



Prairies like the one above and other grassland and pastures continue to be broken out for crop production around the Midwest including Kansas. But the multiple benefits to water quality protection, soil conservation, and biodiversity including pollinators are well known. Researchers, conservationists, and farmers in Iowa are exploring use of prairie strips within crop fields to provide some of the conservation benefits while allowing producers to maintain some crop production. See article page 10. (KRC File Photo)

The Kansas “March to Zero”: What Happens Now the Legislature’s Gone Home

by Paul Johnson & Mary Fund

The sigh of relief could be heard across Kansas as the longest legislative session in state history finally came to a close. The stalemate over the state budget was finally over. But relief was short-lived as the reality of the biggest tax increase in state history goes into effect. \$384 million in tax increases were passed to balance the state budget along with the authority for the Governor to find another \$50 million in cuts.

On July 1, the state sales tax increased to 6.5%. Kansans will pay the second highest state sales tax on food in the nation. When local sales taxes are added, most Kansans will pay the nation’s **highest** tax on food, while 333,000 businesses retain their 2012 tax exemption and pay no taxes.

Relief quickly gave way to finger pointing and political spin. The painful chaos of the final days of the session was the fault of freshmen legislators, claimed Senate leadership. They had never been through a tax debate before. Never mind that this was not your father’s tax debate (or that it was even a debate; most decisions were made behind closed doors by relatively few participants).

Continued on page 12

Rural Papers

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Rural Papers is the voice of the Kansas Rural Center, Inc., (KRC), a non-profit organization that promotes the long-term health of the land and its people through research, education, and advocacy. The KRC cultivates grassroots support for public policies that encourage family farming and stewardship of soil and water. KRC is committed to economically viable, environmentally sound, and socially sustainable rural culture. The KRC is funded by private foundations, churches, and individual contributions.

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Small Farmer Commentary Book Review

“Lentil Underground” Tells Our Story

by Mary Fund

*Liz Carlisle has done organic and sustainable agriculture a huge favor. Only a few pages into her book, **Lentil Underground: Renegade Farmers and the Future of Food in America**, I recognized not only my husband and I's story, but that of countless others around the country in our 40-year quest for a different vision of agriculture. This book comes just as those of us who have been at it 20, 30 or more years, are seeing increasing interest from a new generation of farmers and consumers, and have begun turning the task over to them.*

Carlisle, a fellow at the Center for Diversified Farming Systems at the University of California, Berkeley, and Montana native, recounts the story of the organic/sustainable agriculture movement in Montana. Not the first place you think of when you think organic farmers and natural foods ... you might think California, East coast or the Pacific Northwest, or any place with more urban markets. But that this happened and is happening in Montana—the quintessential Western rural state—is an important story to tell. It is a story all the more important because it has been replicated to some degree or another by groups of individuals involved in sustainable and organic agriculture around the country.

Here is the story of a group of stubbornly independent, hard working people trying to make a living in a place they love, protect the land by working with nature not against it, and avoid the straitjacket of modern industrial farming's dependence on fossil fuels, corporate inputs and markets. To do this—while facing all the same challenges of credit, bills, expensive health care, and weather extremes that conventional ag faces, plus deal with government programs hell bent on putting up barriers ~ all while having to resist the laughter or disdain of neighbors who think you are crazy, takes drive, passion and vision. Carlisle captures this along with the

unique personalities and perspectives that run the Montana gamut from “gun-toting libertarians to Christian homesteaders to peace-sign waving environmental activists”.

Underground of course has double meaning. Underground in terms of soil health— these farmers were heavily into building soil health long before it was cool to mainstream ag or conservation agencies and researchers, or the term “cover crop” was commonplace; and underground in terms of resistance—resistance to “the status quo is inevitable” mantra of the capital intensive, chemical dependent agriculture promoted by scientists, researchers and primarily by the corporations selling the inputs.

The story is largely the quest to develop an alternative agriculture, to find crops other than dryland wheat and barley, suitable for Montana, that will reduce input costs while providing nitrogen and nutrients to the soil, not harm the natural environment, and provide a decent living for the farmer.

Specifically, Carlisle tells the story of Dave Oien, who returned to his family's small Montana farm in 1976 after stints at the University of Chicago and University of Montana, determined to introduce solar heat collectors to his parent's farm and the larger community. More importantly he came home determined to find a new direction for their small family farm.

Oien's search led him to Black Medic, a nitrogen fixing native plant despised by farmers as a common weed, which led to lentils, another dryland nitrogen fixing crop but one that can serve as human food, which led to a cooperative business, Timeless Seeds, now Timeless Natural Foods. The path was not easy or clear.

Continued on page 3

Continued From page 2...

“When Oien seeded his first organic lentil crop, it was a radical act,” writes Carlisle. “On the northern Plains, farmers specialize in either wheat or barley.....all other life forms stand aside so that farmers can grow one plant year after year aiming to fill the bin each August.” If wheat and barley are the sum total of modern technology and inputs, lentils, an ancient grain, are the opposite.

“Instead of mining the soil for nutrients... this Robin Hood of the dryland prairie gathers the abundant fertility of the aboveground world—of the air, in fact—and shares it freely beneath the earth’s surface. Inside the plant’s nodules bacteria surreptitiously convert atmospheric nitrogen into a community nutrient supply.” In a diverse rotation they also keep weed pressure at bay, and do not need chemicals at all. In other words, the plants perform the functions expensive industrial inputs do.

“If wheat is the symbol of rugged individualism,” Carlisle writes, “then lentils embody that other agrarian hallmark all too often overlooked in the Western mythos: community.”

Looking at the struggles of the “lentil underground” community and their more current recruits some of whom focus as much on fruits and vegetable production as on grains, will help all of us as we move forward toward a new vision of agriculture. That vision mimics natural systems offering a diverse mix of crops and ecological benefits, and makes food – and food related livelihoods– accessible to more people.

KRC Board Appoints New Executive Director

The Kansas Rural Center (KRC) Board of Directors announces the appointment of Mary Fund to its Executive Director position. Fund has been serving as the Interim Executive Director since January 2015, and is a long time KRC staff member.

“We are pleased that Mary has accepted the position, and feel that her history with the organization, and her background in sustainable agriculture circles, make her uniquely suited for the job,” stated Stu Shafer, KRC board president. “We look forward to working with her and the other staff to build on KRC’s accomplishments and rich history.” Most recently, Fund has been KRC’s Policy and Program Director and editor of KRC’s newsletter, Rural Papers, and the Weekly Legislative Policy Updates.

“KRC has a long history of promoting a diversified, ecologically based, and economically viable food and farming system,” stated Fund. “In recent years, our vision has expanded to include greater local and regional food production, promotion of beginning farmer opportunities, and healthy accessible food for all Kansans.”

“We have historically maintained a two-pronged approach to our mission,” Fund explained. “First, we offer practical information and how-to education to farmers, ranchers, and growers seeking more environmentally sound, diversified practices and marketing options; and second, we identify and advocate public policy at a state and federal level that supports a more sustainable agriculture and food system.”

