

Rural Papers

Reporting with commentary
on agricultural and rural issues



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The Farm Bill: A Pawn in a Bigger Game?

By Mary Fund



The Farm Bill used to be a place for political compromise. Rural interests would combine with urban priorities to ensure continuity of safety nets and conservation and marketing assistance for the food producers, and safety nets of food access for the poor or low income. Now the only sure thing appears to be that it is anyone's guess on the final timing and content of the 2018 Farm Bill.

The current Farm Bill expires September 30, 2018. On May 18, the House version of the 2018 Farm Bill was defeated on the House floor. As this goes to press, the Senate Agriculture Committee just released its version, which has significant differences from the earlier House bill. The clock is ticking to see what if anything can pass this deeply divided Congress.

The House Farm Bill has multiple flaws, and it represents a huge step backward from the kind of policy that even begins to address the natural resource challenges we are facing. Nor did it acknowledge in any way the lack of a level playing field in terms of commodity subsidies or opportunities for beginning farmers, or the needs of the poor or low income.

For instance, it zeroed out the Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP), the innovative program with a whole farm approach to conservation and resource

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Small Farmer Commentary

“We’re Not Dead Yet”

By Mary Fund

The above slightly altered quote from the 1975 Monty Python “bring out your dead” comic sketch kept coming to my mind as I listened to fellow Kansans react to a recent news story. (I apologize up front for my dark rather warped sense of humor). The news story was “Rural Kansas is Dying: I drove 1800 miles to find out why.” (See link below) But the Kansans I heard from were not laughing.

The story appeared online in the New Food Economy April 26. The author, former Kansan and now California based journalist, Corie Brown, described her 1800 mile journey around rural Kansas earlier this year to interview farmers, business owners, economic development and other professionals, academics and more. Brown wanted to understand how rural Kansas is faring and why it is in decline. In the spirit of past journalists (William Allen White in 1896 and Thomas Frank a hundred years later) Brown asked her version of the basic question: “What’s the matter with Kansas?”

She pointed to the steady population decline, the exodus of 25 to 29 year olds, lack of rural jobs and housing, empty storefronts, the poor commodity farming economy, the dependence of farming on expensive inputs, and how today’s farms and technology simply don’t need as many people. You name it. All the negatives are there. Many readers were disheartened; others just beginning work on community issues like keeping a grocery store, or keeping school enrollment up, and housing issues, wondered “why bother?”

Many of the people quoted in Brown’s story felt betrayed. They thought they were being interviewed for a story on the resistance to this decline to point out the positive energy and efforts going on all around the state to combat the seemingly inevitable forces of a larger economy hell bent on squeezing the last drop out of rural America. They were and are understandably angry as they fight this negativity on a daily basis and are using every inch and pound of creativity and energy they have to turn the tide.

The story barely touched on the positive examples and models that are happening all over the state - farmers adapting away from conventional commodity agriculture to start new enterprises, such as fruits and vegetables or organic farming, rural entrepreneurs using internet connections to create national or global businesses, cooperative marketing efforts to reach population centers, young professionals and others who have returned by choice to start businesses and raise families because this is a place they love with people worth caring about. There is another story to be told, and if nothing else, the Brown story has acted as a catalyst for those of us doing the telling.

But I do not want the main point of the story to get lost in our indignation at the story’s spin. Brown’s basic conclusion is true: the commodity agriculture system (the mainstream capital intensive industrial agriculture model) is destroying rural Kansas. And it is not just Kansas, but rural communities across the country from Connecticut to California.

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Small Farmer Commentary

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“Blind faith in outdated agricultural orthodoxy and a failure to imagine a new way forward for farmers still dominates rural policy” according to Brown. Recognizing this truth is a big step forward in imagining and building a new way forward.

Some of us have spent the past 40 years working to tell that very story and to encourage a different system of agriculture— one where people and communities matter, where our technological choices consider all costs and benefits, and the profits flow to the people who do the work in the communities where they live. KRC has stressed over and over that the prevailing system is not inevitable; it is the result of policy and political choices— choices that we can change for the kind of farm, food, and community future we want.

The status quo system in agriculture assumes some kind of sustainability. Nowhere in the story does Brown discuss the environmental or natural resource problems associated with this model. That is another story, but it is absolutely critical as there are increasing reasons to question the sustainability of this system. Conventional commodity agriculture with its dependence on expensive pesticides that no longer work, the declining nature of soil health - a problem created by years of chemical fertilizer and pesticide use, and year after year of the same one or two crops, and its inability to assure a new generation of farmers—is not sustainable. For the future viability of food production and food security, we need to shift to a more agro-ecological approach to food production, which requires more people, more diversity, and appropriate technology choices.

To rebuild rural communities and to feed both rural and urban communities, we need nothing short of a new economy, and it needs to be based on an agricultural system that protects and regenerates our natural resources, and brings the next generation of farmers and rural leaders into the system.

Kansas farmers are recognizing the challenges, as are “rural by choice” advocates the challenges. Many farmers are responding with cover crop adoption and other soil health building measures that diversify their cropping systems. Some are pondering specialty crop production, transition to organic farming, and cooperative marketing ventures. Consumers are asking for more local or regionally produced food, and rural advocates and entrepreneurs are building businesses to support this. “Rural by choice” advocates are creating their own opportunities. These are the fiercely independent, self-

reliant, and creative Kansans that Brown claimed to be looking for.

That innovative, thoughtful farmers and rural entrepreneurs are looking for alternatives and ways to adapt to new realities is no surprise. That their solutions are closer to home, involve partnering with other producers, and serving real needs in their communities is no surprise either.

Yes, rural Kansas—and a large swath of rural America may appear to be dying—but we are not dead yet. The infrastructure for a new food economy, or a new economy, is not here yet. But we are building it one farm, one business, and one community at a time.

“Rural Kansas is Dying: I Drove 1800 miles to find out why”
<https://newfoodeconomy.org/rural-kansas-depopulation-commodity-agriculture/>.

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2018 State Legislature Wraps Up

by Paul Johnson

The Kansas State budget has finally been stabilized after several years of tax cuts, costly transfers, and numerous rounds of budget reductions. The question going forward in this 2018 election year is whether stabilization will move toward restoration of essential programs or will Kansas experiment with another round of tax cuts?

Thanks to the Kansas income tax restoration in 2017 and increased state revenue from the federal tax cut changes, state general fund (SGF) revenue increases from \$6.34 billion in 2017 to \$7.10 billion in 2019 and up to \$7.44 billion in 2022. (For years 2020 -2022, the assumption is a 3% income tax increase and 1.9% sales tax increase.) What starts on May 22 is the review by the Kansas Supreme Court of the adequacy and equity of the new school funding formula. Will the Supreme Court decide that increased funding is needed? and if so, how soon must that happen?

Gov. Colyer has signed the State Budget for 2018 & 2019. The largest adjustment for 2018 was \$40.5 million from the State General Fund (SGF) to fund the updated estimates for human services caseloads. For 2019, the adjustment for human services caseloads is \$76.9 million from SGF.

The Board of Regents receives an additional \$15 million for a combined restoration of \$21.7 million of the \$30 million cut in 2016. \$57.3 million for Department of Education transportation needs now comes from SGF instead of being taken from the State Highway fund (although the overall transfer from the State Highway Fund to SGF is still \$280 million).

\$56 million is transferred from SGF to the KPERS Trust Fund. \$5.2 million is transferred from the Children's Initiatives Fund (tobacco settlement) to the Pre-K Pilot (\$4.2 m) and Parents as Teachers (\$1 m). \$1 million from SGF is directed to the Tiny-K program. \$22.1 million of all funds are added for nursing home facility reimbursement rates that were cut 4% in 2016. \$5.5 million of all funds

added to increase foster care kinship payments from \$3 to \$10 dollars a day. The State Water Plan gains \$2.75 million from SGF and \$500,000 from lottery receipts for water-related projects. \$27.7 million from all funds provides salary increases for many state employees including judicial branch employees, correction officers and judges.

The SGF profile out to 2022 is sobering. On the revenue side - 3% income growth and 1.9% sales tax growth may well happen, but nationally this is one of the longest periods of growth without a recession. Kansas could be seriously impacted by a trade war. The federal tax adjustment impact on Kansas is estimated as a plus \$150 million annually, but it will take at least two years for the IRS to write all of these new regulations.

On the expenditure side, the promised transfers to city/county government for property tax relief and roads are ignored along with just partial payment to the State Water Plan and the \$280 million continues to come out of the State Highway Fund.

