

# Butter sculptor Sarah Pratt's journey from apprentice to master

By BEN CROFT  
FarmWeek

Sarah Pratt might lack the skills to handle live cattle, but she's proven herself a master when it comes to creating a life-size cow made from butter.

The sculptor of the butter cow annually displayed at the Illinois State Fair needs just 500 pounds of butter, five days and 10 magical fingers to get the job done.

She learned most of her sculpting skills from her mentor, Norma "Duffy" Lyon, whose butter sculptures were among the must-sees at the Illinois and Iowa state fairs from the 1960s until her retirement in 2006. She even made appearances on "Today," "The Tonight Show" and "Late Night with David Letterman."

A few years before Lyon's passing, Pratt took over as the "Butter Cow Lady" and found a new passion in molding hundreds of pounds of recycled, unsalted butter into works of art.

She noted several of the small, intricate details Lyon would incorporate into her pieces that she now incorporates into her own butter cow sculptures, like the veining on the utters or specifically one vein on the face that would stick out a little bit more than the others.

"She was always very specific about the anatomy of a dairy cow. I think that if they weren't present on a sculpture, people would still walk by and go, 'Oh, that's a dairy cow,'" Pratt said. "But those are the things she taught me."

Proud to carry on Lyon's legacy, Pratt sculpts at state

fairs across the Midwest, including Illinois and Iowa, and has done so for several years. Using the same butter, year after year, one might wonder if a particular stench begins to develop. Yes, indeed it does, but Pratt doesn't mind. She prefers the older butter, as it is easier to mold into those fine details that Lyon taught her to include. This will be the seventh year using the same recycled butter.

Her work is also displayed at events across the nation. Pratt recently returned from the Reno Rodeo in Nevada, where she sculpted a butter cow at the request of rodeo President Greg "Lightning" Williams. Williams, an Illinois native, grew up going to the state fair and loving the butter cow, according to Pratt. When given the opportunity to feature something special at the rodeo, he requested her talents.

A native of Iowa, Pratt "always wanted to be a farm girl." While her parents were raised on farms, she grew up in town. But the distance didn't stop her interest in agriculture. She spent a significant amount of time assisting her cousins on their farm.

"I always had that passion to be connected to the land, the animals, the production of the food we eat," she said.

When she was 14 years old, she excitedly took the opportunity to help take care of a friend's show cattle at the Iowa State Fair. But Pratt quickly learned that passion doesn't always translate to skill.

"It was my ineptness in being able to actually do that



THE PRATT FAMILY (from left), Hannah, Dean, Sarah, Andy and Grace, pose with a past state fair butter cow sculpture. (Photo courtesy of Sarah Pratt)

(take care of the cattle) that got me connected with Norma "Duffy" Lyon," Pratt said.

When Pratt's practical cattle caretaking skills didn't work out with Lyon's niece, the family sent her to watch Lyon prepare the butter cow. And so Pratt's training under Lyon began.

After graduating from the University of Northern Iowa in 1999 with a degree in elementary education, Pratt took

her first job teaching middle school special education in Kansas, where she stayed for two years before returning to Iowa.

In education and butter sculpting alike, Pratt sees opportunities for creativity and thoughtful problem solving. She passionately uses her teaching background to create new opportunities to educate people young and old about the art of sculpting.

Buttery fingers run in the family. Pratt's husband, Andy, and daughter, Grace, will assist in the creation of the 2023 butter cow. Grace, and her twin, Hannah, attend the University of Northern Iowa just as their mother did. They both study art in different forms. Pratt marvels at her daughters' artistic abilities and says the two of them hope to take over the butter cow sculpting someday, "in the midst of all their other

passions that they're pursuing as well."

In addition to the cow, supplementary sculptures will be created to complement some of the educational displays at the fair. The Illinois State Fair will run from Aug. 10-20.

This story was distributed through a cooperative project between Illinois Farm Bureau and the Illinois Press Association. For more food and farming news, visit FarmWeekNow.com.

## Gov. Pritzker vetoes bill that would have allowed new nuclear construction

### The bill earned more votes than the three-fifths majority needed to override

By ANDREW ADAMS  
Capitol News Illinois  
aadams@capitolnewsillinois.com

Gov. JB Pritzker on Friday vetoed a bill that would have lifted a 1980s moratorium on the construction of new nuclear reactors.

The passed in May with three-fifths majorities in both legislative chambers, meaning that if all of the members that voted for it also support an override of the governor's veto, it still could become law. Its Senate sponsor, state Sen. Sue Rezin, R-Morris, said she has already filed paperwork to bring the bill up in the legislature's fall veto session scheduled for late October and early November.