“Historically we have identified emerging issues, asked the right questions, and focused attention on them, growing the grassroots support until they become recognized and accepted as the broad issues they are. This was the case with a range of issues from the 1980’s farm crisis of foreclosures and bankruptcies, water quality concerns, management intensive grazing systems, community wind, and how Kansas could and should produce more of its food locally. Our work on all of these has been and is geared toward giving people– both growers and consumers– greater control over farm, food and resource decisions.”

Continued on page 7

I recall moving back to our farm after my father’s death in 1978, and saying “Only if we can do this differently. We are not into big is better. We will avoid debt. We will not use chemicals. We will rely on nature and biology as our guide, and we will find kindred spirits.”

Like Dave Oien and his Montana neighbors, we found other like minded farmers scattered across the state: all of

us asking tough questions, sharing what we learned, and working together. Here’s to many more years for all of us in the so-called “lentil underground.” □

Lentil Underground: Renegade Farmers and the Future of Food in America by Liz Carlisle, 2015. Gotham Books. ISBN: 978-1-592-40924-4

Sustainable Food and Farming News

Announcing KRC's 2015 Farm & Food Conference

“Roots, Shoots and Boots: Healthy Farms, Healthy People from the Ground Up” November 13 – 14, 2015, Manhattan, Ks.

Mark your calendars! This two day conference promises to have something for a broad spectrum of attendees—from conventional, organic and specialty crop farmers, to beginning and established farmers, and local food advocates and community leaders.

The first day will be dedicated to a **Soil Health Forum: The Nexus Between Cover Crops, No Till and Organic Systems**. Featured speakers on day one will include Dr. Bianca Moebius-Clune, USDA NRCS soil Health Division Director, as well as Jeff Moyer, Rodale Institute's Research Director, who will speak on organic no till and opportunities in organic; and Klaas Martens, who operates a 1400 acre certified organic grain farm near Penn Yan, NY. Klaas is well known and respected in organic circles for his broad knowledge of cover crops, crop rotations and heirloom grains.

The day will also feature a panel of cover crop/no till and organic farmers discussing challenges and lessons learned, and identifying issues in common.

The second day will feature keynote speaker David Hunt, a nationally recognized teacher and leader in organizing for social change. Hunt will set a tone of action for policy development, issue and community organizing, and community building throughout a packed day of diverse sessions and speakers. Breakout sessions will focus on local food systems, community food solutions and economic opportunities, farm transitions and beginning farmer opportunities, health-agriculture connections, state and federal food policy, and more. More information about the agenda will be posted as it develops.

Call for Sponsors

The conference each year would not be possible without the generous support of sponsors. Sponsorship allows KRC to produce a top quality conference complete with renowned speakers, diverse workshops, exhibits, locally sourced food and other opportunities that create a positive, meaningful experience for conference participants. Several different levels and benefits of sponsorship are available now with each level providing a unique way to support the conference.

For more information as it becomes available, and to sign up as a sponsor, please visit our website at www.kansasruralcenter.org or contact Natalie Fullerton at 866-579-5469 or nfullerton@kansasruralcenter.org, or Mary Fund at mfund@kansasruralcenter.org. KRC staff and board members will also be calling upon would-be sponsors in the coming weeks. ☐



About 180 people attended each day of the 2014 conference, which featured dynamite presentations by Dr. Fred Kirschenmann, former director of the Leopold Center in Iowa and Ricardo Salvador, Union of Concerned Scientists. Listen to their presentations on our website.

Feeding Kansas Summits to Feature “Ideas Into Action”

by Natalie Fullerton

KRC is hitting the road late summer and early fall to host four regional Feeding Kansas “Ideas into Action” summits across the state. These summits will bring together farmers, local food advocates, local and state policy makers, Extension, institutional food leaders, food business leaders, health leaders, and ag and health organizations with the common goal of advancing and mobilizing grassroots organizing for local and even state level policy change.

Summits will be held in:

- Colby, August 12 Community Building
- Dodge City, August 13 at the Western State Bank Expo Center
- El Dorado, September 23 at the Civic Center
- Manhattan, September 24 at the Manhattan Public Library

KRC is entering the third year of the “Community Food Solutions for a Healthier Kansas” initiative. The purpose of the initiative is to advance public policy solutions to better incorporate Kansas farms into the supply chain thereby improving Kansas’s economy, community, environment, and health status.

Last year, KRC toured the state hosting Farm-to-Fork summits asking two basic questions along the way to people in all sectors of the food and farm systems, opening up dialogue on the current environment and policies around Kansas farms, food, and community health.

The questions were: How to you envision the Kansas farm and food

future? And what’s standing in the way of achieving that vision? Dialogue from these questions helped shape the report, “*Feeding Kansas: Statewide Farm & Food System Assessment with a Plan for Public Action.*” (The report can be downloaded at www.kansasruralcenter.org/feeding-kansas)

While the first two years of this initiative were heavy on research and asking questions to pinpoint where change needs to occur, year three will focus on taking action. The Feeding Kansas report highlights seven specific policy recommendations that echo what KRC heard from folks across the state last year as critical to revolutionizing farming and food in Kansas.

This year’s Feeding Kansas summits, will provide strategic tools and ideas to help folks organize at the local and state levels to help support not only the *Feeding Kansas* policy recommendations but other endeavors in their communities. As we approach 2016, also an election year, these tools will be critical to ensure that farming, food, and health voices are heard, especially in rural Kansas.

Those who attend the summits will hear from regional and state experts to learn how to meet with and talk to legislators and local policy makers, serve on a community task force or start your own, write an op-ed and talk to the media, and how to tell your story and testify in front of a committee.

Pledge Action for Feeding Kansas

While the summits are still a few weeks away, there is no time like the present to get engaged in this initiative to help support the Feeding Kansas recommendations. KRC needs your help in growing a network of grassroots citizens and partners to educate fellow community members and local and state policy makers about the public policy recommendations set forth in the Feeding Kansas report.

To help advance the recommendations in Feeding Kansas, visit www.kansasruralcenter.org/support-feeding-kansas-take-action and pledge at least three action goals that you can accomplish over the next year.

KRC will provide the tools needed to achieve those goals starting with an “advocacy toolbox” found at kansasruralcenter.org/cfs and the Feeding Kansas summits. While you’re there, don’t forget to sign up for the Feeding Kansas: News & Action newsletter to get action alerts, updates on the initiative, and upcoming activities from KRC and partners.

To attend the summits, please register at kansasruralcenter.org/cfs. There is no cost to attend. Each summit will include a lunch featuring locally sourced ingredients. We need pre-registration in order to have an accurate lunch count.

For questions about this initiative or upcoming summits, contact Natalie Fullerton at nfullerton@kansasruralcenter.org or (866) 579-5469. Registration info will be posted on our website. □

State Food and Farm Task Force Drafting Recommendations for the 2016 Legislature

by Cole Cottin

The legislative stalemate over Kansas's budget may have caused the governor-appointed Local Food and Farm Task Force to cancel its June meeting this year, but the group remains focused on drafting and submitting its report to the Kansas legislature by the end of this year.