The ending balance for 2019 is \$375 million but falls to \$143 million in 2020 as required KPERS payments are finally made, and by 2021 - just to reach a zero ending balance - there will have to be \$127 million in cuts or revenue increases. For 2022 to reach zero balance the number is \$196 million in cuts or revenue increases.

So, while steps have been taken to stabilize the budget, the debate is far from over in Kansas. In addition to the continuing uncertainties about education funding, other critical questions remain: how to restore staffing shortages in state agencies, respond to emergencies caused by recessions or natural disasters, as well as how to restore essential services. Will Kansas maintain its' hard fought for momentum toward rebuilding the state economy in the 2018 elections, or will we backslide toward further cuts and loss of services? This is the essential economic and political debate that Kansans deserve in 2018.

Electoral Expectations: Issues for 2018 Voters

by Paul Johnson with Mary Fund

2018 is a critical election year. The voters of Kansas deserve and should expect a substantive honest debate on the future direction of our state. Elections matter and candidates should present their ideas to address and solve the economic and political challenges facing Kansas, as well as offer a vision for the future.

The big issues center around the solvency of the state budget and state services, the future of agriculture and food in Kansas, the provision of medical services, the affordability of housing, the crisis with water management, and electoral engagement by many more Kansans.

The state budget is stabilized at this time, but barely. The 2017 tax increases restored just two-thirds of the 2012 tax cuts. Restoring nine rounds of budget cuts and limiting program transfers will take time. As you listen to candidates this fall or listen to neighbors and friends complain, consider the following issues and decide which candidates are willing to talk about these issues and offer ideas and solutions.

Social services and health care. The privatized child welfare system is finally being comprehensively analyzed and will need greater resources if we are to provide adequate protection and care for children in need. The privatized Medicaid system – KanCare – (that serves over 400,000 residents) has incredible problems with enrollment and auditable payments to providers. Expanding Medicaid would cover over 150,000 low-

income working Kansans, while also assisting many rural health providers who are struggling to survive. Mental health services could be increased with an expanded Medicaid program as State support of community mental health centers has declined.

Education Funding. Public school funding was cut 15% in 2009 and lost ground to inflation in the last 10 years. While still 10th of the 50 states in education outcomes, Kansas is slipping in the rankings behind states who are increasing their state support. The 2017 Legislature added funding back into the school finances but will be it enough to satisfy the court requirements?

Agriculture and food. Agriculture is a key economic driver in Kansas. So far, no candidates are offering a vision on the future of farming other than more of the same. Consolidation and concentration of land and resources are seen as inevitable. Water resources-- both quality and quantity-- receive lip service, but no one is putting forward a plan (or even asking the questions) to address critical soil health needs through the kind of comprehensive conservation and stewardship practices needed to ensure sustainability.

Kansas has 60,000 farms, and the largest 10% account for 75% of all farm sales. But Kansans import 95% of all the fruits and vegetables consumed in the state. While consumer demand for local, naturally raised meats increases, Kansas has only 75 small meat processors left that might

be able to supply 10% of that local meat demand.

From 5,600 dairies in 1980, today there are less than 400 with 50 megadairies accounting for two-thirds of the dairy herd. Kansas government actively recruits the next mega-dairy, or courts a billion dollar corporation for vertically controlled poultry production. There is no vision of expanding regional food systems where farmers and community or intermediate sized processors can earn a living wage while being partners in the ownership of this system.

The average age of the Kansas farmer is almost 60 and the transfer of farmland will increase over the next ten to 15 years, but there is no effort to promote beginning farmer loans and provide specialized business training to niche agricultural enterprises. Neighboring states of Nebraska and Iowa have beginning farmer tax credit programs that at least help retiring farmers lease to beginners. The financial stress of low commodity prices and high input prices, coupled with uncertain trade are pushing more farmers to the edge both economically and emotionally.

Consumer demand for organic food continues to skyrocket, and interest among farmers in transitioning to organic production is high. But there is little information available on organic systems at our land grant. Interest in specialty crop production is also high, but there are not enough extension agents offering regional information

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State Policy News

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on horticultural production or analysis of the economics of such production. There is also little policy maker concern over the expanding chemical war on controlling weeds and the impact on both organic and the emerging specialty crop sector in the state.

Kansas is primarily a beef state with a beef packing market monopolized by four corporations of which two are now owned by Brazilian companies. There is no vision of a competitive, regional meat market that believes in a free, fair market.

Affordable housing. The debate over affordable housing has been silenced in Kansas. Under Governor Bill Graves in the 1990's, there was a Governor's Commission on Affordable Housing along with a Housing Division within the Kansas Department of Commerce & Housing. In 2003, the Housing Division was moved out of Commerce and became the Kansas Housing Resources Corporation (KHRC) – a semi-public entity in conjunction with the Kansas Development Finance Authority (KDFA – Kansas' bonding authority).

As a semi-public agency that exists on federal grants and fees, KHRC does not report annually to the Kansas Legislature. KHRC has the weatherization program, the Community Services Block Grant, emergency shelter funds and the multi-family rental unit construction program. Kansas has around 1.2 million housing units with 2/3rds (800,000) owner-occupied and 1/3rd (400,000) rental. 40% of the renters (160,000) are cost burdened paying over 35% of income on housing. Kansas now has 86 rural counties who

have lost population over the past few decades and affordable housing is a key challenge. Rural economic developers site housing as a barrier to landing new manufacturing. Small communities lose the possibility of returning youth due to lack of housing. There needs to be a new vision to bring private, state, federal, non-profit, realtor and financial players to create a new comprehensive housing affordability strategy.

Water resources. Debate over water in Kansas has received lots of attention from policymakers and citizens, but few new financial resources. Western Kansas is truly dependent on the Ogallala aquifer. 40% has already been drained and that number will climb to 70% by 2050 at present rates of crop irrigation. Since the 1950's, Kansas has issued too many groundwater permits - some 35,000. These permits are considered property rights so legal experts argue Kansas would be forced to spend tens of millions of dollars to retire some of these permits. Some irrigators are voluntarily setting conservation goals to extend the life of their water rights, and are using tools and technology that closely monitor soil moisture and help them use less water. But all of this only adds a few years to the aquifer's lifespan.

In eastern Kansas, the water battle is over surface water and public water supply storage in several federal reservoirs. These reservoirs are silting in from stream bank erosion and soil run-off. Kansas has started dredging John Redmond Reservoir plus limiting soil run-off up stream at a cost of over \$20 million. Water quality within those reservoirs is also at risk with algae blooms impacting more reservoirs. Farming practices that reduce runoff and protect water quality require

programs with adequate funding and policies backed with commitment to providing water for farms and businesses in the future.

Voter Engagement. Of the 125 Kansas House races up this year, nearly 50 will have only one candidate. There are thousands of unregistered eligible Kansas voters—especially among youth and communities of color.

Voting rates are under 30% for the August primary and under 60% in November elections. Kansas, through its Secretary of State has spent far too much time and attention on making it harder to vote and chasing ghosts of voter fraud.

Improved election laws could encourage greater voter participation. Kansas should repeal laws that mandate the proof of citizenship. We could implement same day voter registration at the polls as many states have done. Kansas could follow states that automatically register residents to vote when they apply for driver's licenses. We could also expand early voting opportunities and voter education campaigns with greater outreach efforts. Kansas needs to establish voter participation goals, and research what works to meet increased participation.

We face big issues as a state, in our communities, our families and as individuals. We need more people engaged in the conversation about those issues. This summer take time to pay attention to what matters in your community, and ask questions of those running for office be it dog catcher, county commissioner, legislator or Governor. The 2018 elections matter.

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Strategies to Reduce Pesticide Use: Farming for Pollinators

by Joanna Will

In recent years, much attention has been given to the plight of pollinators as their numbers have declined precipitously worldwide. Neonicotinoid pesticides are a primary cause of these dramatic declines, due to both an increase in the amount of pesticide being applied on farm fields and the high toxicity of neonicotinoids to bees and other pollinators. The EU voted in April to ban neonicotinoids from all fields because of the harm they cause to bees. By the end of 2018, the only allowed use of neonicotinoids in EU countries will be in closed greenhouses.

In addition to impacting pollinator populations, neonicotinoids (neonics) have spread throughout the environment, creating a host of issues. Neonics have been found in a majority of streams in the US and have had a serious impact on aquatic invertebrates, who are the foundation of the food chain. Neonics have been found in soil in fields that have not been planted with neonic-coated seeds or sprayed with neonicotinoids. They have also been found in off-target vegetation, including on organic farms located at distances that exceed the recommended buffer to avoid contamination. Neonics were found in the drinking water supply in Iowa City, and have been found in bees, pollen, and honey across the country. Neonicotinoids have also been found in the human food supply. A single neonicotinoid-coated seed can kill a songbird, and five coated seeds can kill a turkey. Impacts on human health are only

starting to emerge but the results are not encouraging.

