

# Rural Papers

Reporting with commentary  
on agricultural and rural issues



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## 2018 Kansas Legislature Faces Tough Decisions

by Paul Johnson



KRC's Annual Farm & Food Conference  
November 2017, Manhattan, KS

Photos by Tom Parker

The 2018 Kansas Legislature began Monday, January 8. Legislators face many challenges -- all amid what will certainly be one of the most interesting election seasons in the country. All 125 Kansas House seats are up for election in November 2018, as is the Governor's seat. The Governor's budget, which called for more spending on education but did not say where the money would come from, only increased animosity. Will Kansas continue its momentum away from the Brownback agenda or will it move forward in both the Legislative session decisions and the fall elections?

Since a two-year budget was passed in 2017, there should be more time for the Kansas Legislature to drill down into the vital issues surrounding revenues, budget cuts, public education funding, faltering social services, forward thinking energy policy, and fully funding natural resource issues. Adding to the complexity, the Kansas Supreme Court has set one critical deadline -- bring them a constitutional public school funding plan by April 30 for review.

### REVENUE RECOVERY

The income tax cuts of 2012/2013 reduced income taxes to the State by over \$900 million dollars with \$600+ million from income tax bracket changes and \$300 million from eliminating income tax on 'non-wage' income (the LLC loophole). The income tax increase passed in 2017 over the Governor's veto restored just under \$600 million with \$270 million from restoring the taxing of 'non-wage' income.

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# Rural Papers

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# Small Farmer Commentary

## The Pesticide Treadmill... Dicamba and Then What?

By Mary Fund

*On top of the usual speculation about drought and rain, late frosts and low prices, one of the big things on farmers' minds as thoughts turn to spring planning and planting, is the dicamba question. Dicamba is industry's silver bullet solution to the decreasing effectiveness of their wonder herbicide glyphosate (trademark Round Up) and the emergence of super weeds that evolved after broad routine use year after year of herbicide tolerant (HT) resistant crops. (Kansas has at least 13 different weed species resistant to five different herbicide treatments; nationally it is 160.)*

*But dicamba has a problem. It has a strong tendency to drift onto non-target crops damaging if not killing them.*

*Claiming they had solved the drift or volatility problem with a reformulation of the old dicamba, industry introduced the new HT soybean and cotton seed. Unfortunately they released the HT seed in 2016 before EPA approved the new formulation, and some farmers used the old dicamba. Lawsuits and even violence broke out among farmers whose non-HT soybeans were ruined. In 2017, the reformulated lower-volatility dicamba was released. But there was still a problem.*

*Last summer and fall, damage reports flooded departments of agriculture and extension offices from major soy producing areas across the Southeast and parts of the Midwest, including Kansas, claiming dicamba drift. One reason dicamba was replaced by glyphosate was its tendency to volatilize and drift to non-target crops. Some crops such as sensitive specialty crops like vegetables, grapevines, and orchards are especially vulnerable, not to mention other trees and ornamentals. Dicamba sprayed on dicamba resistant soybeans is fine, but non-resistant soybeans including public and non-GMO varieties are highly vulnerable. By summer's end, University of Missouri researchers calculated there were 3.6 million acres of non-resistant soybeans that were damaged or killed by drifting dicamba, and the industry had a huge problem.*

*As a solution to a problem industry claimed would never happen, industry created the new HT crops resistant to stronger herbicides, except they are not new, but a resurrection of older stronger herbicides, namely dicamba and 2,4D, some states took action to limit or ban the use of the new dicamba HT crops. In October last year, EPA, with heavy influence from Monsanto, BASF and Dow, decided new label requirements would be sufficient to address the problems –as long as farmers and applicators follow the label.*

*But opponents and those harmed argue that past experience shows that not all applicators are willing, able or even concerned about following label directions and restrictions. Furthermore they argue "dicamba is uncontrollable with its tendency*

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# Small Farmer Commentary

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to volatilize and move into areas where it was not meant to go.”

According to University of Arkansas researchers, the rate of volatility might be different in the initial 24 hours following application of the new formulation, but over a few days the total amount of volatility was really not different than the old formulations. Apparently, the new formulation only alters the timing of the volatilization, and changes in weather conditions can trigger movement days after initial spraying and cause damages miles away.

The new label rules are an improvement. They classify dicamba as a “restricted use” herbicide requiring that applicators must be certified; and require that applicators/farmers must receive special training (Kansas State University Extension has announced trainings in Kansas). Applicators/farmers must also maintain detailed records of atmospheric conditions; and that applications are to be made only when wind speeds are below 10 mph (down from 15 mph). Proximity to sensitive crops, weed size and rainfall patterns are all addressed.

Again those harmed and opposing dicamba use argue that the massive crop damage of 2017 proves that the new low-volatility formulations do not perform as advertised.

The real problem here is not the label. It is not even the super weeds. It is the continued pursuit of the same solution that got us here in the first place. Albert Einstein once said, “We cannot solve our problems with the same thinking that we used when we created them.”

Weed resistance happened faster than scientists predicted—and it was predicted. What happens when dicamba resistant weeds appear? Where does this treadmill take us? A related question I have not addressed here is the increasing evidence that glyphosate (dicamba’s predecessor and still in heavy use) not only creates weed resistance but damages or kills soil microbes essential to a healthy soil. This only adds to the questions about a strategy that leans heavily on silver bullet solutions.

Farmers face a difficult immediate challenge—either they buy the new seed or run the risk of being damaged by a neighbor’s use of

dicamba on their HT resistant crop. Farmers of specialty crops or non-GMO soybeans do not even have that option. The longer term question is do we continue to accept industry’s strategy and approach? Or do we stand up and maintain real autonomy in decision making options, and say no to the technology, and find a different approach?

Many farmers in Kansas have embraced soil health as essential to their success. They are finding value in cover crop mixes and more complex crop rotations, and discovering the magic of diversity. Such diversity requires a reduction in pesticide use if not elimination ... and certainly requires a change in strategy.

The dicamba question raises serious dilemmas on several fronts. The emerging specialty crop sector in Kansas and around the country is threatened, at a time when we should be encouraging greater local and regional production of fruits and vegetables for food security purposes and for a healthier food system. We should be encouraging farming practices that encourage healthy soil—regenerative, sustainable practices that protect the environment and human health. And we should be encouraging farmer autonomy—this too is critical for our food future.

The Kansas legislature will soon be examining the state’s noxious weed law. (See page 14). While noxious weeds are a different problem than routine pesticide use in crop production, the same issues surrounding dicamba and HT crops about efficacy, management, and impact on the overall environment and public health can be found. Instead of just looking at the noxious weed law, we should start looking at state pesticide law overall.

Whether aimed at noxious weeds or the systemic problems with silver bullet chemicals, we need to explore solutions that place greater emphasis on an integrated approach that relies on more cultural controls (crop rotations), biological controls (reliance on natural enemies), and mechanical controls (burning, tilling, mulching, burning, cover crops, etc.). Such an approach would reduce the use of chemicals and preserve their efficacy if we choose to use them. Above all, we need to abandon the pesticide treadmill and the thinking that got us here in the first place.

For more information, contact Mary Fund, [mfund@kansaruralcenter.org](mailto:mfund@kansaruralcenter.org).

# State Policy News



Paul Johnson, Zack Pistora, Dorothy Barnett and Sheldon Weisgrau, KRC Farm & Food Conference. Photo by Tom Parker

## Legislature...cont. from page 1

There is uncertainty that this full \$270 million will be realized. The new federal tax reform may also impact these numbers. This 'Kansas Tax Experiment', which failed to generate promised growth, was partially included in the new federal tax cut as 'non-wage' income (known as 'pass throughs') tax rates were lowered from 37% to 20%.