The task force's eighth public meeting will take place at K-State Extension's Olathe Research Station this summer. After a tour of the facilities, task force members will take a crack at honing in on their recommendations. Previous meetings focused on information gathering, but the July meeting marks a shift for members who must now synthesize what they have learned into a meaningful report - due to the legislature at the end of this year.

The Local Food and Farm Task Force, established in 2014 with the passage of Senate Bill 286, is responsible for preparing a statewide food and farm plan containing policy and funding recommendations aimed at increasing production and consumption of Kansas grown foods. Thus far, task force discussions indicate that the report's emphasis will be on impacting Kansas's small but growing fruit and vegetable sector.

Topics and presentations at previous task force meetings have included:

- January: The big picture of fruit and vegetable production, distribution, and access issues and needs in Kansas. This included a presentation

focusing on how each of KRC's Feeding Kansas findings and recommendations resonate with the Task Force's four priorities.

- February: access to farm loan and crop insurance programs, and potential for development of vegetable crops in Kansas. Emphasis on the need to gather current and future economic impact information for the fruit and vegetable sector, particularly dollars earned and jobs created over time.

- March: logistics for learning what members need to learn before writing the report.

- April: understanding of scale and opportunities and an emphasis on Extension support needs.

- May: various aspects of specialty crop production and locally-grown food distribution in Kansas. A key take-away was that Kansas could greatly benefit from the creation of an interdisciplinary clearinghouse for information and education through Kansas State University. Currently, many departments at KSU as well as Extension hold a great deal of farm and food system related information, but the university lacks a cohesive central entity to gather and communicate that information broadly.

Because the task force has repeatedly identified Kansas State University Research and Extension as a critical resource to leverage and support to more effectively develop Kansas's local food system and fruit and vegetable sectors, KSU's Dean of Agriculture, John Floros, has been invited to meet with the group in August.

The task force's final report to the legislature must address the following four priorities:

- 1) Identification of financial opportunities, technical support and training necessary for local and specialty crop production;

- 2) Identification of strategies and funding needs to make fresh and affordable locally grown foods more accessible;

- 3) Identification of existing local food infrastructures for processing, storing and distributing food and recommendations for potential expansion; and

- 4) Strategies for encouragement of farmers' markets, roadside markets and local grocery stores in un-served and underserved areas.

At every meeting so far, at least one task force member has referenced the recommendations in Feeding Kansas: Statewide Farm and Food System Assessment with a Plan for Public Action, a report issued by the Kansas Rural Center in late 2014. Members have stated that they see Feeding Kansas as an important guide for their work.

Recommendations in KRC's report, available in full online at: <http://kansaruralcenter.org/feeding-kansas/>, include:

- Supporting and sustaining food and farm councils across Kansas, to better engage Kansas voices in shaping policies to address Kansas's agriculture and food needs;

Contd. on page 7

Feeding Kansas News

State Farm & Food Task Force...

Continued from page 6

- Creating a central clearinghouse for information related to Kansas farming and food systems, to provide more clarity and better enable Kansans to engage in those systems;

- Advancing fruit and vegetable production and consumption in Kansas by improving farmer access to necessary research-based information, technical assistance, stable markets, and adequate protections for the production of those food products.

The Feeding Kansas recommendations stem from extensive dialogue with citizens across the state who wish to see Kansas farms better incorporated into state's food supply chain, thereby strengthening Kansas's economic, community, environmental, and health status.

For current information on when and where the next State Farm and Food Task Force meeting will be, or for any other task force related questions, contact Julie Roller at the Kansas Department of Agriculture: Julie.Roller@kda.ks.gov. □

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Savor the Season Recipe Cards Available from KDA

In an effort to add cooking inspiration and education into farmers' markets, From the Land of Kansas has partnered with Kansas Farm Bureau to launch Savor the Season. The campaign promotes Kansas specialty crops. Savor the Season is designed to educate and excite consumers about cooking with local produce using tasty, seasonal recipes and providing tips and tricks to cooking with these special ingredients.

Eye-catching and informational recipe cards, featuring ten different Kansas fruits, vegetables or herbs are available for farmers to share with consumers. Each recipe card provides information on the selection, storage, nutrition and kitchen tips for the featured seasonal crop from a registered dietician and a chef. Recipes were created by Kansas' very own Chef Alli.

Both farmers and farmers' markets can reap great benefits from engaging

with the Savor the Season campaign. Educating consumers about Kansas crops and how they can be prepared for cooking makes the shopping process less intimidating. Asparagus, peaches, zucchini and kale are some of the crops spotlighted in the recipes.

Each recipe includes a full nutrition panel, provided by Kansas Value Added Center, housed at Kansas State University, as well as tips on washing, storing and flavor pairing for the spotlighted fruit or vegetable.

The recipe cards are available for specialty crop farmers and market managers to order. They can be found at Shop.FromtheLandofKansas.com/SavortheSeason. Shipping is the only cost for farmers and farmers' markets who are ordering the recipe cards. For more information, please contact KDA, farmersmarket @kda.ks.gov. □

KRC News

Continued from page 3

In her years at KRC, Fund has worked primarily on conservation, natural resource and agricultural policy issues, as well as serving as the coordinator of KRC's Clean Water Farm Project from 1996-2012. She has monitored state and federal farm and resource policy and worked on numerous advocacy projects such as the 1980's farm crisis organizing project, anti-corporate farming campaign, and on various state water policy issues, serving on a number of water advisory boards. From 2003-2008, she served on the Sustainable Agriculture Coalition (now the National Sustainable Agriculture Coalition) Coordinating Council and as Co-Chair 2005-2008.

In 2005, she was awarded the John Vogelsberg Sustainable Agriculture Award by the Kansas Organic Producers, and is a current board member of the national Organic Farming Research Foundation. Mary and her husband, Ed Reznicek, own and operate a 400 acre certified organic farm in Nemaha County. □

National Strategy to Promote Pollinator Health Drops the Ball on Pesticide Protection

by Joanna Voigt

On May 19, 2015, the White House released its National Strategy to Promote Pollinator Health, aimed at restoring and protecting honey bees and other pollinator populations. The Strategy is the result of a memorandum issued by President Obama in June 2014, directing an interagency task force to create a strategy for pollinator protection in the US.

The goals of the pollinator strategy are to reduce honey bee colony losses to economically sustainable levels, increase monarch butterfly numbers to levels adequate for protecting the annual migration, and to restore or enhance millions of acres of land for pollinator habitat through combined public and private actions.

Specific targets of the National Strategy to Promote Pollinator Protection include:

- Reducing honey bee colony losses during winter to no more than 15 percent within 10 years;
- Increasing the monarch butterfly population to 225 million butterflies in the overwintering grounds in Mexico by 2020;
- Restoring or enhancing 7 million acres of land for pollinators over the next five years.

Under the strategy, federal agencies will include pollinator habitat in their property management schemes, and encourage state highway and utilities' administrators to plant wildflowers along roadways. There is a modest increase in funding for bee and

pollinator research, and a push to find ways to minimize pollinators' exposure to pesticides. The Strategy also includes expansion of public education about pollinators.

