

Rural Papers

Reporting with commentary on
agricultural and rural issues

Spring/Summer 2021

KRC

KANSAS RURAL CENTER



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KANSAS RURAL CENTER



WHAT WE DO

The Kansas Rural Center (KRC) is a non-profit organization founded in 1979. We promote the long-term health of the land and its people through research, education, and advocacy. KRC cultivates grassroots support for public policies that encourage family farming and stewardship of soil and water. KRC is committed to economically viable, ecologically sound, and socially just agriculture.

OUR MISSION

To promote the long-term health of the land and its people through research, education and advocacy that advance an economically viable, ecologically sound, and socially just food and farming system.

OUR VISION

KRC believes that diversified farming systems hold the key to preserving, developing and maintaining a food and farming future that provides healthy food, a healthy environment and social structure, and meaningful livelihoods.

RURAL PAPERS

Rural Papers is the voice of the Kansas Rural Center. It is published 3 - 6 times a year, in print and digitally. Rural Papers is jointly edited by KRC staff. Reprints of articles are encouraged with acknowledgement of Rural Papers and the author.

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UPDATE ON KRC LEADERSHIP

Hello Friends of the Kansas Rural Center,

After several years of having the honor to serve on the KRC Board of Directors, I was elected earlier this year to serve as President. I have always been proud of the unwavering commitment of this organization, including its staff, leadership, and Board of Directors to advancing a socially just and ecologically sound food and farming future for our state, and I am honored to be entrusted with helping continue to guide this mission in 2021.

This year will mark a year of change in the Executive Director position of KRC. Connie Bonfy has stepped down to focus on her health, effective May 14. We are grateful to Connie for her time shepherding the organization, to helping us bring on talented, dedicated staff members along with helping build organization capacity and new-to-us partnerships with other organizations across the state. Connie shares a few words of farewell for you all on page 5.

During this time of transition, the KRC Board, especially the Executive Committee, is supporting staff and the organization's programs, grants, partnerships. The Board has selected Vice President Zack Pistora to fill the role of Interim Director as the Board begins a full executive search. Zack will be taking a temporary leave from the Board to do so. We are confident in Zack's abilities to guide the organization, alongside our incredibly skilled and passionate staff members.

Starting last year and continuing to today — and surely beyond — KRC has not been immune to the great transitions our state, country, and world has been undergoing, progressing forward in a time of uncertainty and adjusting to our “new normal,” no matter how frequently that sense of normalcy seems to shift. As with many other organizations, we have move to a fully digital program execution, bringing in folks from across the state and beyond its borders to our education-by-Zoom (and Whova platform!) opportunities. Our continued push toward our mission has remained constant throughout, and we are looking forward to many collaborative, exciting, and we believe game-changing events and programs, including:

- KRC's annual conference in a virtual setting—just successfully completing a Local Foods conference and looking forward to the Soil Health conference on August 6.
- Engaging in the expansion of local/regional food production, processing, and marketing as a way of supporting community development and opportunities for meaningful livelihoods, including our 2020-2022 Farm to School program grant and a partnership with Common Ground Producers and Grower's Urban Agriculture project.
- Promoting widespread adoption of more diversification and biodiversity (biological and social) in the farming, soil health, and food system in Kansas that provide more opportunities to farmers, and a more resilient future.

I thank all of you for your ongoing support of KRC, your involvement and attendance, your presence in our community, and your taking up the good fight on behalf of our land and people.

If you have someone who would be a strong fit for our next Executive Director, please email info@kansasruralcenter.org. We are actively searching and will be reaching out to our partners and launching a full search.

Respectfully,

Jennifer Kongs
KRC Board President

Please donate today at the cover crop level of your choice and help sow the seeds for a healthy future for KRC!

A donation card can be found on the back page of this issue of Rural Papers, or please visit <https://kansasruralcenter.org/donate> to donate online.

Thank you for your support!

KRC Seeks Applicants for Executive Director

Kansas Rural Center (KRC), a nonprofit education and advocacy organization promoting a sustainable agriculture and food system, seeks applicants for Executive Director. Responsibilities: overall program implementation, fundraising/grant writing, budget and financial management, personnel and administrative management, KRC's public spokesperson, and works closely with the Board of Directors. Background in and commitment to sustainable agriculture required. View full Position Announcement at: <https://kansasruralcenter.org/krc-news/kansas-rural-center-seeks-executive-director-2021>.

Contact: Jennifer Kongs, KRC President, jennifer.kongs@gmail.com; 785-249-4159.

To Apply: Send letter of interest, resume and two writing samples to jobs@kansasruralcenter.org.

--KRC is an equal-opportunity employer--

HELLO FROM ZACK

Interim Director: New Days Bring Birds to Sing

Doesn't it seem like there's a whole lotta 'new' we're seeing lately? Surely so – the list could include all of what was/is bundled with the tragic pandemic, an ever-evolving world affected by climate change, historical firsts, political firsts, all-electric Humvees... you name it. Just the other day, I was admiring the emergence of a rainbow when I noticed sets of clouds crisscrossing each other, blowing past each other in opposite directions. That was a first for me.

