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HENDERSON, POLK & TRANSYLVANIA COUNTIES | SERVING THE BLUE RIDGE SINCE 1871

TUESDAY, APRIL 21, 2026

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Mills River farmer Jason Davis says that a spike in the cost of diesel fuel and synthetic fertilizer because of the war in Iran is squeezing him and other Henderson County farmers on April 16. GEORGE FABE RUSSELL/HENDERSONVILLE TIMES-NEWS

'TRIPLE WHAMMY'

Drought, war costs threaten Henderson County farmers

George Fabe Russell
Hendersonville Times-News
USA TODAY NETWORK

HENDERSONVILLE – Jason Davis was making hay while the sun shone on a hot, dusty afternoon.

The Mills River farmer started harvesting his hay crop two or three weeks earlier than normal because of a shortage caused by drought in the region. So far, the drought also has cut his yield in

half, he told the Times-News April 16 over the noise of tractors and balers.

But that's hardly his only problem. In addition to higher costs for labor and seed, ripple effects from the war in Iran have spiked input costs for Henderson County farmers, especially those who, like Davis, grow vegetables, including tomatoes, peppers and corn.

Before the war, Davis was paying between \$15,000 and \$16,000 per acre of tomatoes but now that might be up to

\$20,000, he told the Times-News April 17.

Iranian and U.S. blockades of the Strait of Hormuz, a vital shipping lane for Iranian and Arabian oil, has raised oil prices globally and, with them, the costs of petroleum-derived fertilizer and diesel fuel, USA TODAY reported.

Iran declared the strait open April 17 but the U.S. blockade of Iranian ports

See **FARMERS**, Page 2A

Mission, HCA settle in C-section malpractice lawsuit

Will Hofmann
Asheville Citizen Times
USA TODAY NETWORK

ASHEVILLE - A 2022 medical malpractice lawsuit filed by a Canton family against HCA Healthcare, Mission Health and an Asheville-area OB/GYN has been settled, according to court records.

Originally filed in 2022, and refiled in 2023, the civil lawsuit brought by husband and wife Zeb and Ashley Smathers on behalf of their son through an ad litem guardian had been scheduled for trial in March. In the original filing, the couple alleged "egregious acts of medical and corporate negligence" during the March 2020 birth of their son, who was diagnosed with cerebral palsy after being born.

The couple later sued the OB-GYN practice, Laurel OB/GYN, and physician, Dr. Summer Gilmer, who helped deliver their child in addition to the health care conglomerate, the Citizen Times reported.

On Feb. 2, all parties reported that over 12 hours spent in mediation settlement conferences had resulted in agreement on all issues in the case. A joint motion to approve a minor settlement — meaning a settlement on behalf of a child — was filed April 13 and approved by Special Superior Court Judge William Pittman on April 16. All claims have been dismissed with prejudice, meaning the case cannot be refiled.

The written motion and approval of the minor settlement are considered "public not portal," according to the

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Negotiations to end war with Iran on shaky ground

Kathryn Palmer, Adrianna Rodriguez and Francesca Chambers
USA TODAY

Iran is considering attending peace talks with the United States in Pakistan, a senior Iranian official told Reuters on April 20, following moves by Islamabad to end a U.S. blockade of Iran's ports, a major hurdle for Iran to rejoin peace ef-

forts. However, the official stressed that no decision had been made.

With a two-week ceasefire set to expire on April 22, a senior Iranian official said Tehran was "positively reviewing" its participation but no final decision had been made. The comments conveyed a clear change of tone from earlier statements ruling out attendance and pledging to retaliate for U.S. aggression.

The Iranian official said mediator Pakistan was making positive efforts to end the U.S. blockade and ensure Iran's participation.

The ceasefire had appeared in jeopardy after the United States said it had seized an Iranian cargo ship on April 19 that tried to evade its blockade in the Strait of Hormuz and Tehran vowed to retaliate.

The U.S. military said it had fired on the Iranian-flagged cargo ship headed toward Iran's Bandar Abbas port after a six-hour standoff, disabling its engines. U.S. Central Command released video showing Marines descending on ropes from helicopters onto the vessel.

In a Truth Social post, Trump said

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