“... if the pesticide issue isn't addressed, the pollinator population decline problem will not be solved.”

While many people laud the White House's efforts to protect and restore pollinator populations, a number of pollinator conservation groups and experts were quick to point out that while the plan is a good first step towards protecting pollinators, it falls short of assuring success. The plan is rich in pollinator habitat initiatives, but it is significantly lacking in pesticide protection and enforcement initiatives, which many experts consider “a major factor in the [pollinator] population declines,” according to an article by Michael Vines in the New York Times, published May 19, 2015.

The Xerces Society for Invertebrate Conservation said in a statement released after the unveiling of the National Strategy, “One area where the pollinator strategy falls short is

protecting pollinators from pesticides, especially systemic insecticides like neonicotinoids. Neonicotinoids are the most widely used insecticides in the world and there are demonstrated links between their use and declines in bees and other wildlife.”

Neonicotinoids are a class of systemic insecticides, most commonly used as seed coating for corn, soybeans, cotton and canola. Neonicotinoids have been shown to cause significant harm to honeybees and other pollinators, and are highly persistent in the environment.

Tim Tucker, Kansas beekeeper and President of the American Beekeeping Federation, summed up his thoughts on the importance of addressing the pesticide issue during his address to the North American Pollinator Protection Campaign International Conference in Washington DC in October 2014. Tucker stated that while providing habitat is critical to protecting and restoring pollinator populations, if the pesticide issue isn't addressed the pollinator population decline problem will not be solved.

Since the release of the National Strategy for Pollinator Protection in May, the United States Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) has announced their piece of the plan which includes limiting the use of some bee-harming pesticides when honey bee colonies are contracted for pollination. *Continued on page 9*

Sustainable Farming News

Pollinator Strategy...

Continued from page 8

The pesticides targeted in the EPA's proposed new rule include neonicotinoids, chlorpyrifos and endosulfan.

While it is a step in the right direction for the EPA to turn attention towards restricting bee-harming pesticides, the proposed EPA rule falls short of significant protection for pollinators in a number of ways. Because its rule applies only to blooming plants and only for situations involving contracted pollination services, whole swaths of pesticide use and entire populations of pollinators, both domesticated and native, receive no protection at all. In the Midwest, most agricultural crops do not require pollination services, effectively exempting farmers from any restrictions in use of these pesticides.

Just because a plant does not require pollination does not mean that honey bees and other pollinators won't visit the plant and utilize the resources it has to offer. In fact, bees and other pollinators are known to visit agricultural crops for nectar, pollen, and even for moisture from the gutation fluid released by the corn plant.

Because pesticides such as neonicotinoids are systemic, they are taken in when pollinators utilize the plant resources and wind up not only in the bees and pollinators, themselves, but also in their hives and nests. In honey bee hives, neonicotinoids have been found in the beeswax, the pollen, and propolis, where they accumulate with time.



Additionally, the EPA's proposed rule applies only to foliar applications not to other application methods like soil drenches and seed coatings. While the impacts from these application methods may seem less acute in the very short-term than foliar spraying, these applications have serious consequences for pollinators and the environment.

As Lex Horan, Midwest Organizer, Pesticide Action Network, points out, "When neonic-coated seeds are planted, only 2 - 20% of the pesticide is absorbed into the plant, while the rest washes into the soil, water and air. A study released in May 2015 and published by PLoS ONE - The Public Library of Science, found that honey bee colonies kept near neonic-treated cornfields had higher rates of infection from common honey bee pathogens. And large bee die-offs during planting season remain a serious issue, as planting equipment kicks neonic-laced dust into the air and onto nearby flowering plants as coated seeds are injected into the soil."

Given the potentially drastic consequences of systemic pesticides

pollinators and the environment, it is wise to take a look at the benefits they provide when used in agricultural systems and to weigh them against the potential costs.

Recent studies indicate that the efficacy of seed coatings on yields is uncertain. Dr. Jonathan Lundgren, a leading USDA Agricultural Research Service entomologist studying the effects of neonicotinoids, stated: "Farmers should question whether applying neonicotinoid seed treatments are more harmful than helpful on their farms. Public sector research on insecticidal seed treatments in soybeans from across the US consistently shows that spraying pests when they exceed thresholds is more profitable than prophylactic use of insecticidal seed treatments. In corn, I have not seen evidence that there are insect pests—beyond those targeted by Bt—that warrant consistent and prophylactic management. Finally, pest management decisions need to account for the costs that insecticides have against non-target organisms like predators and pollinators." □

Sustainable Food and Farm News

Is Age Old Prairie the Solution to Modern Agriculture's Problems?

by Ken Roseboro

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An innovative project is using an age-old ecosystem to help solve problems resulting from modern agriculture. A team of scientists at Iowa State University is reintroducing strips of native prairie into Iowa's farms as a way to reduce soil erosion, prevent fertilizer pollution of waterways, and create new habitats for wildlife, insects, and pollinators.

"Think Outside the Box".

The idea for the project arose out of discussions among agriculture experts at Iowa State who were becoming concerned about negative environmental impacts of industrial agriculture in Iowa, particularly with reduced water quality and loss of wildlife habitats.

"We were looking for something to do to address those concerns without impacting the profitability of agriculture," says Lisa Schulte Moore, ISU associate professor of natural resource ecology and management. "We tried to think outside the box."

Their idea was to reintroduce the once predominant ecosystem of Iowa—prairie—into Iowa's farms, which are dominated by corn and soybean production. Until the mid-1800s, Iowa's landscape was dominated by prairie spreading across 85 percent of the state. But with the introduction of agriculture in the mid-19th century, Iowa's prairie gave way to the plow and today just 0.1 percent of Iowa's native prairie remains.

The ISU team, which included experts in agronomy, agricultural engineering, entomology, and ecology, chose the Neal Smith Wildlife Refuge in Prairie City, Iowa to conduct the prairie experiment. The 3,600-acre refuge contains the largest reconstructed prairie in Iowa.

Reduced soil loss and fertilizer runoff, increased wildlife

The project, titled STRIPS (Science-based Trials of Rowcrops Integrated with Prairie Strips), began in 2007. Prairie strips were planted along with corn and soybeans on the refuge, particularly on slopes near watersheds, areas where water collects.

Researchers began documenting benefits in 2008. "We were able to measure responses right away," says Moore who is the STRIPS communications lead. "The prairie strips were able to slow down water moving across farm fields, which can be erosive. It also kept nutrients in the field so they didn't become pollutants in waterways, and there were increases in wildlife, birds, and insects."

"... converting just 10 percent of a crop field into perennial prairie can reduce soil loss by almost 85 percent; phosphorous loss by 90% and nitrogen loss by almost 85%."

The STRIPS team found that converting just 10 percent of a crop field into perennial prairie can reduce soil loss by 95 percent, phosphorus loss by 90 percent and nitrogen loss by almost 85 percent. Soil loss, phosphorus, and nitrogen are three main causes of water pollution in Iowa. Excess nitrogen running off Midwest farms is also a leading cause of the "dead zone" that appears in the Gulf of Mexico each year. In terms of biodiversity, there was also a four-fold increase in native plant species, a doubling of bird species, and an increase of pollinators with the prairie strips.