The revenue debate in 2018 could go a few directions. Raising the income tax again may be the easiest administratively but the hardest politically. If services such as health care, accounting, legal, engineering, etc. were charged a 6.5% sales tax, Kansas could raise \$912 million. Very few states have experimented with sales tax on services. There is debate over the amount of property tax paid by agriculture.

While residential and commercial/industrial property are taxed at 'market value', agricultural land is taxed at a 'use value' by computing

the last eight years of production on a given piece of land. One estimate claims, agricultural land comes in

at one-tenth the assessed valuation of residential or commercial property. With commodity and beef prices down over 50% the last couple years and this

rolling 8-year average now including very profitable years of 2012/2013, property taxes for agricultural land will continue to rise, as will agricultural opposition to increase them further.

## BUDGETARY REPAIR

Since 2009, there have been 10 rounds of budget cuts with some caused by the Great Recession of 2008 and 2009, and some to pay for the Brownback income tax cuts. In the process, Kansas has drained the state's ending balances. Kansas has resorted to increased bonding for the retirement system (KPERS) and the Highway Fund, thus shoving these costs down the road. Kansas has ceased paying certain statutory revenue transfers to local governments thus jeopardizing those local budgets. Kansas has experienced 3 credit rating downgrades thus increasing borrowing costs.

Kansas has cut the number of state employees by 15-20% thus damaging vital health and public safety services such as prisons and state

hospitals. 2017 marks the first state employee salary increase in ten years except for instances such as the Kansas Corporation Commission that offered a 7% salary increase for its 300 employees if they became unclassified employees with no work place protections.

With the 2017 tax increase and some economic growth, the 2019 Kansas budget is solvent. However, in 2020 with obligatory payments to KPERS and stopping the sales tax raid on the Highway Fund, Kansas is in the red by \$143 million and this rises to \$419 million in 2021. There is no provision for increased public education funding or repairing broken institutions such as prisons, state hospitals or child welfare programs.

Public education accounts for 50% of the State budget. The 2017 public school plan added close to \$300 million in new funding over two years. While base state aid per pupil (BSAPP) reached \$4,400 in 2008 just prior to the recession, this \$4,400 was cut to \$3,850. The new school funding plan will only increase BSAPP to \$4,103 in 2019 and there is no accounting for inflation since 2008.

The Kansas Supreme Court did not issue a specific funding number to reach the constitutional standards of 'adequate and equitable' support of public education. At the same time, higher education – which accounts for 15% of the State Budget – has experienced a 30% cut in state support thus relying on higher and

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**Legislature...cont.** *from page 4*

higher tuition fees to cover some of the lost state support.

## **SOCIAL SERVICES**

Social Services account for 20% of the State Budget so combined with K-12 (50%) and Higher Education (15%) these three areas account for 85% of the Kansas Budget. Medicaid (KanCare) accounts for the greatest share of social service spending. KanCare expansion will be debated again. The drastic reduction in public assistance programs has increased concern over hunger and 'food insecurity' in Kansas.

Medicaid expansion almost passed last year over the Governor's veto. The vote was three shy in the State Senate. Congress has not yet repealed Medicaid expansion and would fund any expansion in Kansas with a 90% federal and 10% state match. Regular Medicaid is 55% federal and 45% state funding. There are an estimated 150,000 Kansans that would be covered through expansion.

Thirty of the ninety hospitals in Kansas are considered financially at risk. Medicaid expansion would ease that pressure. Medicaid expansion would also stabilize and increase mental health services across Kansas, as State support for the 27 community mental health centers has sharply declined.

Foster care continues to deteriorate in Kansas. There are now a record number of children (over 7,600) in this privatized system. Kansas was the first state in 1996 to completely

privatize foster care with no pilot projects to test the idea. Post audit reviews show that these private companies pay lower salaries and have higher employee turnover. The 2017 State Legislature established a special Child Welfare System Task Force (including six legislators and others) that is discussing foster care, adoptions and family preservation. There have been publicized instances of children sleeping in private contractor offices and a number of missing foster care children. The Task Force is mandated to offer solutions to the State Legislature in 2018.

Food insecurity is a way of life in Kansas – the breadbasket of the world. The Kansas Health Institute published a report in November 2015 documenting that in 2013 one in six Kansas households were 'food insecure' – unsure of having food the whole month. Single women with children were twice as likely to be 'food insecure'.

Of the 50 states, Kansas is 45th in eligible recipients actually getting food stamps (SNAP). Kansas has been dead last in accessing federal funds for summer feeding programs for children. The SNAP budget in Kansas has fallen from \$402 million in 2014 to \$302 million today as 20,000 children have lost benefits. Temporary Assistance for Needy Families had 38,950 recipients in 2011 and today has less than 10,000. 18,500 of these recipients who lost TANF were children.

## **ELECTION LAWS**

There will be efforts to reverse recent election laws that mandated proof of

citizenship and increased the number of persons unable to register. Legislation will be proposed to establish same day voter registration, as is the case in a dozen states. There will be a debate to turn redistricting over to a non-partisan committee as is done in a few states.

Presently, the Secretary of State selects the election commissioner for each of the four largest counties with populations over 130,000. The Kansas Senate used to confirm these appointments but that was changed in 1982. While the Secretary of State appoints the election official, the counties fund the budget. Returning selection of election officers to county control will be debated this year.

## **UTILITY POLICY CROSSROADS**

The Kansas Corporation Commission has three key decisions to make over the next year that will define a future for energy utilities in Kansas. The first decision will come over the merger of Kansas' largest electric utility – Westar – and Great Plains Energy (Kansas City Power & Light). The second decision involves 'distributed energy' that will define a future for solar and independent power producers. The third decision is how will 'energy efficiency' programs (offered by utilities) be factored into rates and utility regulation.

The first request by KCP&L to buy Westar was turned down by the KCC that ruled the buyout was too expensive and too much of an economic burden for ratepayers

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## Gains, Losses and Determination - A Forty Year Struggle for the Soul of Agriculture

by Tom Parker



*Ferd Hoefner addresses KRC Farm and Food Conference, November 2017*

Looking back on four decades of advocating for sustainable agricultural issues and policies, most of it on the federal level, Ferd Hoefner, Senior Strategic Advisor for the National Sustainable Agriculture Coalition (NSAC), has seen his share of gains, losses and missed opportunities. For every notable success, such as the implementation of the Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education program (SARE) in 1988, there was a notable loss.

But it is important to remember, Hoefner stated, that great advances have been made, and that despite continued obstacles to achieving good food and farm policies, a celebration is in order. "This is not the time to abandon the mission of reforming public policy at all levels," he said, "but rather a time to remain engaged, with even more passion than before."

Hoefner was a keynote speaker for "Driving the change that matters: Practical and political solutions for our farm and food future," the Kansas Rural Center's 2017 Farm and Food Conference held Nov. 17-18 in Manhattan, Ks. Nearly 200 farmers, local food advocates, conservationists, and consumers gathered for two days of speakers and workshops ranging from practical farming and marketing how-to's to policy analysis and organizing tips, and exhibitors ranging from beekeeping to soil health and voting rights.

Hoefner addressed the crowd on the "past, present and future of sustainable agriculture" having spent the last 40 years addressing federal policies supporting long-term economic and environmental sustainability of agriculture, natural resources and rural communities, beginning in 1977 as a congressional intern working on the Farmer to Consumer Direct Marketing Act and the Urban Gardening Program.

It was a heady time to be working on farm issues. New innovations were being introduced and a new movement was emerging. Even Congress seemed ready to consider the "why" of the farm bill rather than simply tinkering with support programs. Title 1 was not the commodity title as it is now, but the family farm title, specifically stating that federal laws and programs should foster the family farm system of agriculture and that no policies or programs should be enacted or administered in a manner that would place the family farm operation at an unfair economic disadvantage. It also put commodity program payment limits front and center, rather than buried at the end of the commodity title.