Studies have shown that for a majority of crops, neonicotinoids do not increase yields or provide other benefits. While chemical companies promote the notion that it is risky or impossible to forgo neonicotinoids on corn, soybeans and other crops, farmers can and do successfully grow these crops without the use of neonicotinoids. Any farming strategy or practice that increases biodiversity, minimizes soil disturbance and builds soil health is a step in the right direction towards reducing the need for chemical inputs, including neonicotinoid pesticides. Practices that provide natural pest control can particularly benefit pollinators by reducing pesticide use.

There are a number of farming strategies and practices that reduce or eliminate pesticide use along with different terminology or titles identifying them. Following is an overview of a few of them.

Agroecological farming practices are practices that utilize ecological principles in the agricultural setting. According to Marcia Delonge, Senior Scientist at the Union of Concerned Scientists, “There are actually many terms that refer to the study of ecological processes within agricultural practice: agricultural ecology, ecoagriculture, sustainable agriculture, and regenerative farming, to name just a few. While these concepts may have subtle differences, they all share a core and

critical intent: understanding, managing and benefitting from the interactions between soils, crops, livestock, water resources, air quality, weather, climate, wildlife, and biodiversity.” Among the benefits of these interactions is increased naturally-occurring pest control which reduces or eliminates the need for synthetic pesticides.

Agroecology focuses on healthy soil and might include the following practices: organic amendments, animal integration, agroforestry, locally adapted breeds and seeds, barriers and strips, cover crops and green manure, conservation tillage, crop rotation, and diversified fields and landscapes designed to increase biodiversity, minimize erosion and run off, and attract beneficial insects and natural pest predators.

Diversified ecological farming systems are based on healthy, functioning ecosystems, which sustain a number of important ecosystem services, including natural pest control. According to the website of the Center for Diversified Farming Centers at UC Berkeley, “Diversified farming systems (DFS) are a set of methods and tools developed to produce food sustainably by leveraging ecological diversity at plot, field, and landscape scales. By supporting a complex fabric of natural and human ecologies, DFS allow critical ecosystem services – like pollination and pest control – to be generated and regenerated within the agroecosystem, aided by the human knowledge to sustain those processes.”

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Specialty Crop Farmers Share Challenges and Opportunities

by Jennifer Kongs

“Sustainable economics for rural communities includes sustainable growing and a system that is financially sustainable for farmers,” said Claire Zimmerman, operator of Groundspeak Farm in Edgerton, Kansas. Zimmerman was one of 11 specialty crop farmers who gathered in Salina, Kansas, on February 26, 2018.

The farmers were participating in a learning circle as part of the Kansas Rural Center’s (KRC) project “Linking Experienced and Beginning Specialty Crop Farmers to Share Information for Establishing Successful Specialty Crop Enterprises.” The project goals include identifying common challenges for specialty crop farmers and opportunities that have been learned through farmers’ experiences, and building a network for ongoing peer-to-peer connection between specialty crop farmers across the state. Zimmerman succinctly summed up many of the concerns shared by the farmers present: a sustainable farming system must be economically viable for those engaged in farming.

The farmers invited to the learning circle, which included long time experienced growers and several beginning growers, discussed the realities of growing and marketing fruits and vegetables in different communities across Kansas.

“People in my area prefer to go to Wal-Mart than buying local food,” said Christi Janssen of C and C High Tunnels in Scandia, Kansas. “People lack knowledge about the seasons – many people don’t understand that you can’t grow tomatoes in the wintertime, even with hoop houses. I was asked at farmers market last year whether I grew oranges. There is an education piece to getting consumers to try new foods – such as when we started selling kale at markets.” The Janssens grow entirely within the city limits of Scandia, selling through multiple CSA deliveries in their hometown and neighboring communities as well as at multiple farmers markets.

“Local residents don’t know what to do with a lot of the crops, which factors into whether I grow eggplant versus tomatoes,” added Chris Palmberg of Lazy E Produce in Kanorado, Kansas. He and his wife bought a vacant parking lot to start growing within the Kanorado city limits. He said, “I’m in the phase of my experience of, ‘What’s going

to work where I am? What can I grow here, and will the local population buy it?’”

The Palmbergs are selling eggs and raising small numbers of poultry for meat, and Palmberg notes that including value-added breads and jams have been popular and, perhaps, could be a more profitable market than the raw ingredients. As someone with work experience in economic development, Palmberg is interested in the role local foods could play in revitalizing rural economies.

Dave Svaty of Svaty’s Produce in Kanopolis, Kansas said, “For areas without a large population center, getting consumers to come to an on-farm store or operation is a struggle. Our farm store is currently not holding water, but we want it to work because making time to get into town is a struggle.”

The Svatys raise vegetables in multiple hoop houses, as well as run a grass-fed beef, lamb and pork operation. Dave currently sells primarily at farmers markets, but a few years ago he built an on-farm store, with daily operating hours, to sell produce and meats year-round. Svaty raised concerns about the logistics of selling the majority of a farm’s produce through farmers markets when the most profitable markets are all on Saturdays, and the weekday markets are much smaller and held in multiple locations.

Dan Brooks of Roots Revival Farm in Sharon Springs, Kansas, said, “We came to western Kansas because it is accessible to buy land, especially small acreages.” Brooks operates about a half-acre vegetable farm with his wife. The couple sells some produce locally and some through the High Plains Food Co-op, and they are looking to do more wholesale if possible. They are completing the organic certification paperwork now, and he wished he had access to market research for their area to know which crops would be most popular instead of needing to go through a long period of trial and error to find what their community will buy and eat.

“We started working with vegetables, because we couldn’t find good food anymore,” said Brooks, but the market isn’t

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Specialty Crop Challenges & Opportunities...

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readily available. Based on the attendees' experience, where land is more affordable and accessible, the markets are harder to develop.

Farmers like Frank Gieringer of Gieringer's Orchard in Edgerton, Kansas, have had growing success in developing agritourism opportunities near a large population center, like Kansas City. Fifteen years ago, the family put in an orchard and then added a high tunnel, which grew into six, growing mostly grafted tomatoes. The U-Pick and agritourism efforts at the farm include plasticulture strawberries; raspberries and thornless blackberries; peaches; pumpkins; and soon apples.

Gieringer also raises conventional corn, soybeans and cattle, but shared that 2017 was the first year the specialty crops beat out the conventional crops in net income. "Look for something that sets you apart," said Gieringer. "If we didn't have fruit, we wouldn't get people out to our farm." The Gieringers do a lot of marketing and alerts about the U-Pick availability via their Facebook page, which has more than 20,000 followers.

Similarly, Leah Dannar-Garcia of Firefly Farms near Wichita, Kansas, says, "I can't scale enough to meet the large Wichita market. But we can't get enough new farmers to grow more – we don't have enough farmers in our area to support a food hub for the production we can support." Dannar-Garcia has been growing for three years and has primarily focused on tomatoes and selling to local chefs. The local sourcing for restaurants is an opportunity for farmers growing in areas with such a demand.

Labor and health insurance were two challenges for which no ready opportunity presented itself during the conversation. It is especially a challenge when farmers are paying someone until midsummer before getting money to cover those wages. While CSA models, which provide upfront payments to farmers before production begins, provide income to pay for labor, it isn't an answer for all farmers. For large wholesale producers, including attendee Dan Kuhn of Depot Market in Courtland, Kansas, hiring seasonal labor through the H-2A visa program is an option. Kuhn has been growing vegetables and fruit for about 40 years. Pumpkins are his main crop, and he primarily sells

wholesale with a retail market on-site. He raised 180 acres of produce, the majority of which is under pivot irrigation. Kuhn notes that the visa program is clearly not for everyone: It requires extensive paperwork and infrastructure, and is not sustainable for individual smaller operations.

Gabe Spurgeon of South Baldwin Farms, an intensively planted fruit orchard that has been in operation for a couple of years in Baldwin, Kansas, added, "In other states with apple-growing regions, there is a known population that does this type of work. We don't have that as strongly in Kansas."

On health insurance, many farmers expressed that someone in their family was required to hold off-farm jobs to provide health care coverage for their families. Dave Svaty said, "My son came to farm after he lost his teaching job. The first year was great, but the second year was bad – we lost all of our tomato crop to a virus. He has three kids, and we had nothing to fall back on, so he had to get a job for security. He wants to farm and he has a space, and we have markets to go to, but you need health insurance and you need steady income, and you can't do that as a starting specialty crop farmer."