Moore describes these as "disproportionate" benefits, meaning significant benefits can be realized by planting a just a small amount of prairie—and without impacting crop yields.

The benefits are starting to be backed by published research. A recent study published in the *Journal of Environmental Quality* found that prairie strips can remove nitrates, which pollute waterways, from cropland runoff over long periods of time.

Continued on page 11



Prairie Strips....

Continued from page 10

Moore says she and her fellow researchers are excited about the possibilities of STRIPS. “With some science projects, the results will just sit on a shelf,” she says. “But with this, we have a project where the science has legs, and it’s really exciting to be part of this.”

Strong farmer interest in STRIPS

For the next phase, the STRIPS team moved the project to farmers’ fields across Iowa to see if the benefits could be replicated.

There is strong interest among farmers in the project. “They are saying ‘I feel good about this practice,’” Moore says. “Farmers are interested in keeping soil on their lands and pollutants out of waterways.”

The first on-farm STRIPS project started in 2013; that grew to nine last year and will expand to 23 this year. “This has been a good fit for a lot of farmers,” says Tim Youngquist, field coordinator for STRIPS, who works with the farmers. “They’ve known in their hearts that they want to do something to improve the land.”

Gary Guthrie, a farmer in Story County, Iowa, says he got “super excited” when he heard about the STRIPS project. “Prairie strips fit with what we want to do, building diversity with insects and bees,” he says. “I’ve seen the result of soil devastation, and that informed my decision also.” Guthrie will plant four, 30-foot-wide prairie strips this year on his 145-acre farm.

Ag and environmental groups find common ground on STRIPS

STRIPS is a rare initiative where opposite ends of the spectrum—conventional agricultural and environmental groups—find common ground. The Iowa Soybean Association and Iowa Corn Growers Association along with The Nature Conservancy and Iowa Environmental Council, as well as other state and regional groups, all support the project.

What is the long-term goal of STRIPS? The project’s team will continue to document the benefits and hopefully attract more farmers, who are key to its success.

“We would like that prairie strips become a common practice on farms across the Corn Belt,” Moore says. According to one estimate, nearly one million acres of prairie strips could be planted in Iowa. Not a complete restoration but a huge improvement over 0.1 percent.

Obviously more needs to be done to address other problems with industrial agriculture, particularly with monocultures, pesticides, and GMOs. But the STRIPS project is demonstrating that sustainable solutions are available. “We’ve got a chance to make Iowa a better place, one field at a time,” Youngquist says. □

Ken Roseboro is editor of The Organic and Non-GMO Reporter. This article was reprinted with permission from The Organic & Non-GMO Reporter, February 2015. See more at <http://www.nongmoreport.com>.

State Legislature...

Continued from page 1

It is doubtful that any legislator of any duration had been through this kind of arm twisting, gut wrenching legislative sausage making. Trying to prove that two wrongs make a right, Governor Brownback proclaimed that it was not really a tax increase, but a decrease. It is all in your perspective. However, it took numerous veto threats and taking the state's higher education budget as hostage to convince enough legislators to vote for the budget package.

A decidedly different view was expressed as commentaries and editorial pages across the state declared the session "embarrassing", "disastrous", and "devolving into farce", with Kansas becoming the butt of political jokes nationwide. One county online news source included a survey to grade the Ks. Legislature's performance. 73% of the respondents gave the Legislature a failing grade. On the national front, even upon declaring that "we are not doing this like Kansas did," other states wanting to shrink government could not pass tax cuts. The great experiment has become a cautionary tale, and it is not over yet.

The "March to Zero", the Governor's catch phrase to eliminate the income tax in Kansas, moves on. Add the continuing uncertainty of judicial decisions on school finance, and the revenue situation becomes even more grim. Relief at the Legislature going home will indeed be short lived.

The Tax Plan. Individual and corporate income taxes account for

over 25% of the revenue to the State. Unless Kansas experiences exponential employment growth coupled with substantially expanded sales taxes, Kansas will face continual revenue shortfalls.

With this 'march to zero' Kansas will most likely join the deep south states that have greater income inequality, underfunded/inadequate public schools, second rate higher education, survival mode social services, faltering highways and skeleton public safety. Beyond this revenue mess, the anti-government conservative majority that runs Kansas government will continue to privatize public education, sell off more state assets. More public services will be converted to private services through contracts with lobbyists and former staff members of the Governor's office. If the courts dare challenge and rule against this conservative orthodoxy, the Judiciary's budget will be negated and a constitutional crisis enjoined.

For the 'dark money' billionaires/millionaires that funded the \$30 million campaign to re-elect the Governor in 2014, they keep their annual tax cuts worth tens of millions of dollars. Working Kansans and seniors will fund those tax breaks and balance the budget with a higher sales tax.

This total \$384 million tax package in House Sub. for SB 270 has been called a 'band aide' effort at best. There are many questionable revenue projections on different parts of this bill. The Governor also has to find \$50 million more in budget cuts but these cuts cannot come from the public school block grant, Kansas Public Employee Retirement System

(KPERS) contributions or bond payments. These exceptions shield over 50% of the State budget from reductions so the remainder of the State budget will be hit that much harder following five years of continuous program reductions.

The increase in the state sales tax generates \$164 million of the \$384 million total. Merchants have up to 30 days to implement this change so there will not be a full 12 months of sales tax increases. While charitable contributions would remain fully deductible and mortgage interest & property tax deductions cut by 50%, all other Kansas itemized deductions would be repealed thus generating \$97 million in new revenues.

A tax amnesty for penalties and interest on certain delinquent taxes is hopefully going to raise \$30 million. A tax on the 'guaranteed payments' to the 333,000 income tax exempt business entities will hopefully generate \$23.7 million but questions remain whether accounting maneuvers will reclassify the 'guaranteed payment' into another income exempt category?

The 50-cent cigarette tax increase will generate \$40 million in additional revenue. Individual income tax rates of 2.7% for the bottom tax bracket and 4.6% for the top tax bracket will be frozen through 2017 thus generating \$26.4 million in 2016. Starting in 2019, any growth beyond 2.5% in State revenues must be used for further income tax reductions.

This revenue experiment of cutting the taxes for the wealthy and hoping for significant economic growth was tried by President George W. Bush in 2000. *Continued on page 13*

State Policy

State Legislature ...

Continued from page 12

Our Governor was a U.S. Senator at that time. During the years of 2000 to 2008, the nation had little employment expansion while the nation's debt soared to deficit finance unnecessary wars and the creation of the Medicare part D drug program. The last decade of employment growth in Kansas in the 2000's was primarily driven by national policy but our Governor blamed the policies of past Kansas governors.

If consumption is the key to greater economic growth, how does increasing the sales tax not slow or halt expanded economic growth, since consumer spending is responsible for 70% of the gross domestic product (GDP)? Consumption taxes are very susceptible to the vagaries of the market economy. Another significant downturn in the economy such as witnessed in 2009 will curtail consumer spending and further threaten the funding of vital education, social service and public safety programs across Kansas.