The governor said in a message to lawmakers explaining his veto that he did it "at the request of the leadership team of the Speaker of the House and advocates."

While Pritzker said he saw "real potential" in small modular reactors, or SMRs – a type of "advanced" nuclear reactor that proponents tout as a path forward for the industry – he also said he doesn't think the legislation goes far enough in regulating the nascent technology.

"This bill provides no regulatory protections for the health and safety of Illinois residents who would live and work around these new reactors," Pritzker wrote. "My hope is that future legislation in Illinois regarding SMRs would address this regulation gap."

The governor also cited an "overly broad definition of advanced reactor" in the bill that he said could "open the door to proliferation" of large-scale nuclear power plants, like the reactors at the state's six existing generating stations.

Pritzker said these traditional reactors are "so costly to build that they will cause exorbitant ratepayer-funded bailouts."



The bill would have allowed for the construction of reactors that meet the federal government's definition of "advanced reactor," which require that fission reactors have "significant improvements" to things such as safety features and waste yields.

Rezin, in a phone interview with Capitol News Illinois, said Pritzker's characterization of the bill allowing construction of traditional reactors is "just not true."

"This is a pattern of a governor that is bending to special interests," Rezin said.

Rezin also noted the limitation in the bill to only apply to advanced reactors came out of bipartisan negotiations.

"Advanced nuclear reactors would help supplement the flaws that wind and solar unfortunately have by providing reliable power 24/7, because wind and solar alone don't have the infrastructure or technology to provide our state with the reliable, affordable and efficient energy it needs," Rezin said in a news release.

Rezin's claims about advanced nuclear reactors are contentious, particularly among some environmental advocates that have been leading voices in the push for carbon-free energy in Illinois.

On Tuesday, a pair of influ-

ential advocacy groups sent a letter to Pritzker asking him to veto the bill. The Sierra Club Illinois Chapter and the Illinois Environmental Council's joint letter outlined several concerns, including waste disposal, costs and a lack of up-to-date regulation.

"Nuclear power comes with significant safety risks and results in highly hazardous wastes that threaten our drinking water, with no safe, permanent waste solution in sight," IEC Executive Director Jen Walling said in a Friday news release. "Rather than abandon all safeguards, Gov. Pritzker recognized that such substantial risks merit the highest protective guardrails our state can offer."

Waste was the central concern of the original moratorium, which will end when the head of the state's Environmental Protection Agency finds the federal government has "identified and approved" a method for the disposal of high-level nuclear waste, a responsibility the federal government has failed to successfully act on.

Currently, nuclear waste is stored on-site at the plant that produced it. But in the 1970s and 80s, a facility outside of Morris, Illinois, became home to waste from California, Minnesota, Nebraska and Connecticut, making Grundy County the nation's only de facto high-level storage site.

Rezin defended her propos-

al on the subject of waste as well, pointing out in an interview that companies building nuclear reactors must submit plans for waste management when they apply for permits.

"This is a very heavily regulated industry by the federal government," Rezin said.

Beyond waste, environmental advocates also say that focusing on nuclear power diverts attention and resources away from the development of wind, solar and battery storage technology.

"SB76 would have opened the door to increased risk, negative environmental impacts, and higher costs for consumers while jeopardizing our progress toward Illinois' clean energy future," Sierra Club Illinois Director Jack Darin said in a Friday news release.

The nuclear moratorium does not affect research reactors, like the one under development at the University of

Illinois Urbana-Champaign.

In addition to this bill, the governor on Friday also vetoed a measure that would have required the state to implement a contract to provide religious dietary options in schools, which Pritzker rejected because food service contracts are a district-level responsibility. Pritzker also used his amendatory veto powers to modify two bills that have to do with property taxes and government procurement.

Capitol News Illinois is a nonprofit, nonpartisan news service covering state government. It is distributed to hundreds of print and broadcast outlets statewide. It is funded primarily by the Illinois Press Foundation and the Robert R. McCormick Foundation, along with major contributions from the Illinois Broadcasters Foundation and Southern Illinois Editorial Association.



• Fresh Meat Case  
• Locally Raised Beef, Pork & Chicken  
• Cured Meats From Our Own Smokehouse

**5% Off** Weekly Special - Aug. 21-26  
Bratwurst

217-543-5178 Monday-Friday 8:00-4:30 Saturday 8:00-11:00  
Fax 217-543-5168 1758 CR 1900N Arthur, IL 61911  
2 miles south and 1/2 mile west of Arthur

we remember your name. because it's your name.

simple human sense

LINDENMEYER INSURANCE AGENCY  
A Division of Compass Insurance

217.268.3041

**Auto-Owners**  
INSURANCE