Regulations and crop insurance were also identified as barriers. While many specialty crop farms, especially those who market directly to consumers, are exempt from many of the larger farm regulations, the confusion and concern for what the future holds was expressed by many in attendance.

In addition, the lack of consistent availability of information and willingness to help producers with unique business models is a reality many farmers have faced. Nina Isley of Y Knot Farm and Ranch in Bird City, Kansas, said, "Whole-farm crop insurance is available, but it isn't well received to work with farmers on it. You have to be patient because the commodity crops and those farmers have more sway. You can work with the NRCS for help, too."

Jeter Isley, current President of the High Plains Food Co-op and co-owner of Y Knot Farm and Ranch with his wife, Nina, stressed that the bulk of farmers' abilities to scale is limited by access to capital.

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Who Will be the Next Generation of Farmers? Farm Link Programs Explored for Lessons Learned

by Mary Fund

Who will be the next generation of farmers? This is a question with many answers. But none of the answers are straightforward, simple or ensured. Traditional farm transitions within families are complex and pose more challenges today than in the past. The high cost of land, the fragility of farm income and the uncertain nature of the farm economy make agriculture a questionable choice, or at least a risky and stressful choice. Fewer farmers have heirs or successors who want or are able to take over the farm. Yet, interest in farming as a career and a way of life remains high.

The average age of farmers nationally and in Kansas is around 60. This means that a large number of farmers will retire in the next ten to twenty years meaning a large amount of land will be transferred to someone.

While transfer to a farming heir is no longer a certain thing, what about farm transitions where there is no successor or family heir? For those who want to see a farm legacy continued, if not a family legacy, is there something other than selling to the highest bidder on the open market? And what about those who are seeking land and want to farm?

A wave of interest from a largely non-farm population inclined to raising food for an emerging local and regional food system via specialty crop or small farms combined with more traditional rural dwellers or displaced farm heirs seeking a way to carve out

a niche or entry into farming begs the question: who will farm? And how will they get access to land?

What works and what does not work for programs that assist with farm/ranch transfers between non-kin?

Over the past 20 to 30 years a number of programs arose around the country to help address these questions of linking retiring or outgoing farmers with beginning or new farmers. They are called “land link” or “linking” programs, and provide a range of services from simple listings of farms for sale or those seeking land, to actual matching services or events to bring people together, to business planning and legal advice. Success has been met to varying degrees and depends on what the expectations were.

Kansas dabbled in such a program in the 1990’s immediately after the mid-1980’s farm crisis. This was prior to the internet providing more options for easier, more timely program management. The program had some limited state funding, but did not survive past a couple rounds of budgeting.

Last year, the Kansas Rural Center joined researchers at Indiana University to help explore how land link and matching programs across twelve states in the Midwest and Central Plains have fared. Neither Kansas or Indiana presently have formal pro-

grams to assist specifically with transfers between non related parties. But we found 40 some programs (active and inactive) across the twelve states.

We asked the following questions:

- * What works and what does not work for programs that assist in some capacity with farm/ranch transfers between unrelated parties?
- * What do leaders of these programs, including farmer mentoring programs, view as next steps and best investments in helping farm/ranch owners transition to a non-family successor?
- * What could we learn that would help improve existing programs?
- * What should anyone (like those of us in Kansas and Indiana) know before starting, or even thinking about starting, such a program?
- * And beyond program services to link or match owners and seekers, what are the alternative models or stories of ownership or leasing out there that might help beginners onto the land and help continue farm legacies?

Let me be clear that we set aside the more typically addressed questions and difficulties facing traditional family transfers, such as family communication issues and succession planning. These are complicated enough but Extension programs at land grant universities regularly host educational workshops for these type of transfers.

We focused on land link programs, including a few that include mentoring or internship components, that

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Farm Link Programs...

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primarily serve those without family connections or successors.

To date, we have completed the primary research: an online survey of active and ended programs in twelve states in the Midwest and Central Plains. Twenty-nine of 42 contacted programs participated in the survey and a follow up telephone interview. Participating programs were also asked to share a similar survey with their program participants to get a sense of farmer/seeker perception of the services and their needs.

While we are still working on farmer case studies of non-family transfers and compiling information on alternative land ownership models, we can offer the following short summary of the survey findings.

Basic characteristics of reviewed programs. About 80% of the programs are active with a median experience of ten years ranging from one new in 2018 to some that began in 1990. Most of the programs reviewed (63%) were located within non-governmental organizations (NGO's or non-profits). About 17% were located within an Extension program at a land grant university, and another ten percent within state departments of agriculture. Maintaining funding is a struggle for most of programs, and funding determines staffing and scope.

Two categories of beginning farmers are served by these programs. One set is moving into commodity crop/livestock production; the other is mov-

ing into non-commodity crop or value added or specialty crop production. Beginning commodity crop farmers are often from a farm background, but are looking for farming opportunities because their home farms cannot accommodate them.

Other beginners are often from non-farm backgrounds with varying skills and experience, but are also looking for a way to enter farming. Programs reviewed tended to serve one or the other, and sometimes both. Programs provide a range of services with 67% offering some type of linking or matching service. See below for description of services.

Bucket of Services:

Listing: a managed list of available farm/ranch properties; may also list seekers. Can be done with minimal staffing or time.

Linking: a service providing contact information to seekers/owners, typically pre-sorted or pre-screened. A step beyond listing.

Matching: a service that facilitates a specific transaction between seeker and owner.

Tax Credit: for landowners who lease/sell to beginning farmers.

Mentoring: a service that facilitates formal connections between learners (who may be farm or ranch seekers) and mentors who are farm/ranch owners. May be only a learning connection and not a transfer situation.

Support services: general services that build seeker and/or owner competencies to engage in farm/ranch acquisition or transfer. May include: business/financial/acquisition planning, land use planning/ farm/ranch

design, estate/succession/transfer.

Ancillary services: not directly related to farm/ranch acquisition or transfer. May include: general business / viability planning, marketing, employment/labor, production systems/practices, non-farm/ranch estate planning, financial management, land use planning/conservation.

Summary of Findings.

Finding each other is the biggest challenge. The number one obstacle to non-family transfer is the basic and obvious problem of owners and seekers finding each other. However, programs also ranked this service as one of the main ways they help people. So even a very basic listing service, such as an online service, which can bring farm/ranch owners and seekers together even with limited staffing, facilitation or follow up, can be beneficial.

Low-input networking events to bring owners and seekers together in either stand-alone events or as part of an annual conference or meeting are also helpful to bring owners and seekers together. On-line discussion forums also allow seekers and owners to build relationships with minimal staff oversight.

There does need to be some kind of staffing and oversight to manage inflow and outflow of information and to keep lists current. Better yet are those programs that have some sort of tracking metrics in place to measure success or identify problems.

Establishing medium-term metrics is critical. If the main measure of

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Changing the Way We Think - For the Sake of Our Future

by Tom Parker

When Pastor Adrion Roberson took the podium at the Kansas Rural Center's 2017 Farm and Food Conference, his was a singular presence that stilled conversation. He stood out in the crowd not only for his size but as one of three African-Americans in the room—an all too common occurrence especially at farm or rural conferences. In a voice like rolling thunder, he demanded accountability like an Old Testament prophet.

“Why is this conference happening?” he asked. “Where are we going? If I asked you why you do what you do, what would be your answer? Why do it? Because if you don't have a purpose, everything you talk about means nothing.”

The issues facing him as a pastor in Wyandotte County, as a black man, as a resident of Kansas and of the United States, he insisted, are no different than those facing farmers and food advocates, and the issues are huge. The issues are challenging, he said, and solutions to those challenges have been both ineffectual and elusive.

“I live in a context where I'm not only dealing with inequality over access to healthy foods but with economic inequality, with educational inequality, with racial inequality,” he said. “I don't care if you're urban, suburban or rural, we have huge, challenging issues, and we've been trying to fix them with a technical fix. Ain't got nowhere. So here's the challenge as people who are trying to get from here to there—we need to recognize that there's a gap.”

Roberson, pastor of Destiny! Bible Fellowship Community Church in Kansas City, Kan., and faculty member of the Kansas Leadership Center in Wichita, led an interactive discussion entitled “Recognizing the adaptive challenges of defining our purpose, our values, our vision for the sake of the future.” His presentation was a driving tour de force that alternately left many audience members nodding their heads, scratching their heads and/or enthusiastically clapping. The key term was ‘recognizing,’ he said.

“That means an ongoing process of shifting, moving, of not being happy with the status quo, trying things differently,

experimenting, failing, experimenting, having successes,” he said. “That's what recognizing means.”