Though it proved imperfect in practice, Hoefner said, the bill's payment limit provision at least attempted to target commodity benefits to moderate-scale agriculture, reducing coverage at the high end to tamp down over-expansion and consolidation.

Following the passage of the 1977 farm bill, the USDA undertook the Structure of Agriculture project and the Organic Farming project, both of which led to two highly important USDA reports, Hoefner said. "A Time to Choose" profiled the federal policy changes needed to save and grow an agriculture backed by mid-size family farms, while the "Report and Recommendations on Organic Agriculture" profiled the potential for widespread adoption of organic farming—a first for a USDA publication.

The euphoria was short-lived. Immediately following the

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# Sustainable Farm and Food System News

## The Changing Face of Agriculture in Kansas: A Diverse Community

By Tom Parker

The promotion of greater diversification and biodiversity in farming and food systems has long been a major goal of the Kansas Rural Center. However, the emphasis on diversification has mostly focused on complex crop rotations, rotational grazing, multi-species integration of both crops and mammals, specialty crop production and marketing, and other programs designed to insure greater environmental and ecological resilience.

Diversity is more than that, though. It is also diversity in people, cultures and ideas, and a small but growing number of foreign-born immigrants is changing the state's demographics. According to the Pew Research Center, two percent of Kansas' population in 1980 were foreign-born residents; by 2012, that number had grown to six-and-a-half percent. Immigration has benefited rural areas of the Midwest by slowing population loss, according to the Chicago Council on Global Affairs; and because many immigrants have roots in agriculture, food and food production is a unifying force.

To illustrate the changing face of agriculture in Kansas, KRC presented "Diversity in Kansas: The People and Cultures of Food and Farming" during its 2017 Farm and Food Conference. Panelists included Bertha Mendoza, director of the K-State Research and Extension Southwest Kansas Expanded Food and Nutrition Education Program (EFNEP) in Garden City; JohnElla Holmes, executive director of the Kansas Black Farmers Association and founder of the Veryl Switzer/KSU Agriculture Camp for Youth; and Matthew Kost, program director of Cultivate Kansas City's farmer development and support programs.

Teaching immigrants how to integrate into American society while not eating like Americans is the challenge facing Bertha Mendoza. "My role is to teach people not to learn the bad eating habits that we have here," she said. "I help them understand that fried foods aren't a good habit."

Mendoza is herself an immigrant. She immigrated to the United States 25 years ago from a small farming community in Mexico, and remembers a sense of culture shock at the lack of familiar food staples, especially fruits and vegeta-

bles. While much has changed since that time for Hispanic immigrants—by far the greatest country of origin—other minorities continue to struggle with adapting to nontraditional diets. Within the 24 counties served by the Expanded Food and Nutrition Education Program (EFNEP), at least 28 languages are spoken among the program's low-income families and youth.

In addition to teaching immigrants skills for healthy cooking and eating the American way, Mendoza also instructs them in gardening. Growing their own vegetables, including traditional varieties, not only allows them to integrate traditional foods into their diet but to strengthen the bonds of their communities. "We're helping them feel proud of their community," she said.



*Bertha Mendoza, director of the KSU Research & Extension SW Kansas Expanded Food and Nutrition Program in Garden City, was part of a panel speaking about diversity in Kansas agriculture and communities.*

Developing programs for schools is a priority of the program. Recently they've been able to add two sites to provide meals that can be prepared at home. Many students who are home in the summer often aren't able to eat due to being too young to cook or not having adult supervision, Mendoza said, so the sites are a much-needed resource. "We provide food they know and like, and we also add something new so they can learn," she said. The program has been a success so far, not only within the immigrant community but in the community at large, she said.

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# Sustainable Food and Farming News

## Save The Dates! Kansas Rural Center to Host Five Specialty Crop Workshops in March 2018

The Kansas Rural Center (KRC) will host five specialty crop workshops during March to provide information and education necessary for beginning specialty crop growers to establish a successful specialty crop enterprise in Kansas. The workshops will focus on conservation, production and marketing practices for specialty crop growers, and will provide an excellent opportunity for beginning growers to connect with and learn from experienced growers.

The workshops are part of KRC's "Linking Experienced and Beginning Kansas Specialty Crop Farmers to Share Information for Establishing Successful Specialty Crop Enterprises Project," which was funded last fall by the Kansas Department of Agriculture through the USDA Specialty Crop Block Grant program. KRC is one of five projects approved in Kansas. The aim of KRC's project is to link experienced and beginning specialty crop farmers and provide information and networking opportunities to help beginning farmers lower production costs, increase profitability, and create successful specialty crop enterprises in Kansas.

More information and registration details will be available later, but the workshops will be held:

**Saturday, March 3, in Scandia**  
**Friday, March 9, in Leavenworth**  
**Tuesday, March 20, in South Hutchinson**  
**Wednesday, March 21, in Dighton**  
**Saturday, March 31, in Erie.**

Experienced specialty crop growers and experts from partnering institutions and agencies will provide information on conservation practices and soil health, high tunnel construction and management, cold storage, marketing strategies, and basic economics of specialty crops. Conservation and management practices (such as cover crops, crop rotations, pest and weed management strategies, beneficial insects, etc.) can dramatically impact the bottom line of farms through improving system productivity and profitability. Better understanding of the costs and benefits of

these practices and the potential revenues from key vegetables and fruits well-suited to Kansas can help specialty crop farmers succeed.

In addition to providing valuable information education, the workshops will offer beginning farmers the chance to connect with experienced growers to provide for continued access to information and advice.

Detailed agendas of each workshop will be posted on the KRC website soon.

In addition to the regional workshops, KRC will work with beginning specialty crop growers to pair them with experienced specialty crop growers to facilitate farmer to farmer transfer of knowledge and information. KRC will facilitate a learning circle meeting of ten farmers to determine further educational and resource needs, to share information, and to serve as case study subjects for farm profiles for publication statewide later in the year.

To learn more about the workshops, please contact David Coltrain at 620-330-3951 or [coltraindavid@gmail.com](mailto:coltraindavid@gmail.com), or email [info@kansasaruralcenter.org](mailto:info@kansasaruralcenter.org). For questions about the project as a whole, please contact Mary Fund at [mfund@kansasaruralcenter.org](mailto:mfund@kansasaruralcenter.org) or 866-579-5469.





## Specialty Crops Offer Opportunities in Kansas

by Jean Stramel

The specialty crop market – fruits and vegetables – is one of the biggest opportunities for growth in Kansas agriculture. With consumers demanding more locally grown food, a logical step is for Kansas farmers to increase the production of fruits, vegetables and other specialty crops. Kansas currently imports over 90% of the produce consumed in the state.

At the KRC fall conference, representatives from the Kansas Department of Agriculture (KDA) and K-State Extension (KSU) presented an overview of the state's understanding of the challenges and opportunities for specialty crop production and marketing and the resources available. They highlighted KDA initiatives and grants available, as well as results of a recent grower survey which will help guide efforts to increase these resources and grow this segment of agriculture.

Lexi Wright, KDA program coordinator for “From the Land of Kansas”, the state trademark program, also manages the Central Registration of Farmers’ Markets at the KDA. She shared information from the August 2017 KDA Ag Growth Summit, where specialty crops were one of 19 sectors in Kansas agriculture discussed. According to Wright, “growers say it is difficult to get information on crops to grow in their specific part of the state”. She added that lack of an industry association was also identified as a barrier. Unlike row crop and livestock farmers, there are few growers available to pass on generational experience and knowledge in growing specialty crops. KDA continues to identify opportunities for growth, and provide additional resources to meet specialty crop grower needs.