Gannon Vs. State of Kansas and School Funding: The wild card to the state budget is and has been the status of school funding. In March, the Legislature passed a block grant plan for school funding that cut more than \$50 million per year in operating and maintenance funds from schools, and froze funding levels for 2016 and 2017, basically scrapping the state's old school finance formula that linked school funding to student needs. The plan hit districts with immediate cuts to their 2015 budgets.

However, just as the Legislature was

heading home, the Shawnee County District court three-judge panel ruled the block grant funding plan is unconstitutional because it locks in a level of funding already found to be unconstitutionally inadequate, and that it fails to provide for increasing student enrollment, changing student needs or any cost increases. The impact on districts varies wildly around the state. The judges stated, that the block grant bill "does nothing to alleviate the unconstitutional inadequacy of funding, but rather, exacerbates it."

The ruling required the state to pay schools about \$50 million in aid before the start of the new fiscal year, July 1 or as soon as possible, to rectify the block grant cuts. Similar funding boosts were ordered for 2016 and 2017. The court also found that the increased pension spending to districts—which are only pass-through funds and cannot be spent on classroom or daily operating needs—does **not** constitute an increase in school funding, and cannot absolve the state from increasing other school funding.

The State Attorney General immediately appealed the decision and action is on hold at this printing.

The Governor and Legislative advocates of the block grant bill immediately decried this as more evidence of an "activist judicial branch" going beyond their constitutional authority. Given that the Executive and Legislative branches have crafted and passed legislation that curbs the judicial branch's constitutional authorities and threatens budget retaliation for decisions not to their liking, one could argue that Legislators

and the Governor have violated the constitution or at least their oath to support it.

A basic Civics 101 review reminds us that the foundation of democracy is built on the three separate but co-equal branches of government that provide unique checks and balances on power. As one legislator put it, "the judicial system does not exist to merely reflect and uphold the opinion of those in power. It provides a check on the power of the majority by applying the principles of judicial review to ensure the laws being enacted by the majority conform to our Constitution." The ability of the courts to act as an independent check on public power means little if they work in fear of political disagreements with their conclusions.

The battle over school funding is not over, as school districts across the state scramble to plan for the coming year, and communities begin to realize the full ramifications of recent cuts and the uncertain future budget.

Conclusion. An even bigger fear than the budget and the impact on the state is that relief turns into apathy or total disengagement. The next year with fall elections in 2016 will be critically important if we are to fix this continuing downward spiral and chart a new course for fair, stable and reliable government policy. □

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Women in Farming News

Business, Legal and Financial Planning Focus of Spring Women in Farming Workshop

by Joanna Voigt

About 30 women gathered at the American Legion Building in Linn, Kansas, on Saturday, May 9, for the third in a series of four “Women in Farming” workshops hosted by the Kansas Rural Center (KRC) this spring and summer with funding from the USDA Risk Management Agency. The goal of the workshop, titled “What Women Need to Know about Financial, Business and Legal Planning,” was to provide women with the information and tools they need to effectively plan and run their farming operation.

Mary Fund, KRC Executive Director, explained the reasons behind hosting workshops tailored specifically towards women farmers and landowners. Fund explained that the number of women who own land or are the sole operators of farms in Kansas is rising, in line with national trends, led by increasing interest in farming among women, and young women and beginning farmers in particular, and by a shifting demographic in ownership as women inherit family farms and land.

Fund explained that women often have unique questions and concerns about managing their farms or land that aren’t necessarily addressed in other educational settings. She noted that women and men tend to have different learning styles, with women responding more positively to participatory learning opportunities and tending to engage more fully in women-only settings.

Introductions around the room revealed that the May 9th workshop participants came from many regions



KSU's Dr. Mykel Taylor, Agricultural Economics, explained leasing and land price trends at the May Women in Farming Business, Legal, and Financial Planning workshop. Photo J. Voigt

of Kansas and represented a diverse array of farm and land management situations.

Duane Hund, K-State Research and Education Farm Analyst Program, led off the day’s presentations with an overview of financial planning, and of resources available to women to help make farm decisions. “Farm analysts are good at helping farmers to know which questions to ask,” Hund stated.

Hund walked participants through FINPAC, a comprehensive whole farm financial planning and analysis system, explaining that FINPAC is helpful for long-range business planning by helping determine “where you are, where you want to go, and how to get there efficiently.” This can include creative alternative strategies to managing the farm. He encouraged women to contact his office to inquire about individual assistance.

Mykel Taylor, Professor, Kansas State

University Department of Agriculture Economics, discussed land leasing trends, land prices and dealing with land issues. Taylor pointed out the correlation between annual precipitation and land values, noting that land values tend to increase across Kansas from west to east, in accordance with annual precipitation amounts, and that irrigated land is highly valuable.

Taylor said that land values in Kansas have recently increased, and that there was a large increase in land rental rates from 2014 to 2015, owing to higher crop prices. She noted that in Kansas, three to five year leases are common. Taylor feels that interest rates are holding steady and unlikely to change soon. She recommends Kansas Farm Managers Association as a resource for women who manage their farms.

Dan Cecrle, Washington County Farm Service Agency, provided an

Continued on page 15

Women in Farming News



Over 50 women attended the July 11 Women in Farming workshop and farm tour in Emporia, and about 25 attended the roundtable discussion the evening before. Coverage will be in our next newsletter. Photo by Genevieve Voigt.

Women in Farming Workshop... *Continued from page 14*

overview of the types of loans available to farmers, highlighting those that apply specifically to women farmers. Forrest Buhler, Kansas Agriculture Mediation Services. Kansas State University, discussed the basics of estate planning, including what to do prior to consulting with an attorney.

Tom Meek, Supervisor, Clay County Conservation District, talked about services that conservation districts can offer to women, including conservation technical assistance programs and cost-share opportunities.

Janet Connell, Insurance Specialist, Frontier Farm Credit Services, discussed crop insurance basics, with a focus on multi-peril crop insurance (MPCI). Connell explained that budget constraints at the Federal level have precipitated a shift away from programs of guaranteed payments and disaster payouts towards the MPCI system.

Connell outlined what multi-peril crop insurance covers and some things it does not. For example, a combine fire is not covered under MPCI but is covered under hail insurance. Connell

explained that all crop insurance companies sell the same MPCI products for the same price, rendering the agent's knowledge, relationship with the farmer, and service, including "the company's ability to timely adjust claims" as factors that set one insurance agency or agent apart from the crowd.

A tour of Lucinda Stuenkel's farm near Palmer had been scheduled for the afternoon, but was cancelled due to impending threatening weather. Instead, Stuenkel offered a "virtual" tour of her farm, offering tips and strategies for livestock handling, conservation and farm management practices that have served her well.

Among the strategies Stuenkel has implemented to improve efficiency and suit her management style and capability are no more January calving and feeding the cows hay sunset to sunrise, which makes it so that about 80% of her cows calve during the day. Stuenkel discussed selecting heifers based on pelvic measurements taken when they are one year old, to ensure easy calving, and waiting until the heifers are older before breeding them in order to reduce complications.