As for the gap, one of its main denominators is people, and it will take true leadership—and not authority, for the two are diametrically opposite, he said—to mobilize people to do the difficult work necessary for progress to be made. “I don't care what system you deal with, you're going to have to deal with people,” he said. “We have to learn to work with people we don't know, people we don't like, sometimes people we don't understand.”

Traditional forms of labor have always been based on an authoritarian or technological-driven method of governance, he said. In exchange for cooperation, authority provides protection, direction and order. Leadership, on the other hand, is not a position, such as a CEO or a manager, but an act, and it involves collaboration and the pursuit of finding common ground.

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Pastor Roberson leads an exercise at the KRC Farm and Food Conference aimed at highlighting common challenges and aspirations.

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Changing the Way We Think...

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“That’s adaptive thinking,” Roberson said. “And that’s what’s been missing. You have to talk to people who may not look like you or talk like you, but that have something you need—knowledge. That’s leading with an adaptive mindset.”

Roberson applauded the role of the Kansas Rural Center and other organizations as well as the farmers for their hard work and adaptive leadership. “This room is full of people who are designed to do something different with this gift, this talent, this passion you have for agriculture,” he said. “You’re doing it, you’re passing it down to the next generation. You want to see something different happen.”

In preparation for his presentation, he had read the KRC’s mission “To promote the long-term health of the land and its people through research, education and advocacy that advances an economically viable, ecologically sound, and socially just food and farming system.” The idea resonated with him on a personal level. He and his wife live in Wyandotte County, which has been rated the second least healthy county in the state, according to the Kansas Health Institute’s 2017 County Health Rankings. Their church sits in the middle of the least healthy part of the county. Considered a food desert with no access to fresh produce or vegetables, the county proliferates with Family Dollar and Dollar General stores even as grocery stores disappear.

“We have high levels of cancer and mortality, we have high levels of diabetes, we have high levels of everything,” Roberson said. “There has to be an emphasis on the mission, and there has to be an emphasis on the purpose. That’s why you do what you do. That’s your purpose. If you don’t do what you do, guess what happens to us back in Wyandotte County? We die. Truth be told, we’re already dying.”

The work of farmers and ranchers was ordained by God, Roberson said, and their vision of providing healthy food to the residents of the nation inspired by divinity. “Everyone in here has been ordained, from the oldest to the youngest,” he said. “God bless you. You don’t hear thank you enough. You just don’t. Especially from people who look like me.”

Roberson broke the audience down into small groups to discuss four questions about what they did in their free time, how they involved themselves in their neighborhoods or communities, how others would describe them, and what they expected to get out of the conference. The exercise was less about starting open and candid conversations with others than it was about recognizing the aspirations, and the many challenges, that bind people together.

“You’re sick and tired of stuff not working,” he said.

“There’s a gap. When you get up early in the morning and it’s cold out, and you’re bringing in the hay, man, that’s hard, that’s hard work. What are your frustrations? What are your aspirations? What would Nirvana look like?”

Answers from the crowd included more people returning to work the land, putting more emphasis about sustainable agriculture into the school system, and investing in the future rather than stealing from it.

When applying those ideas to the perspective of the gap, Roberson said, it often breaks down to people losing position or losing power. People in the gap are tired of losing, and they don’t want to lose any more. The question that needs to be asked, he said, was what they would be willing to lose to see progress made.

In technical work the problem and the solution are clear, he said. It requires an expert or someone in authority with experience. The timeline is ASAP. The attitude is one of confidence and skill. An example would be if he fell down and broke his arm. The technical approach would be to call 911 and to be rushed to the hospital where he would demand to be treated by an experienced trauma physician.

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For a complete listing of upcoming Kansas Rural Center events and activities, as well as a number of events that other organizations will be hosting in the near future, please visit the Events Calendar on our website - <http://kansasruralcenter.org/calendar/>.

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Strategies to Reduce Pesticide Use...*Continued from page 7*

Diversified ecological farming systems include complex crop rotations, mixed species cover crops, and mixes of annuals and perennials in the rotation which increase beneficial insects and soil microorganisms.

Regenerative agriculture utilizes agroecological practices to sequester carbon in addition to the other benefits of agroecological farming, including natural pest control. While regenerative agriculture is finding a new following recently, the term has been around for a number of years. It was originally coined by Robert Rodale, son of J.I. Rodale, who was a pioneer in American organic agriculture. According to a paper on regenerative organic agriculture published by The Rodale Institute, the early definition stated that regenerative agriculture “takes advantage of the natural tendencies of ecosystems to regenerate when disturbed. In that primary sense it is distinguished from other types of agriculture that either oppose or ignore the value of those natural tendencies.”

The paper goes on to say that, “Regenerative organic agriculture is marked by tendencies towards closed nutrient loops, greater diversity in the biological community, fewer annuals and more perennials, and greater reliance on internal rather than external resources.”

According to the Regeneration International website, two of the primary practices of regenerative agriculture are using agroecological practices to “contribute to generating/building soils and soil fertility and health” and to “increase biodiversity and ecosys-

tem health and resiliency”. Increasing biodiversity and ecosystem health and resiliency are key strategies in minimizing or eliminating the need for synthetic pesticides.

Organic farming practices forgo synthetic pesticides and fertilizers, as well as genetically modified seeds, automatically eliminating the use of neonicotinoids. Organic practices also offer a number of other ecological benefits. According to the Organic Farming Research Foundation (OFRF), “A high percentage of organic farms use production practices with environmental benefits such as water management practices, no-till or minimum tillage, habitat maintenance for beneficial insects and vertebrates, and biological pest control. These ecologically protective practices contribute to enhanced ecosystem services and benefit water quality, soil health, and biodiversity.” Anyone can use organic practices, but strict standards have been established for organic certification for labeling purposes. In the U.S. these are overseen by the National Organic Program and the National Organization Standards Board (NOSB).

Recently, The Rodale Institute announced a new Regenerative Organic Certification. According to their website Regenerative Organic Certification is “...a cooperative effort among a coalition of farmers, ranchers, non-profits, scientists, and brands, led by Rodale Institute, to establish a new, high-bar standard for regenerative organic agriculture.” These go beyond federal standards.

The certification focuses on holistic management focusing on soil health, pasture-based animal welfare, fairness for farmers and workers, and building “resilient regional ecosystems

and communities.” The certification will be overseen by the Regenerative Organic Alliance.

Conservation biological control is a strategy aimed at reducing crop pests, and thus the need for synthetic pesticides, by increasing populations of natural predators. According to The Xerces Society for Invertebrate Conservation, “With the advent of chemical pesticides, the contributions of beneficial insects (those that prey upon or parasitize crop pests) were largely forgotten. However, pesticides alone have not solved the problem of crop pests. “Conservation Biological Control” is a strategy that seeks to integrate beneficial insects back into crop systems for natural pest control. This strategy is based upon ongoing research that demonstrates a link between the conservation of natural habitat and reduced pest problems on farms.” Conservation biological control includes planting habitat near crop fields and around the farm that will attract natural pest predators.

Integrated Pest Management (IPM) does not aim to eliminate pesticide use entirely, but it can be an effective strategy in reducing the amount of pesticide applied. According to the USDA National Institute of Food and Agriculture, “In IPM, pesticides are used in combination with other crop management approaches to minimize the effects of pests while supporting a profitable system that has negligible negative effects.” IPM strategies should involve assessing pest pressure before applying a pesticide or other practices.

No-till farming with a diverse mix of

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Strategies to reduce pesticide use...

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cover crops can significantly reduce pesticide use for many farmers. According to Steve Swaffar, Executive Director of No-Till on the Plains, the more diverse the cover crop mix, the more likely there will be significant natural pest control. The cover crops provide habitat for predatory insects, and the greater the diversity of the cover crops, the greater the diversity of beneficial insects.

While not a comprehensive list, these are a few of the strategies and practices that are being used by farmers in Kansas, and around the world, to raise crops without using synthetic pesticides. Because of the harms of neonicotinoids on pollinators, other wildlife, and ultimately ourselves, it is imperative that more farmers engage in farming systems that do not rely on synthetic pesticides.

Contact Joanna Will at jvoigt@kansasruralcenter.org.

To learn more about agroecology, visit <http://www.fao.org/agroecology/en/>, or <http://www.ucsusa.org/food-agriculture/advance-sustainable-agriculture/counting-on-agroecology>.

To learn more about regenerative agriculture, visit <http://regenerationinternational.org/why-regenerative-agriculture/>, or <https://rodaleinstitute.org/assets/WhitePaper.pdf>.

