING SHAPE AS FRATCO’S
FIRST SOUTHEAST PLANT

FORT PAYNE, AL — JANUARY 2026

Just three months after breaking ground, Fratco’s new production facility in Fort Payne is quickly coming to life. The 42,000-square-foot plant—Fratco’s first in the Southeast—is moving steadily toward operational readiness, with construction crews making strong progress on both structural and infrastructure components.

The walls are up, roofing is well underway and an electrician has installed temporary lighting to support interior work. All subsurface drainage systems have been completed, clearing the way for the next phase of mechanical and utility integration.

“This isn’t just another facility—it’s a new chapter for Fratco,” said Bill Champion, Chief Operating Officer. “We’re building something from the ground up, tailored to the needs of the Southeast market and

the high standards our customers expect. Every part of this plant is being designed with efficiency, flow and growth in mind.”

Once operational, the Fort Payne facility will produce both single- and double-wall corrugated pipe, ranging from 3 to 18 inches in diameter, with the infrastructure in place to expand production up to 48 inches in future phases. The site layout includes room for warehousing, shipping, office space and future expansion—all while maintaining a compact and optimized footprint.

The project reflects a significant investment in local talent, with Fratco set to create approximately 60 new jobs across manufacturing, logistics and administration. Hiring will ramp up in the coming months, with a focus on building a strong, long-term team rooted in the Fort Payne community.

Local officials and community partners have remained closely engaged throughout the process. From the city and county to the Alabama Department of Commerce and AIDT, the collaboration continues to be a driving force behind the project’s momentum.

“We said this was the right place, and it’s proven true every step of the way,” Champion added. “The people here have been all-in since day one. That kind of partnership is rare—and we’re grateful for it.”

As the walls go up and the systems come online, one thing is clear: Fratco’s commitment to quality, innovation and community is already taking root in Alabama clay.

More updates to come as the plant nears production. ■

STAYING ON TRACK

THE RISE OF GPS IN DRAINAGE INSTALLATION

It wasn't that long ago that installing drainage pipe meant reading topography by eye, relying on instinct and hoping your laser level held steady in the wind. However, over the last two decades, GPS has revolutionized how pipes are installed in the field, influencing everything from trench depth and slope accuracy to project documentation and efficiency. What started as a new trick in precision agriculture has become a standard tool of the trade across the drainage industry. Now, a new update to GPS infrastructure is on the horizon, and it's worth knowing how it might affect your work.

FROM CONCEPT TO CORNERSTONE

In the early 2000s, contractors and farmers began experimenting with GPS-guided equipment to improve the layout and installation of drainage pipe systems. While initial systems were clunky and costly, the benefits were obvious: more precise grades, repeatable line spacing and faster installs with fewer corrections. As equipment manufacturers embraced GPS integration, systems became smarter, easier to use and more accurate, especially with the rollout of RTK (Real-Time Kinematic) correction signals, which dial accuracy down to the sub-inch level.

Fratco partners were among the early adopters. As precision demands increased, our pipe product lines rose to meet the challenge. These pipes are engineered with the consistency, durability and joint performance to match the exacting standards GPS-controlled systems make possible.

Today, GPS-based pipe installation isn't just a best practice. It's the standard. Whether you're a contractor running miles of SingleCorr under crop fields or laying ProCorr for commercial water management, chances are good you're depending on satellite data to do it.

WHAT'S COMING IN 2026 AND WHY IT MATTERS

While GPS technology has grown increasingly seamless, a behind-the-scenes shift is coming that contractors should be aware of.

In 2026, the National Spatial Reference System (NSRS), the framework behind GPS positioning in North America, is getting a major update. Two foundational systems, NAD 83 and NAVD 88, are being replaced. According to Iowa State University Extension's recent memo, the current datums are slightly off from Earth's actual center, by up to 2.2 meters horizontally and one meter vertically in some places.

The update will bring higher accuracy, but it also means your existing A-B lines, field boundaries and drainage pipe maps may no longer line up exactly. That could be a problem for installations relying on older RTK base stations or public correction networks.

If you use WAAS or commercial systems like Trimble, Ag Leader or John Deere RTK, you might not notice a big change, as those services will likely handle the shift automatically. However, if your setup utilizes local RTK stations or state-run correction networks, some recalibration or even resurveying may be necessary to keep your installations aligned and compliant.

WHAT YOU CAN DO

1 | CHECK WITH YOUR GPS PROVIDER

Ask how they're handling the NSRS update and what actions—if any—you'll need to take.

2 | RESURVEY CRITICAL FIELDS OR PROJECTS

Especially those with legacy pipelines or long-term management plans.

3 | STAY INFORMED

The team at ISU Extension has provided a helpful guide tailored to ag applications. It's worth a read for anyone managing their own drainage layout. ■



Check out Iowa State University's article with more information, also included on our Industry News page!