Stuenkel extolled the benefits of

planting cover crops, which extend the grazing season and improve the soil, making it richer, better able to hold moisture, and retain more carbon. She pointed out that it is less expensive to fly triticale seed onto the field than to ground plant it, and mentioned that rye inhibits the growth of mare's tail, pigweed, and lambs' quarters, among others.

A number of the presentations and other resources for women farmers can be found on our website at <http://kansaruralcenter.org/women-in-farming/>.

The fourth and final workshop in KRC's "Women in Farming" workshop and farm tour was held in Emporia on July 11 as this went to press. Coverage of that workshop will be in our next newsletter. □

Nebraska Legislature Rejects Meatpacker Ownership of Livestock

In late May, the Nebraska Legislature defeated a bill (LB 176) that would have opened up livestock production and ownership in Nebraska to foreign and domestically owned corporations. The Chinese owned Smithfield Farms, the largest industrial hog producer in the United States, supported the bill.

Nebraska's Competitive Livestock Markets Act is one of the last, effective anti-corporate farming laws in the nation, prohibiting meatpackers from owning, controlling or feeding livestock for more than five days prior to slaughter.

USDA data show that fed cattle sold in the competitive marketplace that are not controlled by corporate meatpackers has fallen to only 21% nationally and to 1.5% in the Texas-Oklahoma-New Mexico fed cattle market. Only about 3% of the nation's hogs are still sold in the competitive cash market.

The bill ran into strong opposition from some rural senators who argued it would be the death of the small, independent hog producer and would allow the nation's largest meatpackers to dictate the price paid for pork. Opponents also argued it would lead to the "chickenization" of Nebraska's hog industry, and could eventually spread and lead to the end of the independent cattle producer.

"Chickenization" refers to how chickens have been raised for years. Large corporations own the animals, the barns and the land, as well as the processing facilities. Workers are employees, not "farmers" in the traditional sense of the word.

A coalition including the Nebraska Farmers Union and Center for Rural Affairs plus others waged a strong campaign against the bill. □

Survey Results Show Expanded Acreage and Yields from Cover Crops

A survey of more than 1,200 farmers across the country revealed that cover crops boosted corn yields last year by a mean of 3.66 bushels per acre (2.1 percent) and increased soybeans by an average of 2.19 bushels per acre (4.2 percent)—the third year in a row a yield increase following cover crops was recorded by the Conservation Technology Information Center (CTIC) Cover Crop Survey.

The survey, conducted by CTIC with funding from USDA's Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education (SARE) and the American Seed Trade Association (ASTA), also registered a fifth year of steady increase in the average number of acres planted to cover crops. Average acres of cover crops per farm reported in the surveys have more than doubled over the past five years.

The survey information can be viewed at: www.sare.org/Learning-Center/From-the-Field/North-Central-SARE-From-the-Field/2015-Cover-Crop-Survey-Analysis.

While the survey showed yield increases among growers who use cover crops, they also indicated they are interested in more than the yield benefit.

The three most-cited benefits of using cover crops were:

- increased soil health (22 percent)
- increased organic matter (20 percent)
- reduced soil erosion (15 percent) □

National Working Group Releases Recommendations on Cover Crops and Soil Health

In late June, the National Working Group on Cover Crops and Soil Health released its list of ten recommendations for "improving soil health and expanding use of cover crops." The Working Group follows up the February 2014 National Conference on Cover Crops and Soil Health held in Omaha, Nebraska.

The recommendations pertain primarily to USDA agencies and programs in an effort to promote and conduct long term research into cover crops, incentivize cover crop adoption on farms by removing program

barriers, decouple crop insurance eligibility from crop management practices, strengthen public-private partnerships to improve cover crop cultivars, and seek strategic opportunities to further support cover crops in NRCS programs.

Read more on the National Sustainable Agriculture Coalition site at <http://sustainableagriculture.net/blog/cover-crop-working-group/>. □

NSAC Urges Overhaul of “Actively Engaged in Farming” Rule

The National Sustainable Agriculture Coalition (NSAC) recently urged USDA to overhaul its “actively engaged in farming” draft rule to create fair and effective limitations on the subsidies taxpayers provide to commodity farms.

The actively engaged in farming rules determine eligibility for commodity subsidies. According to NSAC, USDA’s draft rule would create an ineffective and unfair two-tier system of payment limit provisions. The rules would provide mega-farms with a tantalizing choice between annual payments of up to a million dollars or more, or, in the alternative, even larger subsidy payments limited only by the size of the primary beneficiary’s extended family.

“The proposed rule is a classic example of policy written for the agricultural one percent,” said Ferd Hoefner, NSAC’s Policy Director. “We are urging USDA to rethink its priorities.”

In contrast to the proposed rule, NSAC supports applying a single payment limit to each farming operation, regardless of the operation’s size or business structure. The NSAC recommendations would effectively cap payments at \$125,000 per farm (\$250,000 in the case of married couples), as stipulated by the 2014 Farm Bill, and apply that cap to both family farms and giant general partnerships whose structure includes partners and passive investors unrelated by blood or marriage.

The proposed rule would only apply the new draft payment eligibility requirements to farming entities (general partnerships and joint ventures) that include partners unrelated by blood or marriage. All other farms – the vast majority – would be subject to the current rules that contain no effective limits on payments.

The draft rule would also allow “large” and “complex” farms operated as general partnerships or joint ventures to receive additional payments not based on need, but based on size and “complexity”, two factors not contained in law and not in keeping with the historical goals of our farm programs to provide modest assistance to help family farms weather years with sharp price or income declines.

The combination of the various additional payments in the proposed rule would allow the nation’s largest farms to obtain payments of \$1 million or more a year, all courtesy of federal taxpayers. For those for whom that may not be enough, the proposed rule would allow those mega-farms to reorganize as partnerships comprised solely of members of the extended family and thereby reap even higher payments.

During debate on the last farm bill, NSAC supported, and bipartisan majorities in the House and Senate approved, closing the loopholes in the “actively engaged” rules and tightening payment limitations. Early in 2014, however, during the waning minutes of behind closed doors

Organic More Profitable To Farmers

A comprehensive study at Washington State University finds organic agriculture is more profitable for farmers than conventional agriculture. In spite of lower yields, the global study shows that the profit margins for organic agriculture were significantly greater than for conventional agriculture.

Published in the Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences, the study was authored by Washington State University scientists David Crowder and John Reganold. The study analyzed dozens of studies comparing the financial performances of organic and conventional farming.

The researchers looked at the economics because that is what drives the expansion or contraction of organic farming. This is the first study they know of that examines the economic sustainability of organic production.