Then there's the Kansas Rural Center getting a new Interim Executive Director; yours truly. Yes, let the record show that I offered to serve under my own free will. Also, let the record show that I am deeply honored and excited to offer all I can to help one of my favorite groups of folks in Kansas help 'promote the long-term health of the land and its people'. As a life-long Kansan, I can't imagine a better mission to pursue. Furthermore, I embrace the motivations of both returning the favor to my

familial roots and community upbringing in this work, as well as paying it forward to the next generations of Kansans and the natural ecosystems that will support them. And no matter how old or new you might be to living in Kansas, I bet you can relate.

While many organizations often spin their wheels a bit when undergoing transition, I can attest that the Kansas Rural Center simply shifted gears and never slipped. In a way, it seemed like a group of eco-minded farmers were just practicing good crop rotation. Credit our Governing Board and Staff for their wisdom, hard work, and quick ability to adapt; this ain't your ordinary bunch! Of course, what else might you expect from the leadership of a group who embody values of resiliency, community, inclusivity, and integrity?

You and I – all of us that support the Kansas Rural Center – should acknowledge both the roots and



the blossoms that are both the work and the reason(s) behind the accomplishments associated with KRC for over forty years. It is this deep respect for the seeds that have been sown prior that really allow us to savor the flavor of the fruits we have now. Still, we will continue to plant seeds together for a better food and farming system, for sustainable and prosperous rural communities, and for the healthy and enjoyable place we call Kansas.

Please feel free to contact me at zackp@kansasruralcenter.org.

FAREWELL FROM CONNIE

Hello KRC friends! I wanted to take a moment and say hello and also goodbye; at least goodbye as your executive director. As you know I'm not the youngest chick in the clutch, and we have had such a busy year with many ideas, and more than one conference (with a great new one on Building Community from the Ground Up coming up on August 6). There is much more to be done and unfortunately I am exhausted. My heart is enthusiastic about the work and I know you will continue to see great things come out of KRC. So with an expectant heart toward the future I must say goodbye for now. I will be closely following the work and hope to help in any way I can.



SMALL FARMER COMMENTARY

By Jill Elmers

Greetings from northeast Kansas and [Moon on the Meadow](#) farm. We are a certified organic farm on the east edge of Lawrence where we produce vegetables, herbs, small fruits, and cut flowers. We are celebrating our 20th season at the Lawrence Farmers Market; participate in a multi-farm CSA with around 175 shares; sell to our coop grocery store, our school district, our local restaurants, and the KC Food Hub.

We are excited that the country is working its way out of the COVID pandemic, and we are enjoying being able to interact directly with our customers again. We missed them so much. Everyday life on the farm last year wasn't much different really. We still did most everything that we have done for 20+ years, except that we all wore masks. We opted not to go to the Farmers Market to keep ourselves and staff safe, but created an online store with weekly delivery and increased our sales to the [KC Food Hub](#) and our CSA. Luckily, our customers - who also chose to not attend market on a weekly basis - signed up for our CSA instead. We conducted a contactless, drive-thru CSA that worked well for everyone.

It wasn't until the end of the season and a little down time that I realized the toll the pandemic had taken on myself and my staff. When the lock down started, we just focused on solutions for the changes in our markets, and adapting as needed. We created (and updated often) our own COVID safety procedures so that everyone felt safe both at the farm and away from

the farm. But, every day I worried about what would happen if we had to close the farm due to exposure? How would we get the food to the people who so needed it? How would I keep paying my staff who were depending on this job to support themselves and their families? Well, we made it and all my staff have returned for another season. We closed the farm for all of January to do as much resting as possible and we are excited with what this season has already brought us and what we have coming.

As you can tell from some of the numbers I have mentioned above, I have been doing this farming thing for a while. One of the best parts of transitioning to what is considered an older and wiser farmer is being able to share your knowledge and experiences with the next generation of young farmers and learning how to support them as they learn, grow, and work.

Here at Moon on the Meadow farm we participate in the Growing Growers apprentice program. We host at least one apprentice each year who works on the farm along side myself and my staff to experience as much of what it means to run a farm as possible. The apprentices also take classes on different aspects of farming and ranching, and this year we hosted one of these classes and a virtual tour of our farm. Here is a link if you are interested - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jWUU3g3qje4>.

Jill Elmers is a member of the KRC Board.

KRC Hosts “Pollinators on the Plains” Virtual Conference



In 2020, the world as we know it altered owing to the pandemic that swept the globe. Lives changed, lives and livelihoods were lost, paradigms shifted. Food and farming took on new relevance as ordinary tasks and perceived certainties, such as ready access to food and other staples, became difficult or out of reach. People turned to local farmers to fill their food needs at levels that are unprecedented in recent memory. This shift presented both opportunities and challenges for farmers, and above all, a need to adjust to the new “normal”.