KDA worked with K-State Extension to survey specialty crop growers, publishing the results in the Economic Impact Survey of Specialty Crops to Kansas specialty crop growers in the fall of 2017. In addition to demographic and production data, challenges and opportunities were identified through the responses given by over 250 Kansas growers. Weather and climate extremes often make growing difficult, and compared to commodity crops, there is little marketing and education done through state or university

channels. “The survey helped us identify areas for growth in the industry, and gave us a glimpse of where growers would like to see resources become available,” Wright continued.

**“80% of the people running the industry have only been doing this for 15 years. This shows there is tremendous room for growth, and the need for research and expansion of markets is needed.”**

Wright also listed funding mechanisms that exist at the state level for farmers. The USDA through KDA funds the organic cost share program, which reimburses growers up to 75% of their certification costs, up to \$750, in 4 categories: crops, wild crafted crops, livestock and product handling. The USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service provides funding assistance for Seasonal High Tunnels for season extension through EQIP (Environmental Quality Incentives Program). Applications are taken at the USDA county field offices year-round, with ranking and funding cut-off dates announced periodically.

The KDA has been holding workshops across the state on the new Food Marketing Safety Act produce safety rule, providing information about marketing, scale certification and various regional topics such as beekeeping. KDA has also scheduled regional farmer’s market workshops for February 2018. (See page for more.)

USDA’s Specialty Crop Block Grant Program is administered by KDA for the purpose of helping enhance the competitiveness of specialty crops, explained Kellen Liebsch, KDA administrator of the SCBG. Grant awards include research and outreach on production methods, marketing, storage and many other aspects of specialty crop production. For instance, Highland Community College early on received funding to develop a viticulture and enology program, and now includes a newly licensed wine incubator program.

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## The Power of One: The Perspective of a Long-Time Activist

By Tom Parker

“I always thought that if the work got done, I could go home and just farm,” stated long-time farm activist Denise O’Brien. “But I’ve never been able to do that because we have to continually fight for rural America and even more so now.” O’Brien from Atlantic, Iowa spoke to the Kansas Rural Center November 2017 Conference participants on the power of grassroots engagement, working with others, and “what can one person do?”

O’Brien’s activism started with the 1980’s Farm Crisis, but since then she has worked on agriculture and conservation policy at the state, national and international levels, founded the Women, Food and Agriculture Network (WFAN), organized the Women’s Task Force of the Iowa Farm Unity Coalition, directed the Rural Women’s Leadership Development Project of Prairie Fire Rural Action, Inc., and served as president of the National Family Farm Coalition. She is currently president of the Pesticide Action Network, and is still active with WFAN and other groups. She also raises vegetables for local markets.

But it was the farm crisis that baptized her in the fire of activism. She returns to lessons learned there, when she thinks of just staying home and farming. She remembers those farmers on the brink of disaster and the statements she heard time and time again. “They felt that if they just kept their heads down and kept farming, and worked harder and harder, the crisis would go away,” she said. “It didn’t.” Farm women, she learned, had no such pretensions or delusions. They tallied

the books and totaled the losses and took off-farm jobs to put food on the table. Across the Midwest, a pervasive sense of helplessness spread like a virus. People felt ashamed and isolated and alone. Against the overwhelming forces arrayed against them, what could one person do?

O’Brien had an answer to that, and the answer back then was the same as now, 40 years later. “The short answer is to seek out like-minded people and together work for change,” she said. “The long answer takes time.”

Farming has always been difficult, but it’s even more difficult when the odds are stacked against you, she said. “We struggle every day to keep a balance with Mother Nature,” she said. “She rules. She’s in charge.”

Other outside forces are even more unpredictable. High interest rates and a drop in land prices in the 1980s turned the farming community upside down both economically and structurally. Today’s trend toward agribusiness or industrial agriculture—which she defines as an industrial assembly line method of agriculture—is a trend away from agriculture as we know it. Instead of replenishing the soil and the farming communities that rely on it, agribusiness is based on an extractive economy that depletes and diminishes rather than restores. It is agriculture without the culture, and culture defines our communities.

“We’re farmers, we’re retail business owners, we’re entrepreneurs, we’re doctors, we’re counselors, we’re teach-

ers and so much more, and we have chosen to be as independent as possible, chosen to be in rural America,” she said. “We like to think of ourselves as independent, but we’re dependent on our communities.”

And those communities are emptying out. The great outmigration from the countryside to the cities has been increasing for more than a decade and shows no signs of slowing. Small independently-owned businesses can’t compete against retailers like Walmart and Amazon. Once-thriving downtowns are being replaced with empty storefronts.

“We’re being left in the dust,” O’Brien said. “And we don’t want to be dust. We want to be soil—soil that’s clean, soil that’s living, soil that’s teeming with microbes.”

Historically, there have been times when people had to rise up and pull things together, she said. Such was certainly the case in the 1980s, and it was driven by farmers. Today’s local food movements, CSA’s, farmers markets, and other programs build on their hard work and dedication, as do organizations such as the Kansas Rural Center. O’Brien is quick to quote Margaret Mead, who said, “Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world. Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has.”

Nevertheless, today’s challenges are, like the weather, as unprecedented as they are unpredictable,

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# Sustainable Food and Farming News

## Apples and Peaches Add Value to This SW Kansas Farm

By Charity Horinek

*Part three of a three-part series, highlighting successful specialty crop growers in Southwest Kansas*

The Applehutch, located near Plains in Southwest Kansas, is living proof that specialty crops can not only survive but thrive as a business in this arid region of the state. For almost 40 years, this fruit orchard has been providing customers far and wide with pick-your-own apples, pears, and peaches, and has added other crops along the way.

“My dad started the orchard on our farm almost 40 years ago with six or seven acres of Red and Golden Delicious apple trees,” Roger Holmes, owner, said. “This year, we had almost 3,000 separate [customer] tickets.”

Roger and his wife Wendy run this family operation with their two sons. Their busy season begins around August 1 with peaches, and runs through Oct. 20 or so with some late-season apples. Though the orchard at one time had expanded to about 40 acres, Holmes said they currently maintain about 15 acres of primarily apples and peaches. They also have some pears and about an acre of grapevines, as well as a pumpkin patch.

“We did have 20-22 acres in peaches at one time,” he said. “But we lost the peach crop the last eight years when it kept freezing, so we have not planted back the peach trees and are down to a smaller number now. And we have gone to a high-density system on our apples, growing more per acre on

dwarf trees, so that helps our production be higher per acre.”

He said the dwarf trees, planted every 3 ½ feet and on a drip system, provide a pleasant picking experience for customers as well. “This summer, we had a tremendous crop of Cameo apples. It looked like just a wall of apples,” Holmes said. “It’s a nice experience for people to come and pick, because they don’t have to climb ladders and everything is within easy reach.”



The Applehutch hosts many school tours each year, and also accommodates groups and families as well as individual customers. The farm’s pumpkin patch is very popular with school children in the fall.

One challenge for specialty crop growers in rural Kansas has always been marketing of products. Holmes said The Applehutch began its efforts the old-fashioned way, on paper.

“We used to send out newsletters through the postal system. It was incredibly tedious, with addressing, folding, and stamping,” he said, finding marketing much easier now

in the age of the Internet. In addition to a website, one of the Holmes sons maintains a Facebook page, enabling them to update customers frequently whenever a crop is ready for picking.

Holmes said he has found Southwest Kansas to be well-suited to raising fruit crops. “Somehow, Western Kansas is a very good fit for grapes. It’s hot and dry – which is also fine for apples, as it keeps disease and pests down. The climate is good for grapes and apples,” he said. “We do have to deal with severe thunderstorms in the spring, which they don’t have to deal with as much in other parts of the country where apples are grown, like Washington. We have much more incidence of hail here. But most years, we avoid hail and have good quality fruit available.”