Organic price premiums give farmers an incentive to adopt more organic farming practices. But the study found that even if premiums go down, there is still room for organic agriculture to grow. *Contd. on page 19*

negotiations of Agriculture Committee leaders, this bicameral and bipartisan farm bill reform was overturned, payment limits increased, and changes to the actively engaged in farming rules punted to USDA. This resulted in the proposed rule being commented on currently. □

(From NSAC May 27, 2015)

Bill to Ban State GMO Labeling Laws Passes Committee, While Safety Criteria of GMO's is Questioned

In Mid-July, the House Agriculture Committee passed a bill to ban mandatory labeling of genetically modified foods at the state level. This represents a major win for food and chemical companies who tout the safety of foods made with genetically modified ingredients. However, the bill is being debated just as a new study suggests that the FDA assessment criteria establishing the safety of GMO's needs revising.

If the bill is approved by the full House and Senate and signed by the President, the bill will replace the budding individual state GMO labeling laws with a single, voluntary nation-wide labeling program- one that does not require food companies to disclose use of genetically modified ingredients.

Called the Safe and Accurate Food Labeling Act of 2015 (and initially introduced by Kansas Rep. Mike Pompeo and North Carolina Rep. G.K. Butterfield), would make food producers go through the U.S. Food and Drug Administration before offering their GMO products commercially. But the bill also aims to let food makers tout their products as GMO-free instead of making those who use GMOs reveal their presence. It does so through a program similar to the organic certification program now run by the U.S. Department of Agriculture.

In other words, instead of making the users of GMO products state this

on their labels, it puts the cost and responsibility on the backs of the non-GMO products to certify their products as GMO-free.

Opponents to GMO labeling argue that a "safe, proven biotechnology" should not be subjected to a patchwork of state laws and negatively stigmatized by a label saying it is GMO. Others argued that the new labeling law further confuses the issue, and misses the point that consumers have a right to know what is in their food.

Consumers and environmental groups who support greater labeling of GMO products point out that recent research shows one of the pesticides commonly used in growing GMO crops may contain cancer-causing agents. They also noted that 64 other countries have mandatory GMO labeling laws "and the sky hasn't fallen in."

The bill is also being debated at the same time a new study calls into question the FDA's regulatory framework of "substantial equivalence" used for approving foods made with genetically modified organisms.

The FDA currently considers food crops it has approved as safe if they are "substantially equivalent" to conventional crops. The criteria for assessing this equivalence is taste, touch, sight, and smell.

The study (*Do GMOs Accumulate Formaldehyde and Disrupt Molecular Systems Equilibria? Systems Biology May Provide Answers*) published in peer

reviewed journal *Agricultural Sciences* applied systems biology methods and found that genetically engineered soy creates significant disruption in concentrations of formaldehyde and glutathione. The study states, "These significant changes in key biomarker concentrations could cause deleterious biological impacts. The results reveal how a "small," single recombinant DNA event may create "large," unpredictable, systemic perturbations to molecular systems equilibria. In light of such changes, it is clear to say that GMOs and non-GMOS may not always be "substantially equivalent."

The study's authors believe that the study "provides a new paradigm to address the safety of GMO's by developing transparent Industry Standards for real testing of GMOs, while employing computational systems biology methods to identify real and relevant criteria, to support such testing."

It is too early to see how the supporters of GMO technology will respond to the study. About 75% or more of all products now contain GMO ingredients. □

See more at:
<http://www.integrativesystems.org/in-the-news/>

Organic More Profitable...
Continued from page 17

Actual premiums paid to organic farmers ranged from 29 to 32 percent above conventional prices. Even with organic crop yields as much as 18 percent lower than conventional, the break-even point for organic agriculture was 5 to 7 percent.

“That was a big surprise to me,” said Reganold, a soil scientist and organic agriculture specialist. “It means that organic agriculture has room to grow; there’s room for premiums to go down over time. But what we’ve found is that the premiums have held pretty steady over the 40 years represented in the study.”

Out of 129 initial studies, 44 met Crowder and Reganold’s criteria for inclusion in the meta-analysis of costs, gross returns, benefit/cost ratios and net present values – a measure that accounts for inflation. The analysis represented 55 crops in 14 countries on five continents.

Unique to the analysis was inclusion of yield and economic data for crops grown as part of a rotational system, in addition to data for single crops. The study included profit data for multiple crops grown over several seasons, a more accurate reflection of how farmers profit from agriculture.

None of the comparison studies accounted for the environmental costs and benefits of farming. Environmental costs tend to be lower and benefits higher in organic agriculture. But for consumers who believe that organic farming is more environmentally friendly, organic premiums may serve as a stand-in for the monetary value of such costs and benefits.

The results show that there’s room for organic agriculture to expand and, with its environmental benefits, to contribute a larger share in feeding the world sustainably. Organic agriculture currently accounts for only one percent of agriculture globally. □
(From Washington State University News Service, June 1, 2015)

**Join KRC for our
 Monthly Grazing
 Teleconference Call
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 of every month
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Hosted by Dale Kirkham, and joined by KSU’s Gary Kilgore and Keith Harmony. These informal discussions cover all aspects of grazing management.

Join the toll-free call by entering 1-877-304-5632 and enter conference room number: 300 346 2424#

For more information, contact Dale Kirkham at 620-344-0202



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Calendar

Feeding Kansas Ideas into Action Series:

9 a.m. to 3 p.m.

August 12 Colby, Community Building

August 13 Dodge City, Western State
 Bank Expo Center

September 23 El Dorado, Civic Center

September 24 Manhattan, Manhattan Public
 Library

Contact Natalie Fullerton at
 nfullerton@kansasruralcenter.org, or visit our
 website.

Amazing Grazing Series, Ks. Farmers Union:

August 21 Role of Mycorrhizal Fungi in Soil
 Health, Salina

August 22, Cover Crop Bus Tour with Dale
 Strickler

August 25-26 Carbon and Soil Health, Dr.
 Christine Jones and Gaber Brown, at Gail Fullers
 Farm Emporia, Ks. Contact Mary Howell at 785-
 562-8726, or www.kansasfarmersunion.com/
 events/amazing-grazing-events/

Please check the KRC website for updated and
 more detailed calendar and announcement infor-
 mation on the above and for additional events at:
 www.kansasruralcenter.org

Inside This Issue

No. 257 June-July-August 2015

* Ks. March to Zero: What
 Happens Now the Legislature's
 Gone Home?

* Small Farmer Commentary-
 Book Review: "Lentil
 Underground" Tells Our Story

* KRC Appoints New Executive
 Director

* Announcing KRC's Fall
 Conference Nov. 13-14

* Feeding Ks. Summits to
 Feature Grassroots Training

* State Food and Farm Task
 Force Drafting
 Recommendations

* National Strategy to Promote
 Pollinator Health Falls Short

* Is Age Old Prairie the Solution
 to Modern Agriculture's
 Problems? (*Reprint from Organic
 & Non-GMO Reporter*)

* Business, Legal & Financial
 Planning Focus of Spring Women
 in Farming Workshop

* NE Rejects Meatpacker
 Ownership of Livestock Bill

* Working Group Releases
 Recommendations on Cover
 Crops and Soil Health

* Survey Shows Expanded Cover
 Crop Acreage & Yields

* Actively Engaged Rules Need
 Overhaul

* GMO Labeling Ban Debated
 As Safety is Questioned