At KRC, we’ve had to adjust to a new normal as well. The pandemic temporarily took away our ability to gather people together for education and connection so we took to digital meetings and engagement, as did so many others, and

worked hard to keep connections alive and to bring information to our friends and contacts via on-line platforms such as Zoom and Whova.

In February 2021, KRC held a virtual Pollinators on the Plains conference. Over 120 people attended, and it was an uplifting event filled with great information on the impacts of pollinators from pesticides, farming practices that benefit pollinators, diverse methods of keeping and housing honeybees, and two regional community initiatives that benefit pollinators while enhancing the community.

It was good to see faces of friends, both old and new, coming together via our computer screens circling the campfire around our love of pollinators.

While there are obvious downsides to not being able to meet in person, there are a few perks to hosting a virtual conference. An online event allows for easier access for more people to attend, and allows for inviting high caliber speakers from near and far, as the limitations of traveling and scheduling are less complicated and restrictive.

We had a wealth of incredible speakers at our Pollinators on the Plains conference, including Dan Raichel, NRDC Staff Attorney, who heads the group’s Pollinator Initiative. Raichel outlined the impacts of pesticides on pollinators and

the role that agriculture plays in pollinator decline. In addition to general information about the perils to pollinators from agricultural chemicals that are used extensively on farm fields in the Midwest (and elsewhere), Raichel informed the group about a pollinator harming pesticide-caused environmental disaster that has been unfolding over the past year in Nebraska, sickening pets and livestock, and ultimately ending in a ban on using neonic-coated seeds in ethanol production in the state. You can watch Raichel’s presentation here - <https://youtu.be/jUCsm-lTmkY>.

Raichel mentioned in his keynote address that U.S. beekeepers report losing about 40% of their colonies each year. While interest in keeping honeybees has skyrocketed over the past decade, the challenges of keeping honeybee colonies healthy and alive is a formidable task as the factors that plague pollinators and honeybees - including pesticides, habitat loss, disease and climate change - continue to wreak havoc.

To help beekeepers, or those dreaming of becoming a beekeeper, to navigate these challenges, we offered information on a range of beekeeping methods at the conference. Four regional beekeepers, all of whom utilize different tools, philosophies and strategies for

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keeping bees, shared their knowledge and answered questions, giving attendees lots of choices for getting started in beekeeping and keeping bees healthy in these challenging beekeeping times. Additionally, the [Center for Rural Affairs](#) presented findings from their study on the efficacy of different hive types.

Sarah Red-Laird, founder of [The Bee Girl Organization](#), a Washington state-based non-profit which works to protect and promote honeybees, talked about a regenerative bee pasture project she is working on in Montana that involves interseeding pastures with bee habitat, offering a win-win for the rancher and for pollinators. The project has good potential for replication here in Kansas, and offered inspiration and motivation for a number of farmers who attended the conference.

Candy Thomas, NRCS Soil Health Specialist, gave an overview of farming methods that are beneficial to pollinators. So many of the practices that benefit soil health and microorganisms, such as reducing or eliminating chemicals, planting a diverse array of crops, utilizing cover crops and leaving natural habitat around your crop fields, also benefit pollinator populations on the farm.

In urban communities, efforts to protect and benefit pollinators can also provide big benefits for the people who live in the communi-

ties. [MO Hives KC](#) Co-Founder, Dr. Marion Pierson, and [Manhattan Pollinator Pockets Director](#), Alfonso Leyva, talked about the uplifting and engaging projects they have going on in their respective communities, and they ways in which the projects benefit both pollinators and people in the communities where they are taking place. MO Hives KC's aim is to bring honeybees and beekeeping to an urban environment to engage the community in beekeeping and to provide beauty and wonder. Manhattan Pollinator Pockets aims to increase pollinator habitat, engaging the community in pollinator conservation and also adding beauty and wonder.

Surprisingly, bees and other pollinators often do well in urban environments, due to lower concentration of pollinator-harming pesticides and the abundance of flowering plants found in many urban neighborhoods.

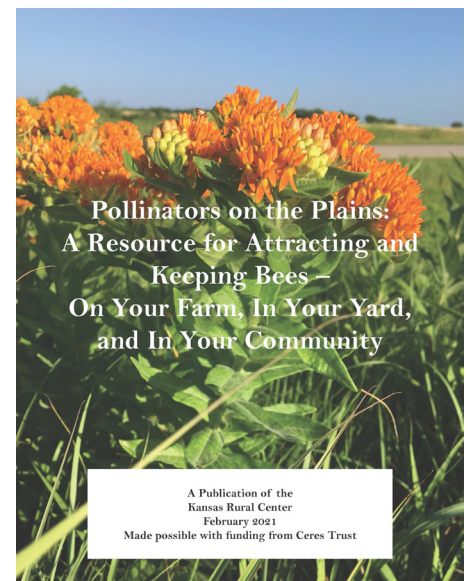
As Dr. Pierson notes, "We've seen that bees actually thrive in (urban) areas due to their lower levels of pesticides and herbicides. Bees are an important element to our ecosystem and have suffered a severe

population decline over the last 20 years. We aim to rejuvenate those populations while also rejuvenating urban neighborhoods."