The challenge for someone who would want to begin an orchard in this region, Holmes said, lies in start-up time and expense. “The establishment time is incredible. It takes a lot of work the first couple of years to get grapes trained, and the initial investment is large,” he said. “It costs about \$15,000 per acre to start apples, and you need to be planting 5 to 10 acres at a go.”

But once established, he said, an orchard can be very rewarding. “It is a lot of work, but it helps if you love what you do,” he said, adding that his wife Wendy especially enjoys running the Applehutch store in the fall. “You have to love meeting with people, and enjoy what you do.”

*continued on page 17*

## Farm Bill and the Move Toward a More Sustainable Food and Farm Future

Every four or five years, federal farm and food policy is up for debate, revision and/or renewal. The current farm bill expires September 2018 so the clock is ticking for passage. Leadership in both Houses of Congress promise action on the bill to pick up by March 2018. The National Sustainable Agriculture Coalition's (NSAC) Agenda for the 2018 Farm Bill provides a comprehensive vision for a more sustainable food and farm system.

NSAC, a leader in agricultural policy for over 30 years, has developed an agenda that addresses farming opportunities and conservation needs, invests in local and regional food economies and needed research, supports public seeds and breeds research, and modernizes the farm safety net of crop insurance. NSAC's 120 members, including the Kansas Rural Center, work together to develop and advocate these recommendations.

### **Priorities include:**

**\*Increasing Farming Opportunity: Beginning Farmers and Ranchers.** Nearly 100 million acres of farmland (enough to support tens of thousands of new family farms and ranches) is set to change hands over the next five years – during the course of our next farm bill. To keep the agricultural community and economy strong, we need to facilitate the transfer of skills, knowledge, and land between current and future generations of family farmers. The 2018 Farm Bill should support aspiring and retiring farmers and ranchers by:

- Expanding beginning farmers' access to affordable farmland
- Empowering new farmers with the skills to succeed in today's agricultural economy
- Ensuring equitable access to credit and the federal crop insurance program
- Encouraging a heightened commitment to advanced conservation and stewardship for a new generation.

**\*Advancing Land Stewardship: Comprehensive Conservation Title Reform.** Every day, American farmers

and ranchers face a myriad of economic and environmental obstacles and challenges (e.g., extreme weather, soil and plant health issues, and pests) and work to overcome them. U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) programs can help producers address these challenges by supporting agricultural resilience, strengthening their ability to absorb and recover from weather extremes and other shocks and stresses to their agricultural production systems and livelihoods. The 2018 Farm Bill should empower farmers and ranchers with the skills, resources, and training necessary to ensure farms and food systems are resilient and healthy by:

- Expanding program access to serve farmers of all types, sizes, and geography
- Enhancing impact by targeting dollars to the most effective conservation activities to solve priority resource concerns
- Improving support for conservation outreach, planning, and implementation support
- Increasing effectiveness and efficiency through better measurement, evaluation, and reporting.

### **\*Investing in Growing Regional Food Economies: New Markets and Jobs**

Consumer demand for local and regional products is on the rise, and this growing interest in the "farm to fork" pipeline is helping to open new markets and economic opportunities to farmers and ranchers across the nation. However, a lack of infrastructure (e.g., storage, aggregation, transportation, and processing capacity) and technical links (e.g., marketing and business planning) has made it difficult for many farmers and ranchers to update their businesses to reach these new customer bases. The 2018 Farm Bill should help connect the dots by:

- Helping farmers reach new markets through outreach, cost-share, and technical assistance
- Increasing access to fresh, healthy, local food for children and low-income individuals and communities.
- Developing new and strengthening existing infrastructure that connects producers to consumers.

*continued on page 13*

# Farm Bill News

*Farm Bill...cont. from page 6*

## **\*Securing Seeds for the Future: Public Plant Breeding Research & Development**

Diversification is a central tenet of any good risk management plan. In agriculture, biological diversity is key to ensuring success: having a variety of well-adapted crops not only reduces the impacts of extreme weather, pests, and disease, it also protects against price fluctuations in the market. Yet, the federal investment in public plant breeding R&D has fallen precipitously, putting food security at risk. By re-investing in public plant breeding research and public cultivar development, we can better ensure that all farmers have access to high performing, locally adapted seeds. The 2018 Farm Bill should keep American agriculture competitive and resilient by:

- Increasing seed options to expand farmers' planting choices
- Boosting investments in research to further crop diversity and enhance the security of our food system.

## **\*Aligning Risk Management, Conservation and Family Farming: Crop Insurance Modernization**

The federal crop insurance program is a cornerstone of the farm safety net, but it must be improved to better serve all of America's farmers and use taxpayer dollars more efficiently. In its current form, the program has limited utility for certain types of farms and farmers in many areas of the country; it discourages sustainable farming practices like cover cropping while encouraging some unsustainable practices like short rotations; and it precipitates farm consolidation through its unlimited subsidies. The 2018 Farm Bill should modernize federal crop insurance by:

- Expanding access to better serve all types of farmers in all regions of the country
- Promoting conservation by eliminating insurance program barriers to sustainable farming practices and linking premium subsidies to stewardship practices that protect our land, water and health
- Reforming the program's structure to prevent the program from unfairly influencing markets, land access, or planting decisions and from promoting farm consolidation and weakened rural communities.

## **NSAC Positions on Other Key Farm Bill Issues**

In addition to the priorities outlined above, NSAC will advocate for 2018 Farm Bill provisions that will:

- Advance racial equity in the food and farm system
- Reverse the trend of rapid consolidation and vertical integration in agriculture
- Increase access to healthy food, particularly for vulnerable children
- Close commodity subsidy loopholes and includes reasonable subsidy limits.
- Focus farm loan programs on family-sized farms and historic target constituencies, including beginning and socially disadvantaged farmers
- Reaffirm USDA's Rural Development Mission Area and creates new rural business investment opportunities
- Scale up funding for sustainable agriculture and organic research, education, and extension
- Focus renewable energy programs on solar, wind, and perennial-based biofuels.

The full platform can be viewed online at: <http://sustainableagriculture.net/publications/>.

Look for updated timely information on KRC's Weekly E-Updates.

(From NSAC October 24, 2017 and NSAC blogs found at [www. http://sustainableagriculture.net/](http://sustainableagriculture.net/))

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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/>.**

# State Policy News

*Legislature...cont. from page 5*

KCP&L and Westar have now come back with a plan to just merge the two companies. Apparently, this would be a very unique approach and the KCC is taking all of 2018 to research the economics and risk of this proposal.

The 'distributed energy' of solar panels and some smaller wind systems are starting to take off in Kansas. The cost of solar panels has dropped significantly and banks are now offering financing arrangements to make monthly cost more affordable. There are two key issues.

If I have solar panels on my home and I am connected to the electric utility grid, what is a fair monthly customer charge for that utility back-up? The second issue is the electric rates that I pay for electricity bought from the utility and what electric rate should the utility pay for any power I sell into the grid? Right now a customer pays retail rates (10-14 cents/kwh) for power bought from the utility but extra power sold back to the utility is a wholesale rate of 3-5 cents/kwh.

Of the 50 states, Kansas ranks close to the bottom for having utility-based or governmental energy efficiency programs. Energy efficiency (1-2 cents/kwh) is far less expensive than producing new power. KCP&L has \$60 million in energy conservation programs (insulation, new lighting, better motors, etc.) for residential and commercial customers in Missouri. KCP&L has requested that the KCC allow such programs to be offered in Kansas. In return for their monopoly status of defined service areas, energy

utilities are required by law to provide 'efficient and sufficient' services/programs.

## NATURAL RESOURCES

Last fall, the Special Interim Committee on Natural Resources met to specifically discuss the State Water Plan (SWP) and existing state water law and adequate funding for the SWP. In terms of water law, there were two statewide legislative water law studies in 1947 and 1956 but none since. By law, the citizens of Kansas are the primary managers of water resources. Conservation or reaching sustainability is not part of Kansas water law today.