To learn more about diversified ecological farming systems, visit <https://food.berkeley.edu/centers/dfs/>.

To learn more about organic agriculture practices, visit <http://ofrf.org/>.

To learn more about organic regenerative certification, visit <https://rodaleinstitute.org/regenerativeorganic/>.

To learn more about conservation biological control, visit <https://xerces.org/conservationbiocontrol/>.

To learn more about Integrated Pest Management, visit <http://www.fao.org/agriculture/crops/thematic-sitemap/theme/pests/ipm/en/>.

To learn more about no-till, visit http://www.fao.org/ag/ca/ca-publications/outlook_pesticides_no_till_and_inputs.pdf.

Changing the Way We Think...

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“I give that person authority because they are the authority in the technical aspects of that issue,” he said. “And that’s okay—sometimes we need technical thinking. But when we’re talking about the things you’re talking about, the solution requires learning. That’s why you’re here.”

Adaptive thinking requires a willingness to experiment, he said. It embraces an expectation of failure and a subsequent response of further experimentation. It involves recognizing our inadequacies and our lack of knowledge. As a speaker once told him, “We have to be pushed through the frontiers of our incompetence.” But most importantly, people need to remain curious. “Because if you don’t,” Roberson said, “that system is going to run you smooth over. We deal with systems, and once we understand that, we can get through things.”

The idea of adaptive thinking versus technical thinking is daunting, he admitted, and not easily understood. But where technical thinking is linear, adaptive thinking is circuitous and premised on the act of questioning everything, especially the norms. “What are you willing to lose to make progress?” Roberson asked. “Whose work is it? We can no longer push the work off on an individual and expect them to do all the work. We need stakeholders. We need a leader. How about you?”

The 2018 KRC conference will be held November 16-17, 2018 in Wichita, Kansas, at the Hotel at Old Town Conference Center.

Tom Parker is a free-lance journalist and photographer from Blue Rapids, Kansas.

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Specialty Crop Learning Circle...

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“We know where the market is,” he said. “But we need grantors to provide capital to growers, co-op coordinators, and our delivery drivers. Our current High Plains Food Co-op model is not sustainable with volunteers. We have an opportunity to turn our rural communities around with sustainable economics – sustainable growing and sustainability for farmers. I consider our rural communities as disadvantaged as urban inner cities, or even more so because there are fewer people. This co-op model, which sells to large markets, is a means of getting and attracting capital into rural areas that can, hopefully, then support their own local food system sustainably.”

Dan Kuhn said, “There’s a real challenge on economics versus scale — the balance of equipment, markets, size, and how to find the answers to your questions as you grow. There is no cookie-cutter approach.”

The attendees recognized several creative opportunities to address many of the challenges brought forward. One was to consider ways for farmers to collaborate with their efforts on growing, marketing and selling products.

Tom Buller, specialty crop specialist at Douglas County Extension, reported on the FreshFarm HQ northeast Kansas food hub and Jeter Isley shared about the High Plains Food Co-op. In both cases, the models aggregate multiple small growers who then gain access to larger markets. FreshFarm HQ sells into the Kansas City area, and the High Plains Food Co-op sells to the Denver/front range region.

Christi Janssen brought examples of the brochures they had created for their CSA and for other farmers in the area who also show up at local markets or sell locally. They split the cost and divvied up taking time going door to door to deliver the brochures and talk to people about how it works. David Coltrain, a contractor with the Kansas Rural Center, shared about produce auctions, such as the one held in Dennis, Kansas, as a new marketing opportunity.

The attendees also brainstormed ways to increase producer education opportunities. “I am interested in learning more about whole-farm planning. How do I integrate a larger farm and build a whole-system farm that ties cover crops, commodity crops, specialty crops and livestock?” said Claire Zimmerman.

Dan Brooks asked whether farmers could setup an apprentice or labor “trade” program to provide extra labor for big projects and potential new farmers with opportunities to learn from various operators. “Hands-on learning is valuable for this type of education program. You have to learn how to make everything as efficient as possible because time is a valuable asset. Somebody has figured it out, and you can learn over time,” he said.

The farmers agreed that peer-to-peer connections, especially with other growers in a similar region or trying similar techniques, was valuable. Attending conferences, including out-of-state events in areas with more fruit and vegetable growers, can be a source of new information and ideas that aren’t yet being implemented by farmers in Kansas.

“Because we are growing differently than many orchards here — we are building trellises and training limbs — we are getting a lot of supplies and insights from Michigan, where more people are doing this sort of work,” said Spurgeon. Fellow fruit-grower Gieringer has found a lot of value in the North America Farm Direct Market Association, especially their Facebook group, and shared that he and his wife often “vacation” to out-of-state conferences to learn more about fruit operations.

Additionally, connecting growers through a closed Facebook group or monthly producer conference calls are opportunities the Kansas Rural Center is pursuing with the hopes of launching these and other ways for farmers to stay connected, ask questions, and share lessons in the coming year.

Next steps for the KRC project are individual interviews and grower profiles that will be published later this summer along with the Learning Circle summary. Also the KRC fall conference will feature several workshops for specialty crop growers.

Jennifer Kongs, as part of Bark Media, coordinated KRC’s Learning Circle meeting and prepared this report.

Sustainable Food and Farming News

Farm Bill...Continued from page 1

management. It rewrote the federal nutrition program (SNAP) so that an estimated two million would be kicked off the program rolls, called for a \$23 billion cut over ten years, and added a work requirement based on no evidence that such requirements actually help people out of poverty. And while requiring more people to work for SNAP benefits, the bill opens new loopholes for receiving farm subsidies-- by relaxing the "actively engaged in farming" definitions so that non-farm/non-working "farmers" can receive payments, further padding the pockets of large farmers and investors, and encouraging even greater consolidation of both land and financial resources.

But the bill was not defeated on its lack of merits. It was defeated by the divisive issue of immigration. The Freedom Caucus and other conservative House members want a vote on immigration law (the Dreamer Act) for their vote to pass a Farm Bill-- specifically to knock down the Dreamer Act that allows immigrants who arrived as minors without legal permission to stay and give them a path to citizenship.

This is where it stands at this writing in early June. House leaders are scrambling to bring the immigration issue to a vote to garner enough votes to pass the Farm Bill. But even if it passes the House, Senate Agriculture Chairman Pat Roberts, our own Kansas Senator, has already said the House bill stands no chance in the Senate. Now that the Senate Ag Committee has released its version, the real wrangling begins.

If no bill is passed before September 30, a Continuing Resolution is likely to keep basic programs operational. But we would lose a number of non-permanent programs that rely on annual authorization and appropriations such as the Value Added Producer Program, National Organic Certification Cost-share, Risk Management Education, and local and regional food promotion programs. These are smaller programs with small pots of funding, but they are critical to diversifying agricultural operations and the food system.

We have not had a chance to review the Senate Ag Committee bill in detail but a quick scan of communication from the National Sustainable Agriculture Coalition indicates it is a big improvement on the House version. It will be the best avenue to ensure local/regional food programs, conservation, and efforts to level the playing field are not

lost or damaged. Senate floor action will happen over the next few weeks. Then House and Senate will work to come up with a compromise bill by September end.

But beware of the prevailing political climate where the law making process is used to tack on unrelated or irrelevant issues, with a zero tolerance for compromise and no flexibility. How far will our state's Congressional leadership go to ensure that the Farm Bill does not become a pawn in a bigger game that we pay for with our farm and food security?

Next Steps? While the Farm Bill covers a vast territory in terms of food and agriculture issues, KRC will be watching the following issues in particular to promote diversification and opportunity in the nation's food system:

1) Support the Local FARMS Act (Local Food and Regional Market Supply Act) in the Farm Bill. Key programs that help farmers reach new markets, increase access to healthy food for the low income elderly and children, and develop new infrastructure for farm to fork efforts through outreach, cost-share and technical assistance include: Value Added Producer Grants Program, Farmers Market and Local Food Promotion Program, Senior Farmers Market Program, National Organic Certification Cost-share program, and Food Safety Outreach Program (that helped farmers meet new food safety compliance rules). Kansas farmers use these programs to diversify their operations and find new markets. Consumers benefit by increased availability of local healthy food. These programs were all eliminated in the House bill.

2) Support working lands conservation programs through the GROW Act. The GROW Act (Give Our Resources the Opportunity to Work) lays out a comprehensive strategy to improve soil health and water quality. It reforms the Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP), Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP), and Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) to target federal dollars in ways that protect the most sensitive acres while empowering producers to adopt and actively manage high-level conservation activities on working lands.