It was an information and inspir-

ation packed day, and the time flew by, despite being glued to the computer screen for the bulk of a day. A number of the presenters have allowed us to share the presentations with you, and they can be found in the index at the end of the publication, on KRC's website or our YouTube channel.

In order to continue the impact of this educational event, we created [this resource](#), filled with information on attracting and protecting pollinators on the farm, and a host of other additional information that we hope you will find useful in helping to protect pollinators and attracting and keeping bees on your farm, in your yard, or in your community.



To view presentations from the event, please visit our YouTube channel - <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCLHfd8ooMjd-4vhuDrRT0Lbg>.

Local Foods for Rural Food Security

This op-ed was contributed by Dr. John Ikerd, retired Professor Emeritus of Agricultural Economics, University of Missouri. Dr. Ikerd gave a keynote presentation at KRC's Local Food Connections conference in May.



Access to good food is a challenge in rural America. Many rural communities have lost their local grocery stores and restaurants. Transportation is often a problem in rural areas, and some rural residents are forced to rely on the more expensive and less nutritious foods available at local gas stations and convenience stores. Others face a long drive to a town with a supermarket or grocery store that stocks fresh produce, milk, eggs, and other staples. Many rural communities are considered “food deserts” — a term previously reserved for inner cities. Ironically, many of these food deserts are farming communities.

Rural areas also have disproportionate numbers of residents who are elderly, chronically ill, or disabled who live in poverty. All of these conditions contribute to a lack of food security, which

is defined as access at all times to enough food for an active, healthy life. Hunger among children is a critical concern, and malnutrition during childhood can result in a lifetime of ill health. According to the USDA, nearly one-in-six children in non-metropolitan areas lived in households that suffered from food insecurity during 2019—before the COVID pandemic. The only other areas with this level of food insecurity were the inner cities of major metropolitan areas. Hunger is what economists call a “market failure.” Markets do not respond to necessity but to scarcity—which is determined by willingness and ability to pay. We may

public responses to this failure, alleviating hunger for millions during times of need and likely saving many from starvation. However, government food assistance and charities have not solved the centuries-old problem of the persistent, systemic hunger caused by chronic poverty. More people are food insecure in the U.S. today than before the Great Society programs of the 1960s. In addition, many who receive food assistance today are getting too many calories and too little nutrition—resulting in an epidemic of obesity, diabetes, high blood pressure, heart disease, and other diet related illnesses. The tragedy of hunger can never

“People are hungry because we don’t care enough to change how we do things.” Doria Robinson

all be of “equal inherent worth,” but we are “inherently unequal” in our abilities to earn enough money to meet our basic needs. Markets work fine for those of us who can afford to buy enough good food. However, there have always been, and always will be, significant numbers of people in any society who simply cannot earn enough to buy enough good food. Hunger is a market failure.

Government food assistance programs and charities have been

be resolved by simply giving people money or even giving them food. In the words of Doria Robinson, who works on food issues in the inner city of Richmond CA, “People are hungry because we don’t care enough to change how we do things.” As our society has increased in complexity, personal relationships have been replaced by impersonal economic transactions. As relationships have be-

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come less personal, they have become less caring. There seems little sense of understanding that our individual well-being is ultimately dependent on the overall well-being of the communities and societies to which we belong. Moral concerns about hungry kids are alleviated by blaming their parents or by relying on government food assistance programs or giving money to food charities. The poor will always be among us, but if we care enough, the poor need not be hungry.

Those who have driven the local food movement seem to understand that the problems that permeate today's agri-food system are a consequence of dysfunctional relationships. They seem to have an intuitive understanding that there is something fundamentally wrong with relying on impersonal markets for food, even for foods that are certified as "organic" or produced without pesticides, GMOs, growth hormones, or antibiotics. "Locavores" seem to understand that their access to enough wholesome, nutritious food to sustain healthy active lives depends on the confidence and trust that arises from personal relationships within caring local communities.

I firmly believe that the problems of hunger in rural America and elsewhere can be solved. This same basic understanding of the importance of personal relationships found in the local food movement needs to be extended to meeting the nutritional needs of everyone in local communities—not simply

those who can afford it. From a national or global perspective, food security may seem an insurmountable challenge. Within local communities, however, ensuring food security is not only possible but realistically achievable. The challenge of national and global food security can be met, and I believe must be met, one community at a time.

The large and growing global "food sovereignty movement" is a testament to the promise of the local food systems to alleviate hunger. Food sovereignty proclaims the right of people in local communities to define their own food and agriculture systems in order to ensure the right of everyone in the community to enough healthful and culturally appropriate food to meet their basic nutritional needs. Food sovereignty also requires that local foods are produced through ecologically sound and sustainable means to provide food security across as well as within generations. The ecological and social principles embedded in food sovereignty can spread from community to community, region to region, nation to nation, and eventually globally. Local food sovereignty is a logical path to national and global food security.