The explosion of groundwater pumping from the 1970's through the 1990's, and the draining of the Ogallala aquifer, have presented many challenges. 40% of the Ogallala has been used and 70% will be gone by 2050 at present pumping rates.

In Eastern Kansas, the water battle is over surface water and adequate storage to supply public water needs. Fourteen federal reservoirs provide public water storage. Built decades ago, they are slowly but surely silting in. Dredging is costly. The first effort is John Redmond Reservoir where Kansas floated \$20 million in bonds to start dredging Redmond and fund stream-bank stabilization on the Neosho and Cottonwood Rivers feeding into the reservoir. John Redmond provides the backup cooling for the state's sole nuclear power plant.

Funding the State Water Plan (SWP) is the ultimate challenge. Developed

in 1989, the SWP was to be funded 1/3rd by state taxes, 1/3rd by water user fees, and 1/3rd by agricultural use (pesticide/fertilizer) fees. Normally this would generate \$25 - \$28 million annually. Since 2009, Kansas has not been contributing the \$8 million in state taxes due to the SWP, so the SWP is now down to \$13 million.

Two years ago, the Governor appointed a Blue Ribbon Task Force to debate and recommend funding options. The first decision was that the SWP requires \$55-60 million annually to meet the needs. The Task Force recommended a constitutional amendment where one-tenth of one penny of the existing sales tax would be dedicated to the SWP generating \$55 million. This idea was not even introduced in the 2017 session.

There is no water usage fee on crop irrigation, the largest user of water in the state. A nickel per thousand gallons would bring in \$6 million yearly. But agricultural interests oppose such a fee.

**Noxious Weed Law and Pesticide Law.** Currently to list a new noxious weed (there are now 12), Legislators must pass a bill, and the Governor signs it. For two years, Legislators have debated moving away from listing noxious weeds by statute and converting to an administrative rule and regulation procedure where the Kansas Secretary of Agriculture has the authority with advice from an appointed noxious weed advisory committee.

But the debate over noxious weed law begs the question of overall state

*continued on page 15*

# Sustainable Food and Farming News

*Legislature...cont. from page 14*

pesticide law, which should be discussed at the same time. There is no definition of 'drift' in pesticide or noxious weed law. There is no statutory right for a landowner to post their land as a 'no spray zone'. As the overuse of glyphosate (Round Up) has become routine over the last 20 years, there are now 13 'super weeds' in Kansas resistant to glyphosate, so harsher chemicals such as 2-4D or 'Dicamba' are being used. Drift problems are routine.

Dicamba use impacted thousands of acres across the Midwest last summer, presenting a very real threat to non-Dicamba resistant crops. Current law and management practices rely largely on chemical controls, which are increasingly ineffective.

More emphasis on integrated pest management practices and approaches, which involve complex crop rotations and biological/cultural options, is needed, along with more research on improving IPM. This would benefit regular pesticide efficacy as well as the noxious weed issues in the state.

## **FEDERAL FARM BILL**

The federal farm bill that comes up every four or five years impacts natural resource management, adoption of conservation practices to mitigate soil loss and climate change, and build soil health in all states. It also impacts rural development and determines nutrition programs, and can have a big influence on who the next generation of farmers and food producers will be. State legislators usually consider it a federal responsibility, but the farm bill currently under debate should at least

be part of informational hearings at the State Legislature.

Watch for KRC's Weekly E-Update Policy Watch in your e-mail inbox to keep you up to speed on all the above. Issues will also be posted on KRC's website at <http://kansasruralcenter.org/category/legislative-policy-watch/>.

*Paul Johnson is KRC's Policy Analyst. He can be reached at [pdjohnson@centurylink.net](mailto:pdjohnson@centurylink.net).*

## **KRC Monthly Grazing Calls**

Join other grazers from across the state of Kansas in a telephone conversation with grazing management experts Dale Kirkham, Gary Kilgore and Keith Harmony on the second Monday of each month, from 7:30 to 9:00 pm.

Hosted by the Kansas Rural Center, these informal discussions cover all aspects of grazing management. The calls are held on the second Monday of each month.

This is an opportunity to learn how you can use complementary forages to extend your grazing season, gain management tips and explore ideas to improve profitability while you responsibly manage your natural resources.

**Dial: 1-877-304-5632**

**Enter: 300 346 2424#**

For more information please contact Dale Kirkham at 620-344-0202.

## **KRC Offers Weekly Policy Watch E-Updates**

KRC is once more offering weekly summaries of the Kansas State Legislature's activities including bills introduced, testimony, calendars and background analysis. KRC's policy analyst Paul Johnson will monitor the Legislature and report on critical issues and provide timely information on a range of issues including agriculture and food related topics, state budget (including education finance) and tax policies, energy and water policy, and social services issues.

KRC also includes information on how to contact your legislator, additional resources available on key topics, and informs you of any opportunities to learn more about the legislative process or specific educational meetings on key topics.

KRC will also cover federal farm bill progress and provide information and analysis via our membership in the National Sustainable Agriculture Coalition.

If you receive Rural Papers and have provided us an e-mail address, you automatically receive Policy Watch. For information on how to sign up for Policy Watch and Rural Papers, contact Mary Fund at [mfund@kansasruralcenter.org](mailto:mfund@kansasruralcenter.org), or go to [www.kansasruralcenter.org/donate](http://www.kansasruralcenter.org/donate).

# Sustainable Food and Farming News

*Hoefner... cont. from page 6*

1980 election and the installation of the new administration, both reports were pulled, publication ceased, and the recommendations left on the cutting room floor.

During and following the farm crisis of the mid-1980's, many farmers started looking for alternatives to the "get big or get out" concept. They were looking at ways to reduce input costs and rely more on management and on-farm resources, as well as looking for ways to find increased value in the marketplace. Sustainable agricultural societies and grassroots organizations across the Midwest formed to change the direction of federal policy toward a more sustainable vision of agriculture. One of them, the Kansas Rural Center, was a vital contributor to those early organizing efforts, Hoefner said. Another was the Sustainable Agriculture Coalition, now known as the National Sustainable Agriculture Coalition (NSAC), which formed in the late 1980s.

The organization's goals were simple. "We argued for a seat at the table," he said. "We warned policymakers to not put all their eggs in one basket. We pleaded that they allow an alternative to have a chance. We argued for a fair share and a fair shake."

Winning congressional appropriations for the SARE program after it had been shelved for almost a decade was their first mission, and getting it off the ground was their first big win in 1988.

Two years later the organization won the full-scale authorization of SARE into the 1990 Farm Bill. Other initiatives followed, including the Organic

Agriculture Research and Extension Initiative, the Beginning Farmer and Rancher Development Program, and the Small and Medium-Size Farm Viability Program.

"It was no coincidence that SARE and NSAC got started in the same year," he said. "The impact of our work to create and fund SARE has been hugely important to the movement. It's difficult to imagine where we would be in sustainable agriculture both now and in the future were it not for the combined \$75 million a year we are pumping into the four programs."

Support for new and beginning farmers has been a central tenet of the NSAC policy agenda from the 1990 farm bill to the present. "We have consistently kept the issue of the aging of American agriculture in front of Congress and the USDA," Hoefner said.

Also with the newfound interest in soil health and cover crops really beginning to take off, Hoefner said, NSAC has been overwhelmed by the interest in a topic they have championed for decades in their conservation policy work. "We are trying to harness that broader support to gain stronger policy and better funding for working lands conservation, and also to better integrate conservation and soil health with the federal crop insurance program."

During the past decade, marketing issues have accelerated. Legislative wins included the Value-Added Producer Grant Program, the Farmers Market and Local Food Promotion Program, the National Organic Certification Cost Share Program, and others that were combined into the Know Your Farmer, Know Your Food

Initiative passed during the Obama Administration.