3) Support meaningful payment limitations across farm subsidy programs. Payment limits are debated every single farm bill. Basically payment reform hinges on the

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Farmlink Programs... *Continued from page 11*

success is how many full transfers or matches are accomplished, none of the programs is particularly successful, as this is the hardest and most elusive accomplishment. Measuring progress along the way is critical. It may well be that providing people information or resources that stops them from making a bad decision is as critical as making the perfect match. Follow up is also important as while a full transfer may not have happened the first try, owners and/or seekers may have used lessons learned to make a more successful match later.

Mentoring programs are good for both farmers and seekers. The goal of these programs is often not a farm transfer between the mentor and mentee, but the transfer of skills and knowledge that may help a beginner access land and opportunity down the road. But Program Coordinators noted that mentoring is a very valuable aspect of later career farming/ranching. The mentor role helps to prepare farmers/ranchers for transitioning their operation by formally moving a farmer/rancher into an advisory role. Thus, establishing some type of mentoring program --if carefully planned with clear goals for both mentor and mentee can be very helpful to helping beginners access land and opportunity.

Beginning farmer state tax credits have attracted a lot of participation and have helped beginners gain secure tenure in Iowa and Nebraska. (Minnesota started a program in 2018.) There is also a beginning farmer bond operating in a few of the states we surveyed (does not include Kansas). The federal tax exemption is for interest income earned from owner agreements with qualifying beginning farmers. Both federal and state tax credits aim to support beginning farmers who are from ag backgrounds and are working into becoming an owner. These programs do have some requirements including but not limited to farm financial courses, succession training, and a written legally binding succession plan. Studying the programs in Nebraska and Iowa in detail is the place to start to determine if a similar program would be helpful in other states.

Individual facilitation is helpful but how much a program offers varies—largely due to the amount of time

required. Coordinators offered a range of opinions on the value of providing incremental levels of facilitation. Consensus was that owners and seekers can use a lot of assistance in all phases of developing a farm or ranch transfer. But opinions diverged on the payback of additional investments of time assisting individual owner-seeker relationships. Only one program offered a permanent full time staff person to assist with non-family transfers. Some suggest that even a single conversation can provide valuable information. Others argue that facilitation is not a one-time deal and that facilitation is as much about helping develop relationships as it is about providing information. But bringing in experts when needed can be a huge help. An indirect strategy is to educate professionals who advise farm/ranch owners on a regular basis such as lawyers, accountants, tax preparers, lenders, etc. so they understand that there are alternatives to selling on the open market.

Interest in alternative land ownership models is growing. While not directly a part of the survey, we have also tapped into a range of options to traditional buyer-seller relationships. Land trusts, investor groups, community land ownership, self directed IRA's, and various leasing/selling arrangements offer some creative alternatives that can create a farming opportunity for a beginner and pass along a meaningful legacy for the farm owning family.

Next steps in the project. The above is a nutshell view of the report findings. The final report will be completed later this summer or fall. A draft version can be requested from KRC by contacting Mary Fund at mfund@kansaruralcenter.org or Julia Valliant the primary researcher and author at Indiana University at jdv@indiana.edu. A final report will be published by Perdue Extension in late summer or early fall.

KRC will also hold a stakeholder meeting in Ks. in the near future to review the research findings and explore interest in some kind of linking service or educational program. A second more public version of this meeting will take place at the fall KRC annual conference along with a couple of additional workshops on farm transitions/beginning farmer issues or alternative models of land ownership. The project is funded by NCR SARE Research and Education Funds.

Contact Mary Fund at mfund@kansaruralcenter.org.

Sustainable Food and Farming News

Adding Diversity on the Farm: Transitions to Specialty Crops and Other Enterprises

by Jean Stramel

A well-known adage of nature is “Diversity lends stability.” Many farmers employ this thinking by adding crops or species, and even enterprises to their operations so that they are not relying on one crop, market or pricing structure to be economically viable. Three Kansas farmers shared their strategies at the fall 2017 Kansas Rural Center conference for keeping their farming operations diversified. Their approaches ranged from organic grains to specialty crops to alternative markets.

Jack Geiger, Brown County farmer near Robinson, has operated a certified organic mixed grain and livestock farm in northeast Kansas with his family for over 25 years. Adding to his organic farming practices though is his understanding of “enterprise analysis.”

Years ago, he attended a KRC workshop where he heard the term “enterprise analysis” – where each part of a farm-

ing operation is looked at to see if it makes sense financially and environmentally. “If one is funding another, you may need to re-think what you are doing” Jack learned. So, he keeps careful track of how each enterprise is faring and adds or deletes those that do not carry their own weight or contribute to the success of the others.

“Diversity is great, but you have to be able to manage the diversity”. It was a trial and error process at first for Jack and his wife Deborah. First they added vegetable crops, but found it too labor intensive combined with their field crops, so now they grow only for their family. Following his parent’s example, he settled on field scale organic grain production, mostly food grade but sells some for organic livestock feed for meat and dairy. He also does some organic seed production.

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Sustainable Food and Farming News

Voting for the Future: KRC to Host Kansas Forums

by Natalie Fullerton

Being informed is critical to the choices we make. This is as true for community decisions and public policy decisions, as it is for individual and family decisions. The Kansas Rural Center wants Kansans to be informed and equipped to use their power to vote as a critical way to take action in their communities and state.

This summer KRC will travel around the state to host several Feeding Kansas Forums which aim to help inform on federal and state level food and farm policy updates, local level efforts to strengthen food and farm systems, and dialogue about civic engagement and ways to work together to reach the common vision of a healthy food and farm system.

The forums will provide time and space for farmers, ranchers, public health professionals, community leaders, policy maker's food, and other farm and community advocates to share ideas and information about mobilizing for change.

“With an emphasis on the power Kansans have to create the changes they seek, we hope folks will use these forums as an opportunity to talk about what’s needed in their communities, region, or state and how to encourage peers to head to the polls, write letters to the editor, or other ways to strengthen civic engagement,” says Natalie Fullerton, Program Director at the Kansas Rural Center.

Each forum will include a complimentary dinner, presenters, and the opportunity to visit with other attendees. Tentative locations include Norton, Cimarron, Girard and Concordia. Stay tuned for dates and agendas.

These forums are part of KRC’s “Community Food Solutions for a Healthier Kansas” initiative and Integrated Voter Engagement project, which aims to improve economy, community, environment, and health in Kansas by strengthening civic engagement and public policy support that better incorporates Kansas farms and communities into the state’s healthy food supply chain.

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KRC Welcomes New Staff



The Kansas Rural Center (KRC) is pleased to announce the addition of Caryl Hale of Norton, Ks. to the KRC staff. Caryl will join KRC as a Field Coordinator for all aspects of KRC’s grassroots engagement work including building relationships with constituents

across the state but primarily in western and central Kansas.

She will be involved in KRC’s educational activities that advance community or regional dialogue around state and local food and farming systems and related health equity issues through leadership development, mobilizing communities, and voter registration education. Health equity issues include local food access and availability, access to health care, education funding, state budget and revenue analysis, opportunities in specialty crop or food production and marketing for local economic development, and federal farm bill programs that encourage local food systems and environmentally sound farming practices.

Caryl has owned and operated her own business, Hale Storm Press, designing and managing websites since 2015, and has been an active volunteer in Northwest Kansas local and regional food circles and community organizations. She serves as the Norton Farmers Market manager, and on the Norton County Arts Council, and as Women’s Chair of the Norton County Farm Bureau.

“Caryl brings a variety of skills and talents to KRC, as well as a thoughtful approach to working with a wide political spectrum of people and opinions,” stated Mary Fund, KRC Executive Director. “She has been a board member for KRC for three years, and though we lose her from the board, we gain a seasoned spokesperson for KRC and rural issues.”

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definition of what constitutes farm management. The House bill undoes modest provisions made in the 2014 farm bill and opens the door to further land and economic consolidation and blatant abuse of taxpayer dollars by allowing corporations and individuals to reorganize to receive multiple payments. It is hypocritical to consider adding work requirements to recipients of America's Supplemental Nutrition Program (SNAP) program while removing the "work requirements" for farmers, non-farmers and land-owners to receive increased subsidies.

4) Support strong organic standards through the National Organic Standards Board (NOSB), Organic Certification Cost-share and organic research. Organic farming offers multiple benefits to conservation and resource stewardship, climate change mitigation, and to farmers seeking to take advantage of the growing organic economic sector. Changes proposed so far would weaken the federal organic standards, and open the NOSB to more corporate industry members. This benefits the corporate organic industry sector and largest players, while taking control away from family farmers and consumers, and paves the way to gut the organic sector as standards would become meaningless.