In today's disconnected society, communities committed to food security need a formal organizational structure to insulate or protect personal relationships within caring communities from impersonal national and global economies. I

have suggested organizing local food systems as "public utilities" — Community Food Utilities or CFUs. Local public utilities would allow acquisition and distribution of food to be determined by the utility, internally, rather than by impersonal markets or government programs. A primary reason hunger is pervasive in rural America, and elsewhere, is current interstate commerce laws that prevent communities from interfering with the commercial agri-food system which maximizes corporate profits by promoting junk foods and limiting food access in low-income communities. Food deserts in rural and urban America will persist as long as communities are unable to insulate their local food systems from national and global markets.

Public utilities are commonly used to provide electrical, water, and sewer services. These are sometimes referred to as "natural monopolies," since it is not economically feasible to support more than one provider of these services. However, public utilities are also used to provide essential services for those who simply can't afford existing alternatives, as in the case of public transportation. Public utilities are appropriate in any case of "market failure" —including hunger.

The Rural Electrification Administration (REA) provides a prime example of what can be accomplished by local public utilities. In the 1930s, it made no economic

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sense for private, for-profit corporations to build miles of power lines to carry electricity to the homes in sparsely populated rural communities. The REA was established to empower communities to create their own Rural Electrical Cooperatives, which were locally owned and operated as public utilities. Low-cost government loans and federal labor exemptions allowed RECs to hire local people to dig the holes, set the poles, and string the “light lines” along the dirt roads to rural farmsteads. Local people were trained to wire existing houses for electricity. The RECs accomplished their tasks at a fraction of the costs of corporate or government construction projects. Over time, the surviving RECs evolved into organizations that function much like for-profit energy companies. However, local owned and operated public utilities were critical in bringing electricity to rural communities and to establishing access to affordable electricity as an essential public service.

Current government food assistance programs represent public affirmation that food insecurity is a market failure and thus can legitimately be addressed through a public utility. CFUs would allow current government food assistance programs to be “internalized” and “personalized” to meet food needs that are currently unmet. Those currently eligible for government food assistance payments could be given an opportunity to assign their government payments to local CFUs and in return be assured that their nutritional needs would be met, regardless of costs to the CFU.

Local food procurement prioritizing locally grown products could provide assurance that foods provided meet locally-determined standards of wholesomeness, nutrition, and socially responsible method of production. By organizing as “vertical cooperatives,” CFUs could ensure equitable benefits for everyone in the organization, from food recipients to food producers.

No blueprint or recipe for development of a CFU exists or is possible, although there are some logical guiding principles. Government must authorize CFUs and ensure that they serve public interests, but the functioning of local food utilities must be determined and carried out by people in the local community. Membership in CFUs would need to be voluntary and ensure local cooperation, but with success, voluntary membership would grow. Government payments could provide a stable economic foundation, but anyone in the local community should be allowed to join. Those not eligible for government food assistance would simply pay the full cost of CFU membership. By focusing on raw and minimally processed, procurement costs could be minimized, since farmers receive less than 15% of retail food expenditures. Communities could be empowered to enact local taxes to make up any shortfall.

Each community would need to develop its CFU to fit its particular need, capacities, and preferences. Local CFU cooperatives could operate local grocery stores and restaurants that ensure access to fresh locally-grown produce, meat, milk, eggs and provide other basic food items at affordable costs. Local

farmers could be paid their cost of production plus a reasonable profit for providing foods that meet local standards of ecological and social integrity. Over time, rural food deserts would become a distant memory and the rural caring communities of the past would become the new rural reality. With local successes, the CFU concept could spread from community to community and region to region to form national networks of producers, processors, distributors and consumers, within which there would be no hunger or malnutrition. The local food movement could grow into this new and better food reality.

Dr. John Ikerd, Professor Emeritus of Agricultural Economics, retired from the University of Missouri in 2000. He was raised on a small dairy farm, worked in private industry, and held several other academic positions, prior to returning to the University of Missouri. In the 80's, John had a “conversion” of sorts after seeing the failures of the policies he had been advocating to farmers. He then reoriented his work toward agricultural and economic sustainability a means of supporting small family farms and rural communities. Since retiring, John has maintained an active speaking schedule and has authored numerous books and papers, many of which can be found at his university website: <http://faculty.missouri.edu/ikerdj/> or <http://johnikerd.com>. John is recognized as a longtime leading voice in the sustainable agriculture movement.

For a version complete with end notes, please visit our website - kansasruralcenter.org/krc-news/local-foods-for-rural-food-security.

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KANSAS RURAL CENTER

HEALTHY COMMUNITIES FROM THE GROUND UP



FEEDING NEIGHBORS
FORGING COMMUNITY
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A Virtual Conference

August 6, 2021

8:45 am to 3:30 pm

ONLINE

Please join the Kansas Rural Center on Friday August 6th, from 8:45 am to 3:30 pm, for a virtual Healthy Communities from the Ground Up Conference, during which we will share stories and information from across the region about SARE Farmer/Rancher research grant reports, panel discussions on health in the environment and Kansas communities, and much more!