All of these programs required hard work and dedication to develop, launch and campaign on, Hoefner said. But when it came to tackling the Big Ag programs, whether commodity programs, crop insurance, tax shelters, CAFO regulations, or anti-trust and fair competition policy, the going got a lot tougher.

"Farm policy overall is stacked against diversification and farming in concert with the environment," he said. "Switching from the production system side of the equation to the structure of agriculture side, we have had nothing if not an agonizing time trying to get Congress and USDA to enact and implement real subsidy payment limitation reform to reduce incentives to over expansion and subsidized farm consolidation. We repeatedly seem to make progress, passing real reform measures on one side of Congress but not the other, or winning small reforms from Congress only to watch USDA undo them in the implementation phase."

Positive change will come only when we are able to construct a wider coalition of farmers, workers, and consumers who will stand up and fight for a better food policy, building a stronger power base to make fundamental change, he said.

NSAC and its member organizations are now focusing on the 2018 Farm Bill, but Hoefner expects it to be a difficult struggle. "Support for beginning farmers and new farming opportunities in Congress and even among agricul-

*continued on page 17*



# Sustainable Food and Farming News

*Hoefner...cont. from page 16*

tural interest groups is a mile wide and an inch deep,” he said. “But for the sake of the future of a sustainable agriculture based on family farms, we really need to confront the barriers in a more systemic way and try to get support levels to a mile wide and a mile deep. The future of a more sustainable agriculture depends on it.”

Policy, he said, is not the be all and end all, but it can help to move us in the right direction. It’s also important to recognize that legislative successes happened from the grassroots up. “We know that the future of sustainable food systems at home and abroad hinge on how we respond to the challenges of today and prepare for the challenges of tomorrow, which are coming at us fast and furious.

“Sustainable farming tomorrow will not be exactly like that of today. The principles and values may remain constant, but the challenges and opportunities will continue to evolve, and in many respects intensify. That makes fighting the fight for more research dollars in general, and more dollars for sustainability, regeneration and resilience research in particular, more important than ever.”

*Tom Parker is freelance writer from Blue Rapids, Ks.*

*Applehutch...cont. from page 11*

The Holmes family plans to expand its operation over the next few years, hoping to plant another two acres of grapes this spring and another two to three acres of apples over the next couple of years. The family farm also includes conventional row crops, raising corn, heat, and soybeans. The specialty crops help to “fill in the gaps” of the growing year, keeping the family and employees busy with pruning, planting and other tasks between the growing cycle of conventional crops. And best of all, he said, is getting to see his customers.

“People just love to come to the country,” he said. “They enjoy getting out of the city and seeing where their food comes from, and we enjoy having them come.”

The Applehutch has a Facebook page, as well as a website at [www.applehutch.biz](http://www.applehutch.biz). They can also be reached at (620) 629-1447.

*The Power of One...cont. from page 10*

and the undercurrent of worry that has lain dormant is stirring. “The worry has always been there,” she said, “but it seems we’re more worried now.”

Her own worries include constant threats from aerial spray drift from neighboring farms. Though she has met with pilots to warn them of her farm’s certified organic status, the response has been one of dismissal.

A lifetime of battling for the American farmer has left her with a clear understanding of what’s at stake. She flashes through a series of photographs showing rows of organic crops, fellow farmers, family members standing in front of a wooden barn, and a colorful tree frog. “This is why I farm,” she said. “I farm because of my family, because of the food I can grow, because of the beauty. I have the pleasure of seeing nature every day.”

She’s reached the age when she’s considered an elder in the movement for sustainable agriculture, and is warming to the idea of mentoring after a friend told her that people are listening. Passing on information to younger generations has enabled her to keep abreast of modern social networking methods such as Facebook and Twitter, as well as discovering new uses and recipes for the crops she produces.

Attending conferences on global food issues has expanded her horizons to other cultures and other worldviews. During one such conference she came across a saying from Haiti that could be considered a summation of her life’s work: “There are more mountains behind the mountains we see.”

“So,” O’Brien said, “our work is never done.” She takes pleasure, though, in the rise of new young energy and commitment to the issues and values she has spent a lifetime working to protect.

# Sustainable Food and Farming News

## *Specialty Crop Opportunities... cont. from page 9*

The Kansas Rural Center has received several Specialty Crop Block grants for educational programs including its recent "Growing Over Cover" publication, and its upcoming regional workshops. (See page 8.) Other examples include the development of incubator kitchens, school and community gardens, and scientific and technological endeavors in product handling and storage. Rock Springs 4-H Camp received funding to bring more locally grown specialty crops into their camp meals. Growers in northwest Kansas have received SCBG funds to expand vegetable production in western Kansas where many food deserts exist. Several grower groups have partnered with the Western Prairie Resource, Conservation & Development Council (RC&D) on expanding opportunities for growers in this region to sell into markets on the front range of Colorado, including restaurants and stores.

The State recent survey specialty crop growers Kansas, Economic Impact Survey of Specialty Crops, provided important information on the status of and the needs of this growing sector of agriculture. Dr. Cary Rivard, director of the Olathe Horticulture Research and Extension Center near Kansas City, explained that only about 30 counties in Kansas (out of 105) have horticulture agents. "Many counties have fruit and vegetable growers but they are spread out, so we don't really know they are out there and how they are adding to the economy," he said.

He stressed the importance of the data generated in this survey. Specialty Crop Block Grant funds are distributed to states based on Agricultural Census data, so if these growers are not captured by the ag census, Kansas does not get the funds it needs for this type of research and promotion.

Rivard explained "The University has a lot of industry partnerships with big agricultural interests to get research funding, but in specialty crops there is not a lot of help. Seed companies are willing to donate seeds for variety trials, but won't finance the research because they say Kansas doesn't have the markets for these crops."

These survey results can provide the real numbers needed to reveal that specialty crop growers exist and that funding research to this industry can benefit Kansas agriculture in general.

The survey shows that there are specialty crop growers in over half the counties in Kansas. 54% of these growers have actually purchased land for growing specialty crops. Almost 80% are under 6 acres, with 11% over 20 acres. This indicates a huge potential for growth in the "middle bubble" of 10-20 acres, which often are considered too big for farmer's market but too small for wholesalers.

Tomatoes are grown on 59% of these farms, with peppers, beans, greens, herbs, spices and berries next in quantity. Nursery crops showed a low level at 7%, but Rivard believes this is low and some growers were not captured in this data.

The majority of sales are through farmers markets (36%). Eighty percent of the growers are bringing in less than \$50,000 in gross sales, and 42% want to expand their operations.

There is tremendous potential for growth, especially for wholesale commercial farms. More research is needed on storage and distribution, varieties and growing methods specific to Kansas climates, and growing conditions, which vary widely across Kansas. It is obvious there is potential for growth, especially in wholesale farms, since according to Rivard, "when production gets up in the 10-20 acre range, that is when you start to make money."

Seventy-eight percent of the operations were started after 2001. "This means that 80 % of the people running the industry have only been doing this for 15 years. This shows there is tremendous room for growth, and the need for research and expansion of markets is needed," Rivard said.

*Jean Stramel is a freelance writer from Lucas, Ks. and she prepared this story for KRC.*

## KRC Receives Health Foundation's IVE Grant

The Kansas Rural Center (KRC) is one of ten organizations named last fall as a recipient of a new multi-state partnership initiative, which will engage populations that are new to the political process. This initiative connects the importance of voting and civic engagement with long-term health. The Kansas Health Foundation (KHF) made the announcement in late October as part of a partnership with Health Care Foundation of Greater Kansas City and REACH Healthcare Foundation to launch a new program, "Kansas Integrated Voter Engagement (IVE): Health Depends on a Vibrant Democracy."