PARTNER SPOTLIGHT

SCHLATTER'S INC.

For contractors looking for expert guidance and cutting-edge GPS solutions, Schlatter's Inc. is a name you can trust. As featured in the *Summer 2025* issue of *Tried & True*, Schlatter's has been helping contractors navigate GPS software, RTK systems and precision installation tools for years. They not only sell the equipment but offer the know-how to keep your operation accurate and future-ready, especially as the 2026 changes roll in.

At Fratco, we believe staying ahead of the curve isn't just about the pipe, but the tools and knowledge to use it well. Whether you're navigating new tech or laying line by instinct, we're here to make sure the job holds up—today, tomorrow and even after the satellites shift.



Read more about Schlatter's Inc. in their feature article by scanning here!



TWO-STAGE DITCHES

AN INNOVATIVE APPROACH TO WATER MANAGEMENT

WHAT ARE THEY?

Two-stage ditches transform traditional drainage ditches by incorporating a widened channel and a floodplain bench. This design not only accommodates more water but also uses vegetation on the floodplain bench to enhance nutrient removal from the water, contributing to cleaner waterways.

FEATURES

- 1 Widened Design**
The channel is expanded to include a vegetated floodplain bench alongside the conventional ditch, significantly increasing its width—typically to about three times that of a standard ditch.
- 2 Floodplain Storage**
This bench provides additional space for water during high-flow events, effectively storing floodwater and reducing overflow.
- 3 Nutrient Processing**
The vegetation on the floodplain bench plays a crucial role in filtering water and encouraging denitrification, which removes nitrates from the water.

IMPACT AND COST

Environmental Benefits: USDA-ARS research shows two-stage ditches achieve 30 percent higher denitrification rates than natural channels, enhancing nutrient removal.

Flood Management: The extra width allows for up to a 200-year flood within ditch banks, minimizing flood risk.

Economic Efficiency: Installation costs range from \$5 to \$50 per linear foot, making it a scalable, sustainable drainage solution for communities and land managers.

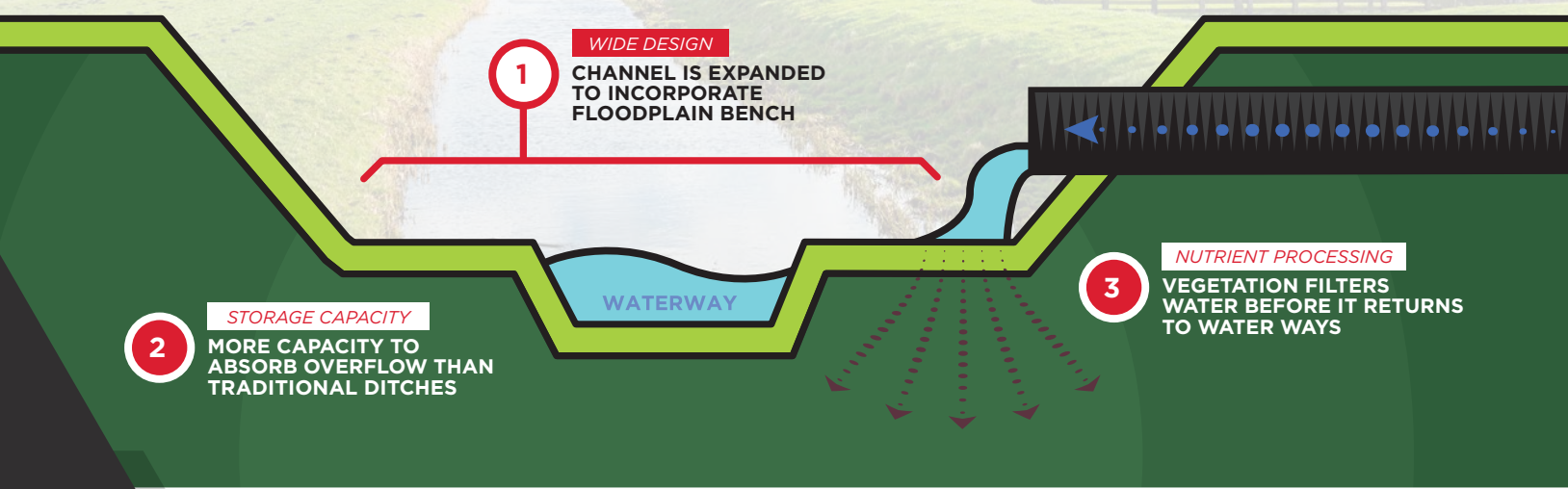
IMPLEMENTATION

Location Considerations: Two-stage ditches are designed to maximize efficiency and preserve agricultural land by utilizing space effectively, making them ideal for areas alongside streams with existing filter strips.