The cost of registration is \$15 which helps support our panelists, speakers and includes access to recorded conference sessions. Scholarships are available to cover the cost of the conference for those who need financial assistance.

The full agenda and more information is coming soon!

[REGISTER TODAY - https://kansasruralcenter.org/healthy-communities-from-the-ground-up-conference.](https://kansasruralcenter.org/healthy-communities-from-the-ground-up-conference)

Keeping Bees on the Farm

By Oscar H Will III

Modern agricultural paradigms are always in flux, but now more than ever before the assault on pollinators via the agriculture industry cannot be overlooked. Not only is habitat destruction ongoing, but man's continual push for perceived efficiencies related to monoculture strategies that are biologically weak and reliant on millions of tons of synthetic inputs and genetically modified seed has created an environment that threatens life on earth as we know it. Farmers are still being paid to rip out tree rows to put land back into production and soil erosion is still an issue. Pesticide use is still sufficiently high to knock complex ecosystems into a continual state of imbalance that simply creates the need for more pesticides. Soils have been so depleted that crops of all kinds have become addicted to synthetic fertilizers. Wow, what a bleak time to be a bee, songbird, bat or any other creature that depends upon a diverse, relatively clean (chemically speaking) environment in which to live. What to do? As a farmer, you have a number of options available to attract, protect and promote bees and other pollinators to your farm, all of which rely heavily on increasing diversity.

Preserve and create habitat. When hedgerows and shelterbelts are dozed and burned to make way for more crop acres, it's tough not to think about the dust bowl, but did you ever wonder how many bee trees and their feral colonies of bees are destroyed by this practice? Why not save hedgerows to preserve a diverse habitat for bees, songbirds and other creatures that will actually make pest management in crop fields easier and can ostensibly increase yields in monoculture grain/seed crops even in species that self-pollinate. To maximize this benefit, leave as much natural area as

possible on your farm and add habitat designed to attract pollinators and other beneficial insects around your crop fields. You and the pollinators will revel in the results.

In fields with grassy waterways prescribed, we too often see monoculture grasses planted that might make a good hay crop but will require herbicide treatments to maintain their monoculture status. Waterways planted with a diverse mixture that includes wildflowers and even soil holding legumes that are allowed to flower before haying will reduce the need for pesticides, feed the bees and benefit the livestock that eat the hay.

In pasturelands, a diverse plant matrix is often the most resilient and productive, with the least need for inputs. If nectar bearing flowering plants aren't currently part of your pasture, consider overseeding or interseeding now and then with plants that can feed both the bees and your sheep or cattle. If you practice management intensive grazing by rotating through many different paddocks, you can readily offer the bees an ongoing nectar flow while putting weight on your flocks and herds. This practice is actually a win-win-win because the animals and bees will benefit, you will build topsoil, and you can reduce or eliminate herbicide and fertilizer use (and bills!) at the same time.

Consider Poyculture Crops. Another idea for benefiting bees on the farm is to grow row and cover crops that intentionally attract and benefit bees. These practices will benefit bees, pollinators and other beneficial insects, which in turn will benefit your crops. One remarkable project carried out by a large-scale regenerative farmer near Windom, Kansas, provides an excellent example of what might be

possible. The crop farmer, a strong proponent for intercropping and for using diverse cover crop mixtures planted a mixture after harvesting triticale that included cash crops like oilseed sunflowers and mung beans as well as buckwheat, a small pumpkin, some squashes and a small watermelon. This field also had many colonies of honeybees placed at its edge. And in a very dry year, there was a steady progression of forage material for the bees and the farmer's sunflower yields were more than competitive in the area. As the cash crops were harvested in late Fall, many of the remaining watermelon fruits were crushed – what a waste. Except it wasn't a waste. The watermelons that were not picked and distributed turned out to be effective bee food! The bees had an unexpected late season flow of watermelon juice to add to their stored resources.

And, finally - Get Gardening! And, let a significant portion of your garden be devoted to pollinator-friendly flowering plants. This can include letting a portion of your garden crops go to seed as pollinators will happily visit your radish, lettuce, basil (and so many other) plants once they have flowered. Flowers in the garden will feed the bees and attract beneficial insects that will help control pests in your garden while minimizing the need for chemicals. For information on which plants to grow to best benefit the bees and pollinators, see the resource section in *Pollinators on the Plains: A Resource for Attracting and Keeping Bees - On Your Farm, In Your Yard and In Your Community* - https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5ff64612c539886ec4f1b21f/t/60ca3f69b00f3f26570f4cdd/1623867352385/RESOURCE_Pollinators+on+the+Plains.pdf.