All farmers and ranchers are dealing with high levels of stress as trade wars loom, conventional commodity prices remain low, and input costs remain high. Consumers and citizens demand healthier food, more locally sourced products and more economic opportunities, which agriculture and food system related businesses can provide. Thus the 2018 Farm Bill is crucial to our food and farm future. KRC will be sending electronic updates over the next few weeks.

Because the Senate Ag Committee version came out just as this was going to press, KRC will be sending out electronic updates with analysis and alerts over the next few weeks.

Contact mfund@kansasruralcenter.org to be sure you are on our e-list to receive these.

Livestock and Poultry on Cover Crops Focus of July 24 Field Day

Farmers and professionals interested in soil health practices are invited to see one of Kansas' best at a field day this summer. No-till on the Plains, in partnership with a large group of Kansas conservation organizations is hosting an educational tour on July 24 at the Darin and Nancy Williams Farm, 2293 26th Rd., Waverly, Kan. Registration is limited to the first 150 individuals.

Registration begins at 8 a.m., and at 8:30 a.m. attendees will see several soils demonstrations from NRCS soil health specialist Candy Thomas. A number of opportunities to see and discuss cover crops, non-permanent livestock fencing, poultry management, direct seeding equipment and wildlife plantings will round out the morning. Lunch will be provided at the Waverly Community Center.

In the afternoon attendees will hear how soil health and cover crops have evolved over the past three decades on the Carroll, Ohio farm of David Brandt, Brandt is a leader in the adoption of soil health innovations in the United States. Host Darin Williams will explain how his farm, his business and soils has thrived applying regenerative agriculture principles. Finally, the group will learn about the unique forage utilization strategies used by Jacob Miller, 7M Ranch, Culbertson, Neb. The day will conclude with a question and answer session.

Partners and Sponsors for the July 24 field day include: No-till on the Plains, The Nature Conservancy of Kansas, Kansas Alliance for Wetlands and Streams, Natural Ag Solutions, Kansas WRAPS/EPA, Kansas Grazing Lands Coalition, Coffey County Conservation District, Kansas Water Office, Kansas Dept. Agriculture, Kansas Rural Center, Kansas Association of Conservation Districts, Live Wire Fence Supply, Green Cover Seed, Farmers Business Network, K-Coe, and Noble Research Institute.

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Adding Diversity...

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He also bought a grain cleaner. He knew that in organic markets to do a good business you must sell a clean product, the best it can be. "You have one chance to make a first impression. Organic agriculture lives and dies on personal interaction," Geiger says.

Another piece of Geiger's farm diversity is direct market beef. This enterprise is complex and capital intensive from calf to selling a box of beef to a customer. "In some ways it is the most profitable. You get ahead when one enterprise on your farm makes profit in another enterprise. I raise wheat ... a by-product of wheat is straw. I use the wheat straw for bedding, manure in the straw becomes fertilizer."

The Geigers have learned that by increasing the diversity on the farm, you are better able to handle what life throws at you – weather, equipment breakdowns, etc. He has been able to buy equipment at auctions for good prices to manage his diverse enterprises, but this is becoming harder. He said, "I used to bid against the iron man." Geiger feels this is no longer the case for younger generations entering farming, as there are fewer smaller, older pieces of equipment available.

Geiger doesn't borrow money to plant crops or to finance exploratory ventures. He feels fortunate that this is the case, so he shares what he has learned through You Tube videos. (Check out "Geiger Farm" on You Tube).

Scott Thellman, Douglas County farmer from north of Lawrence,

stands in contrast to Geiger. Thellman relies on a stream of credit and a good relationship with his banker to sustain his specialty crop operation outside of Lawrence, KS. This has allowed him to grow his business rapidly. He farms 1000 acres, including 60 acres of vegetables, half grown using conventional methods and half grown organically. He also has hay ground and 100 acres of row crops. Every crop grown has an enterprise budget, which he considers essential to track expenses and profits. Even with premium prices for some crops, it is hard to make a profit, so carefully managing rotations and inputs are essential. He sells wholesale produce into Kansas City markets, as well as through a CSA and to chefs.

Thellman is a first generation farmer who started as a laborer on a neighbor's farm in 2007. Once he decided to farm himself, he realized one way he could get into farming was hay. So, he bought old haying equipment, including a \$100 small square bailer. After studying agriculture at Iowa State University, a Kansas neighbor talked him into applying for NRCS EQIP high tunnel cost share. While he really didn't like the idea, he did it and started out with a 20 by 96 foot high tunnel. Every year since has seen a doubling of the amount of vegetables he grows.

In 2016, he went from 18 acres of vegetables to 50 – a big leap – and he lost money to pest problems. He tightened up his expenses, holding back on equipment purchases and in 2017 profits were much better. Now his pest control is better, having learned some important mistakes to avoid. He and his banker agree that things are much better, and he has been able to make a few equipment upgrades recently.

Thellman recommends keeping an open mind and networking with other growers, large and small, organic and conventional. "We're all in it together," he says. "I rent a manure spreader from a large farm, and get manure to spread on my vegetable fields. They need to get rid of it."

His operation includes a CSA as part of his diversity. "Don't put your eggs in one basket – one large wholesale customer just went bankrupt, but our diverse markets allow us to withstand these set-backs."

Thellman bought a refrigerator box truck, delivering 4 boxes on his first trip. But now he is a broker and transports produce into Kansas City for others, mostly out of necessity to keep the truck filled and paying its way. He is a broker for Amish growers in the Jamesport, Missouri area and distributes their produce.

His coolers serve the many growers he networks with, including the Amish, and he pays more than big distributors. He believes it is important to build relationships within these communities. "By brokering, my truck is always full. I have more customers because I can offer more products, which leads to more customers."

Paula Sims, near Newton in central Kansas, direct markets chickens, beef and pork, provides meats and eggs to a CSA, and sells at a Wichita farmers market from her 80 acres. She spent time on her grandparent's farm but had no first-hand farm experience when she and her husband, who was raised on a farm, moved back to Kansas from the Northwest, and decided to buy a farm and raise livestock. She now

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works on the farm full time while he works off full time.

They started with chickens, then added cows. They eventually settled on the smaller Dexter breed. The herd is now up to 50 cows, rotationally grazed on mixed species pasture. Pigs are raised on pasture but they are now down to one boar and sow so fencing needs can be addressed. Sims explains, “there were too many, too fast”.

Chickens are moved around the pastures housed at night in a stock trailer, bought as a good deal because it had no floor boards, just right for chickens. The chickens follow the cows through the paddocks eating insects and breaking up manure. Livestock are kept in a barnyard during the winter and fed hay, manure is composted, then applied to garden fields, so no inputs are

bought from off farm.

The Sims are part of a cooperative CSA where they supply the meats, eggs, and fish from a stocked pond. Other farms provide produce, bread, blueberries and honey. Customers receive a box each week, and pay on line. “It’s very easy and I love it,” Sims notes.

Meats are also sold directly at the farmers market at 21st and Ridge Road, Wichita. They grow about 1 acre of vegetables for themselves and to market. “I’m already at the farmers market to sell my meat, so taking vegetables is an added bonus. The produce sells really well, and we make a lot,” Sims adds. “I love the feedback from customers and answering their questions.” She takes advantage of the three to four thousand people who walk by at the farmers market to do outreach for her direct market sales. Sims keeps detailed enterprise budgets

for each operation, including labor and packaging costs, and is willing to share her templates. She admits farming like she does is a lot of work, but also fulfilling and enjoyable. She is proud to help customers know where their food comes from and encourages visitors.

Geiger, Thellman and Sims have developed diverse operations that contribute to their success. Their farms represent a range of size and crops from certified organic grains and livestock, to specialty crops, and smallscale poultry and meat production. It is the diversity that is key. It helps to survive in uncertain markets, pricing systems and through weather extremes. By sharing their stories, they hope others might be able to avoid some of the pitfalls typical in farming.

Jean Stramel is a free lance writer from Lucas, Ks.

Thank you Community Mercantile!



KRC extends our warmest appreciation to the Community Merc in Lawrence, Ks. and all its customers and supporters for their generosity to KRC as the March “Change Recipient”. KRC received \$6,592!

Started in January of 2014, The Merc Co+op’s Change for our Community Program gives shoppers the opportunity to donate their pocket change to local community organizations each time they shop. Each month, The Merc Co+op chooses a different Change recipient and all donations collected that month go to that organization. Since January 2014, the Change program has raised nearly \$200,000 for three dozen different local organizations.

KRC is humbled to be included as a Change Recipient, and proud to be supported by The Merc community.



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Change Service Requested



*Next issue will be the Fall 2018 issue,
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