Design Criteria: The top width of a two-stage ditch is generally three times as wide as a conventional drainage ditch, providing ample room for water management and floodplain reconnection.

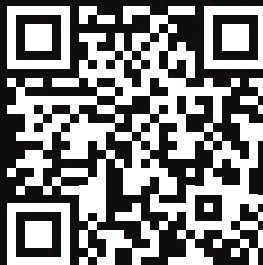
Two-stage ditches represent a strategic advancement in drainage management, balancing the need for effective water conveyance with environmental stewardship and flood risk mitigation.

SOURCES: AGRICULTURAL DRAINAGE MANAGEMENT COALITION (ADMC) & OHIO STATE EXTENSION



WANT MORE?

Get all **six** downloadable infographics that cover some of today's most effective conservation practices, from engineered infrastructure to nature-based practices.



Scan the code or visit fratco.com/conservation-guides

FIELD JOURNAL

TRIED & TRUE TRICKS OF THE TRADE

KEEP MOVING:

STAYING LIMBER IN COLD WEATHER

Winter slows everything down—except the work. Cold mornings, stiff joints, layers that limit movement and icy surfaces all work against you. But one of the best ways to stay sharp, safe and effective in the cold is simple: keep moving.

COLD LOCKS YOU UP

When your body tightens up, so does your reaction time. Muscles don't respond the same when they're cold, which means slower movement, reduced grip strength and a higher chance of injury. You don't have to do jumping jacks in the snow. Just stay active and aware.

BUILD MOVEMENTS INTO THE ROUTINE

Take a minute before the real work starts. Roll your shoulders. Loosen up your arms and legs. Do a few light stretches. Nothing fancy—just enough to get blood flowing. Then keep moving throughout the day. Standing still in the cold is the fastest way to lose energy and focus.

KNOW WHEN TO STAY WARM

Breaks aren't just for lunch. When the wind picks up or the temp drops below freezing, find a way to warm up, even briefly. Get in the truck for five minutes, sip something hot and move around. It resets your body and keeps the day from grinding you down.

DRESS TO MOVE

Too many layers can make you stiff. Not enough and you'll burn out trying to stay warm. The right balance—thin, flexible layers that trap heat without bulk—makes movement easier and helps your body stay loose. Warm muscles work better. Period.

Working in winter means adapting. Keep your body loose, your energy steady and your movements deliberate. Cold might be a constant—but stiffness doesn't have to be.

Winter doesn't stop the work — it just changes how you prepare for it.

RIDE OUT THE SLOW SEASON:

MAKING THE MOST OF WINTER DOWNTIME

For many in the field, winter means the pace slows or stops altogether. But that doesn't mean the work is over. The best crews and contractors use this time to reset, rebuild and refocus.

FIX WHAT YOU'VE BEEN IGNORING

All season long, there's a list of things that get pushed aside—dull blades, worn-out gloves, busted tail lights. Winter is the time to catch up. Maintaining gear, organizing tools and fixing what's broken now sets you up for a smoother start when things pick back up.

SHARPEN YOUR SKILLS

Downtime is a chance to get better. Take a training course, pick up a new certification or shadow someone who knows a part of the job you don't. Winter is the perfect time to build confidence and expand your skill set without the pressure of a full workload.

TAKE STOCK

Inventory isn't glamorous, but it's necessary. Knowing what you've got, and what you're missing, prevents wasted time come spring. Use the slow season to reorganize, clean out the clutter and prep for the rush.

REST WITHOUT RUSTING

Breaks are good. Rest is needed, but stay engaged. Read up on the industry, walk job sites when possible and check in with your crew. Keep your head in the game, even if your boots aren't in the mud every day.

The slow season isn't a setback, but a tool. Use it well, and you won't just be ready when spring comes. You'll be ahead.