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An additional benefit of attracting pollinators to your garden will be the happy buzz of bees and the bright and beautiful butterflies and moths that visit the flowers in and around your garden. Feeding the bees feeds your soul and reduces the chemical assault on you, your pets, pollinators, songbirds and other wildlife.

Adding Honeybees on the Farm - If it's honeybees you're interested in keeping on your farm, in order to supply honey or other hive products or to help with pollination, all of the strategies outlined above apply and there are a few additional considerations. As pollinator populations have plummeted over the past decades, perhaps none have received as much attention as the European honeybee. Honeybee colonies have died off in droves, leaving beekeepers and others grasping for solutions. Despite efforts to slow or reverse pollinator decline in recent years, pollinator populations continue to decline and honeybee colony loss remains a significant issue for beekeepers. As a result, there has been an explosion in the production of package honeybees for sale to replenish beekeepers' hives that die out. One consequence of having to replace significant numbers of lost colonies each year is that beekeepers are forced to become even more efficient in order to maximize their return on investment. Whether turning to cheap manufactured feed sources to supplement food stores during the winter, or utilizing chemical treatments or medications to try to boost bee health, this beekeeping paradigm fits right into the modern agriculture model where farmers, ranchers and now beekeepers are backed into buying all manner of input in order to eke out a bit of profit. But in the case of beekeepers, this paradigm includes restocking the bees themselves. Can you imagine a

rancher replacing his cows every year or two due to the collateral damage caused by mainstream agriculture? Certainly not a sustainable model. So, what's a beekeeper to do?

Turn to Nature – Swarms for Free. Let's take a closer look at that 5th generation cattle rancher. Her herd is the result of perhaps 150 generations of breeding and selection for animals that suit a market, while also performing maximally and efficiently under her management strategy and environment. This is a strategy that few beekeepers have adopted in their quest for a viable business model, but it is one that can work if you leave some space and resources for your bees and work to promote a healthy, genetically adapted feral bee population in your region. In fact, that feral population likely already exists, and you can take advantage of this wonderful resource to build and bolster your apiary. Setting swarm traps or simply letting people know that you'll gladly collect swarms they find in their yard can result in a quickly-stocked apiary with no extra cost to the beekeeper. In addition to free bees, you might be getting excellent genetics carried by feral colonies that have adapted to survive.

In turn – Let Them Swarm. After reaping the benefits of stocking your apiary with wild-caught bees, letting your own hives swarm can offer a number of benefits. Healthy colonies naturally grow and increase in number and at some point they will swarm. This is how bees expand their populations and it is how they develop diverse, yet locally adapted, genetics over the generations. While you might get less honey from colonies that swarm that year because the bees need to put resources toward growing new bees, some beekeepers feel that colonies that

swarm tend towards better survivability in the long run. Additionally, you can replenish your stocks with swarms that you capture. Sure, try to capture swarms in your apiary and populate your hives with them when you can, but when they don't choose to get caught or to take up residence in a hive you provide, know that you just seeded the feral bee population in your region and are helping to maintain its resilience through genetic diversity with bees from a healthy hive. Swarming goes both ways, if you are savvy.

Don't Bee Greedy and Supply Healthy Food for Your Bees. If you keep bees to reap the benefits of the hive, ditch the urge to maximize your volume of saleable or personally usable product. Bees make honey and other healthy things because they need them to survive and indeed to thrive. Healthy colonies are much better able to stay ahead of infestations of all manner of onslaught, except perhaps that of chemical poisons. So, rather than taking all but a few frames of honey and feeding your bees sugar water over the winter, consider leaving enough honey for your bees to survive the entire winter. After all, we would not thrive on a diet of junk food, so why would we expect bees to thrive on a diet of sugar water, processed pollen patties and the like? While it might seem that you are missing out on potential profit at the time, the cost savings in keeping hives alive and healthy through the winter should level out over time. Additionally, you will be contributing to a long-lasting, resilient landrace of localized genes.

Diversity and Integration. We've taken a look at a number of strategies for keeping bees on the farm,

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Barriers and Opportunities to Participating in Farm to School Programs Across Kansas

Written by Cayden Fairman, Vaughn Gessley, Maureen Kassing, Abby Neal, & Meredith Shaheed Students from the University of Kansas Environmental Studies program partnered with the Kansas Rural Center for their capstone project to help lay the groundwork for developing a Farm to School curriculum for producers across Kansas.

The world's increasingly globalized food system has made it more convenient than ever to access food products regardless of season or locale. However, this convenience often comes with a cost to local food systems, small farmers, community connections, and nutrition education. Farm to School programs, established at the federal level in 2010, seek to solve some of these issues by providing benefits to farmers, schools, and entire communities. These programs encourage use of local food in school lunches, as well as agricultural education in the classrooms.