The purpose of IVE is to integrate year-round voter/civic engagement as a part of existing program work. The health of many Kansans is often affected by how much money they make, where they live, their education level, race or ethnicity. Low-income Kansans, African-Americans, Hispanics and those without a high school education often experience poorer health and may have reduced access to affordable health care. These same individuals are also less likely to vote or register to vote. Ten

organizations—nine in Kansas and one in Missouri—will receive \$75,000 a year for three years, for a total grant of \$225,000 per organization. Each grantee will incorporate year-round, non-partisan Integrated Voter Engagement into their existing work to serve at-risk populations. Each organization will be tasked with increasing voter registration and turnout in local, state and national elections, and encourage greater civic engagement between election cycles.

KRC's grant will build a statewide IVE program focused on rural communities lacking consistent physical, social or economic access to healthy food; target audiences include Kansas farmers and ranchers seeking greater production and marketing diversity, and women farmers and socially disadvantaged minority farmers or citizens in rural areas. The project will build on KRC's current policy and organizing and education efforts in rural areas of the state.

For information on the other grantees go to: <http://kansashealth.org/2017/10/31/ive-release-2/>.



## A Voice for Sustainable Agriculture for Over 38 Years - Rural Papers

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# Sustainable Food and Farming News

## *Diversity in agriculture...cont. from page 7*

“Historically, we welcome minorities,” Mendoza said. “That’s the sense I have, and not just us but the community as a whole. We come here not knowing what’s available to us, and we have to change our eating habits.” By collaborating and working together—as well as learning from each other—immigrants can continue to feel comfortable with their food choices.

In the greater Kansas City area, recently resettled refugees are learning to become self-sufficient farmers through “New Roots for Refugees,” a collaboration between the Catholic Charities of Northeast Kansas City and Cultivate Kansas City. The four-year training program provides quarter-acre plots where refugees familiarize themselves with the Kansas City climate, learn to integrate with the local community, strengthen their marketing abilities, and increase their English language skills. Currently, 16 farmers are enrolled.



*A panel at the KRC Annual Conference spoke about diversity in Kansas agriculture and communities. Left to right: JohnElla Holmes, Executive Director of the Kansas Black Farmers Association, Nicodemus, Ks., Founder of the Veryl Switzer/KSU Agriculture Camp for Youth. Matthew Kost, Program Director of Cultivate Kansas City farmer development and support programs representing New Roots for Refugees, and Bertha Mendoza, director of KSU Research & Extension SW Kansas Expanded Food and Nutrition Program in Garden City. Photo by Tom Parker.*

Diversity plays a crucial role in Cultivate KC’s mission, which can be summed up with “food, farms and community,” Matthew Kost said. Kost is program director for farmer development and support programs. “A lot of the farmers we’re bringing in are coming from 10,000 years of

agricultural heritage,” he said. “One thing we realize is that while we’re teaching a lot, we’re learning more than we’re teaching. This gets back to the point of having diversity in culture and perspective in the discussions we’re having around food and farming.”

Because most of the refugees are new to the area and don’t have a lot of money, the program is based on a stair step policy, Kost said. For the first year, all expenses are met by the program. During the second year, participants start taking on more responsibility, until by the fourth year they’re on their own. “We want to ease them into the financial responsibilities of farming,” he said.

Most of the refugees are from Burma, with others from Nepal and the Congo. The program starts early in the season with 18-20 workshops covering everything from production, planting, marketing and financing. Each farmer gets space in the greenhouse to get their seedlings started, and then they’re trained on modern farm equipment suited to small-scale farming. “Many of them were working with water buffalo, so we want to get them on a tractor,” Kost said. “At first they look freaked out, but then you see the confidence come in. It’s really gratifying.”

Once harvest starts, farmers are taught washing and preparation, selling at farmers markets and wholesale marketing. About 20 different restaurants and small grocers work with cultivate KC to distribute their produce, as well as CSAs. Remarkably, most farmers annually earn from \$10,000 to \$12,000 from their quarter acre plot. “At the end of the day,” Kost said, “we want them to spin out of the program, have their own farm enterprise and be completely self-contained.”

Until last year, core plots have been scattered across the Kansas City urban area. Recently, however, the organization was approached with offers by rural farmers who have extra land not in production. The first graduate to take up such an offer signed a lease on five acres with a greenhouse. Kost said it was another instance of spreading diversity, one refugee at a time.

For JohnElla Holmes, the emphasis is on a younger group. “Statistically, only one out of 10 low-income youth have

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### *Diversity in agriculture...cont. from page 20*

visited a farm,” Holmes said. “One. That means the other nine haven’t had the opportunity.” Rectifying that disparity was one of the goals she discussed with Veryl Switzer, a charter member of the K-State Sports Hall of Fame who had dreamed of creating a summer camp to make children aware of agriculture and how it touches every aspect of their lives. The Veryl Switzer/KSU Agriculture Camp, which they founded 2007, addressed those issues and more.

The week-long program is a residential summer camp for primarily low-income urban youth in grades five to ten, with a sprinkling of rural youth with 4-H experience. Campers stay at K-State residence halls while learning about Kansas history and agriculture, and spend time in Nicodemus, Kansas, where they engage in horseback riding, fishing and hiking as well as performing a service learning project sponsored by the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service Center. Agriculture is the heart of the curriculum, Holmes said. Activities include a water field day in Osborne sponsored by the USDA to teach campers about water conservation issues and water sustainability; tours of the Kansas Department of Agriculture, the Manhattan Community Garden, the Kansas Wheat and Innovation Center, an ethanol plant, and the Hill City High FFA and 4-H Project, among others; and hands-on gardening experience in a variety of settings from a small garden plot to riding in combines.

While riding in the combine “blows their minds,” Holmes said, a popular part of the curriculum involves a gift card provided by Subway. “We’ve talked about fruits and vegetables, we’ve been to the garden and the farm, so we take them to lunch and they can spend the card on whatever they want—but they have to put at least four vegetables on their sandwich.” The camp has served more than 450 students and claims a 100 percent graduation and college acceptance rate.

In addition to the camp, the Kansas Black Farmer’s Association is developing several new programs that would increase diversity in the state’s agricultural fabric, Holmes said. One is a mentoring program that would pair experienced farmers with beginning farmers, and another is geared toward minority and women farmers.

### **Nell Newman Foundation Provides Grassroots Programming Support**

The Kansas Rural Center is the recent recipient of a \$5,000 challenge grant from the Nell Newman Foundation to support KRC’s grassroots educational activities. To receive the grant, KRC had to match it dollar for dollar. During its October Match Challenge Campaign, KRC raised \$8100 to more than meet the grant challenge.

The funds will be used to support the following this fall and into 2018:

- \* Educational meetings or forums on emerging issues
- \* Policy Watch: Our weekly e-updates on Kansas policy issues at the Statehouse during the session, and public forums/town hall meetings on critical policy issues;
- \*Federal farm bill: monitoring the debates and discussions in D.C. and holding educational meetings;
- \*and General support for our communications efforts to provide critical information on food and farm issues and promote a sustainable food and farming system.

Thanks to the Nell Newman Foundation and to all who contributed to the match campaign!

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### **Thanks to Limestone Pizza of Lawrence**

Limestone Pizza of Lawrence, Kansas, held a percent day for the Kansas Rural Center last November, pledging a percent of the evening’s profits to KRC. Thanks to KRC friends who patronized the restaurant that evening, and to Limestone customers who were introduced to KRC via table cards and available information. Limestone uses many locally sourced ingredients from local farms, and we are grateful for this support of local farmers and the local food system.

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## KRC News



**Kansas Rural Center Executive Director, Mary Fund, and National Sustainable Agriculture Coalition (NSAC) Senior Strategic Advisor, Ferd Hoefner, at KRC's Annual Farm & Food Conference in Manhattan, November 2017.**

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