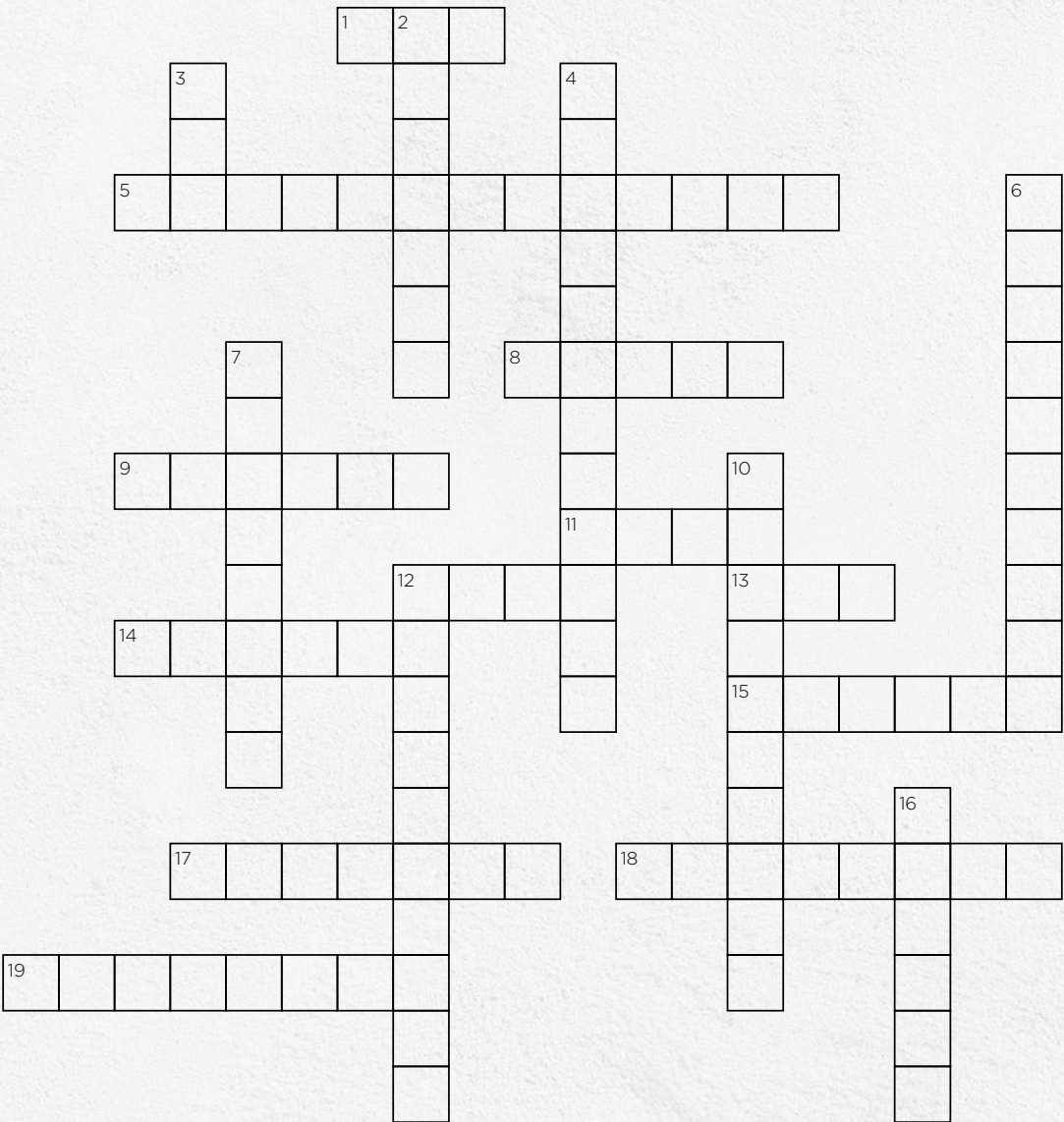
Howdy, Fratco Family!

WIN THIS LIMITED EDITION *TRIED & TRUE* CAP



Complete the crossword, snap a picture of it and email it to **tried-true@fratco.com** by March 31st. We will pick FIVE lucky winners to receive a *Tried & True* hat! Fill out the information below and include it in your photo!

Name: _____
Street Address: _____
City: _____ State: _____ Zip: _____
Email: _____



CROSSWORD CLUES

DOWN

- 2. Term used to describe Fratco’s partnership with Mount Pleasant
- 3. Number of people running George’s Grading & Son
- 4. Indiana location of Fratco’s plant managed by Janell Odom
- 6. Wisconsin town where George’s Grading & Son is based
- 7. Fratco pipe product mentioned in relation to hard clay soil concerns
- 10. Upcoming 2026 GPS-related infrastructure update
- 12. Year George Karczewski bought his first backhoe
- 16. Fratco employee with a background in chemistry and physics

ACROSS

- 1. Technology that revolutionized drainage installation
- 5. City where Fratco opened a plant in 2011
- 8. Frost-related risk that causes shallow pipes to shift
- 9. According to the article, “the land never ____”
- 11. State where Fratco’s Mount Pleasant plant is located
- 12. Chief natural resource concern addressed by USDA’s regenerative program
- 13. Son of George Karczewski and co-owner of George’s Grading & Son
- 14. Chris Overmyer’s term for Fratco’s greatest asset
- 15. Tim Karczewski’s daughter who loves tractors
- 17. Material discussed for its use in recycled drainage pipe
- 18. Last name of Mount Pleasant’s long-serving mayor
- 19. Seasonal stress test that reveals soil drainage issues



INSTRUCTIONS: Cut along the dotted line for 5x7 frames. Cut out the image for 4x6 frames.



*“Success is the sum of
small efforts, repeated
day in and day out.”*

- ROBERT COLLIER

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