Although the United States and Kansas specifically has a long agricultural history, the days of small-scale farming as a sustainable and attractive career choice seem to many to be waning. In addition, the connection between communities and the food that sustains them is weakening as agricultural profits and control over food systems have become more consolidated into the hands of a few large corporations. According to a study conducted for the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) in 2019, the production of agricultural commodities has followed a trend of increasing consolidation and corporatization, leaving small farmers with higher rates of debt. To compound this, the average age of farmers is increasing as fewer young rural residents

view farming as a financially stable career choice. Farm to School programs seek to give small farmers access to new markets and economic opportunities by providing grants and assistance to partner with local schools for food procurement and agricultural education.

Farm to School programs exist in all 50 states, with over 42,000 schools and 23.6 million children participating in Farm to School programming nationwide. These programs are intended to benefit all stakeholders involved: farmers, schools and students, and surrounding communities. A recent USDA review of academic research on Farm to School programs found that, when implemented, these programs are successful in fulfilling their goals. Program participation was associated with increased knowledge of nutrition in students, increased spending on local foods community-wide, economic benefits to small farmers, and increased investment in local economies. Other studies of Farm to School programs have found that participation can create an enhanced sense of community, reduce costs of food procurement for school meal programs, provide students with higher-quality produce, provide small farmers with a market in which they are prioritized over industrial agricultural operations, and reduce costs for farmers to ship their products

long distances to distributors. Due to these benefits, among others, the USDA review found that participation in Farm to School programs is increasing nationwide.

Previous work by the Kansas Rural Center has shown that Farm to School programs have significant potential to benefit rural communities. In a 2020 KRC town hall on Farm to School programs, speakers from participating schools described the benefits of students engaging with the local agricultural system. In order to implement these beneficial connections between farmers, schools, and communities, it's necessary to understand the barriers that are limiting the expansion of Farm to School into more communities across the state. Our group reached out to 40 farmers, most of whom do not currently participate in Farm to School programs, to identify the attitudinal, logistical, and structural factors preventing more widespread participation.

In April of 2021, we interviewed six of these farmers from across the state. The interviews revealed producers' general perceptions of Farm to School, as well as the barriers to participation they encountered. Farmers' background on Farm to School programs ranged from: being involved, not being involved but are familiar with the program

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FARM 2 SCHOOL

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prior to the interview, and not being involved and not at all aware of Farm to School. While each of these three groups represented diverse farming practices and geographies, common themes emerged in their responses. Each group saw benefits to becoming involved in F2S as well as significant challenges to participation.

Whether or not a producer was involved in Farm to School or not - the greatest benefit, and personal motivator, for producers to become involved in Farm to School is the opportunity to educate kids while providing them fresh, local, healthy food. Producers who were involved expressed desire to educate children about the food system at large, and even welcomed the opportunity for schools to take students to their production sites for more hands-on demonstration of the food process. Those who were not involved, once given more information on Farm to School, also saw feeding and educating children as one of the greatest potential benefits of involvement. Interviewees also spoke of the potential benefits of diversifying their markets as a means to increase scale and/ or find their own personal niche.

Farmers perspectives of barriers to entering the Farm to School market varied but contained common themes. Concerns raised by producers generally centered around financial and logistical barriers. Interviewees expressed concerns that profit margins for selling to schools may be prohibitively low compared to conventional markets. Other bar-

riers and concerns included paperwork, certifications, and licensing that is often time-consuming and can be confusing, the difference in seasons for farming and school sessions make crop and menu planning difficult, and some small farms worried about a lack of labor on their farm to meet new demands. Some producers interviewed felt that their local schools did not prioritize healthful, sustainable foods or integrating curriculum about local food systems. Other interviewees stated that they did not have the capacity or ability to market their products to local school districts.

Ultimately, several barriers prevent producers from participating in the Farm to School program. However, producers show great interest in the program, especially after receiving further information on Farm to School and the benefits it may provide to farmers and their communities. The producers expressed enthusiasm even in the face of the barriers mentioned above, proving the deep motivational force for participation. As one interviewee, Bernadette Mills, stated, "The kids are worth it."

Kansas has great potential for Farm to School programs. These programs benefit rural communities, farmers, and children. Increasing connections between schools and local farmers has the potential to allow local farmers to continue their work in the agricultural sector in ways that are more sustainable and locally-focused, while also increasing future generations of farmers and citizens' knowledge of agriculture, food systems, and nutrition.

POLLINATORS

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both native pollinators and managed honeybees. A common theme that runs through the list is adding diversity at every level and "leaving some" for the bees. Leave some habitat and create new. Leave room in your crop, pasture and landscaping plans to feed the bees in novel ways. Add a diverse array of plants everywhere you can, from your garden to your crops to your pastures, and leave them to flower, offering precious resources for bees. Leave some healthful bee-made resources in your beehives to maximize honeybee health. Leave room in your honeybee management plan for a more region-centric swarm management plan. Couple as many of these concepts as you can with a reduction in synthetic pesticide exposure (through spray drift, residue consumption, contaminated pollen consumption, treated-seed dust drift, etc.) and we can rapidly move beyond raising awareness to the pollinator crisis into diminishing the crisis itself. Here's to bees on the farm!

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This article was made possible with funding from Ceres Trust.



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