

Rural Papers

*Reporting with commentary
on agricultural and rural issues*



No. 264

Spring 2017

Two Hundred Gather for WEALTH Day at the State Capitol

by Mary Fund

About 200 people attended the March 16 WEALTH (Water, Energy, Air, Land, Transportation and Health) Day at the State Capitol to hear policy briefings from organizational representatives, comments from State Representatives and Senators, and visit offices of policymakers.

WEALTH Day is the result of state environmental and conservation organizations, businesses and individuals partnering to host an annual day of advocacy and education. Since 2008, several partner organizations led the Kansans for Clean Energy Day at the State Capitol. Now it has morphed into an even more diverse group of organizations and businesses who come together to support an array of water, energy and food and agriculture issues in WEALTH Day.

Over 100 crammed into the Capitol Building's small auditorium room for the policy briefings to listen to KRC's Paul Johnson talk about the overall state revenue picture, which looms over all other policy work. He predicted that it will be late May or June before the dust settles. The big question is what does not get funded under this current budget and income crisis? Most likely it will be water, air and environmental protections, and social net programs such as health care for the most vulnerable of the state's population.

Zack Pistora, Sierra Club, talked about the efforts to get \$8 million/year in funds dedicated to the State Water Plan back into the water plan budget after

continued on page 4...



WEALTH Day participants gathered to hear State Legislators talk about water, energy, food and health issues.

Rural Papers

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

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Small Farmer Commentary

Thinking Bigger: Wildfires and Health Care

by Mary Fund

Wildfires in southern and central Kansas – and Oklahoma and Texas- dominated the news for a few days in early March. Thousands of acres burned. Thousands of cattle died or had to be destroyed. Ranching families saw their farmsteads and homes go up in smoke. Seven people lost their lives. Farmers and ranchers and entire communities saw their livelihoods and indeed their daily lives totally altered, perhaps forever marked by the experience.

When tragedy or catastrophe like this strikes, we see the best in people who are dealing with the worst. News stories quickly filled with tug at your heart visuals of 4-H kids bottle feeding motherless calves. Semi-trailer trucks loaded with hay lined the highways all heading to southwest and south central Kansas, Oklahoma and Texas. Many sported big American flags to show their solidarity with those whose only fault had been that their farms, ranches or homes were in the wrong place at the wrong time.

So why is it that when faced with another crises or tragedy, we find it so hard to come together? For there is another fire that has been doing a slow burn for many years. It has created a lot of heat and smoke lately. I am talking about the lack of affordable health care.

Every day in this country, in this state, and in your communities, people suffer tragedies, crises, and catastrophes that alter their lives totally and forever- and all because of a lack of affordable, available, regular health care. Every thirty seconds, someone in this coun-

try faces a health care and financial catastrophe.

Many more suffer a loss of quality of life and slow erosion of their contribution to our communities and society at large. It is often a quiet crisis; one that we do not know about until or unless the plight of an individual, a family member or friend comes to sudden and dramatic light.

Our communities - rural and urban - hold fund raisers for the victims or survivors of fires and farm accidents, children or neighbors with long term illnesses, and families enduring medical emergencies that shake our confidence, composure, and security. In these situations, our empathy and compassion makes us act. But these are crises fueled by an immediate illness or accident, not the quiet long-term erosion that availability of regular medical care could help avoid.

The social costs or opportunities lost to this quiet crisis are rarely recognized either. The lack of adequate health insurance coverage remains one of the biggest barriers to entrepreneurship including farming. Many would-be full time farmers work long hours to fit their farming work around a full time job that offers health insurance. Many small businesses do not get launched because would-be owners fear loss of health benefits from existing jobs.

Although you would not know it to hear some critics of the current system, health care in this country had serious problems long before the Affordable Care Act (ACA) was

Small Farmer Commentary continued

passed in 2010. 40 million people were without coverage because of pre-existing conditions no company would cover, or they simply could not afford it; premiums were high and rising as were the costs of services and procedures; and employers were steadily decreasing their share of coverage for employees.

The Affordable Care Act has its problems. If the ACA is failing, it is because it did not do enough to reign in the high costs of medical services and to question the predatory profits of health insurance companies. Insurance companies required to cover sick people under the ACA are bailing out.

In recent weeks, we've heard about and so far rejected the efforts of the American Health Care Act, which pretended to be something better than ACA, but lost (for now) because it wasn't. A recent Associated Press Poll shows that 62% of Americans responded negatively to the Trump plan to reform health care. It seems like it is time to try something different and it may be right under our noses.

Recently an unlikely audience listened to a presentation on a single payer system, or universal health care. The Kansas Organic Producers invited Dr. Sharon Lee, a member of the Physicians for a National Health Care Program, to speak at their annual meeting about health care challenges and a single payer system. Dr. Lee is a family physician and head of the Southwest Boulevard Family Health Care Clinic for the poor and uninsured in Kansas City.

"Private insurance companies take 15% profit," she explained, "then they add 12% for administration totaling 27%." The CEO's of the top nine insurance companies", she noted, "made \$12 million each last year." As someone who sees up close and personal what happens to people without health insurance, she is ready to support something different. Government insurance, she explained, takes zero for profit, and two percent for administration, and it works.

Audience members expressed disbelief that the government can run anything more efficiently than private industry. But she explained, "this is basically the current Medicare system—available to those over 65 and the disabled." You know, that program that people in their 50's and 60's can't wait to get to so they can stop paying out the nose for health insurance and actually have medical conditions taken care of more inexpensively?

To protests that this is socialized medicine, Dr. Lee explained, "The VA is an example of socialized medicine. Government controls the dollars; doctors are paid a salary and there is no fee for services. Medicare is a single payer system, and it works. We should expand Medicare, she argued, and allow individuals to purchase Medicare coverage at any age."

Response from the audience of farmers was careful. Many were quiet. Some challenged the idea. But all were thinking. Several had stories of family members affected by health care crises, both with and without health insurance. Others blamed the

poor—those who have "the latest I-phone and cable TV, but don't carry health insurance. Why should I pay for them?"

Part of the answer is that those of us buying our health insurance have always been paying for the uninsured when their bills get factored into health care costs overall. The more uninsured there are, the higher our costs. Also, most people are just one major illness or accident away from financial ruin, whether they have health insurance or not. Instead of blaming each other, surely there is a better way.

Every other developed country on the planet has some form of universal care or a single payer system. Facts show that their costs are lower and the health outcomes are better. If we want a system that provides quality care for everyone, why not look at a single payer system? The devil is, of course, in the detail but this is true of any of the plans so far. Maybe looking at Medicare as a model for a single payer system for all is a place to start.

I return to the question prompted by the wildfire relief response. We are the same people. Why do we not show the same compassion and empathy for those who lack health care, or who find it too expensive? We only end up shooting ourselves in the foot because costs of health care just keep going up for all of us. And we may just find that down the road, we won't have a hospital to take that foot to.

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State Policy News



WEALTH day continued from page 1...

being siphoned off for several years. The State as well as hundreds of citizens have put considerable time and effort as part of the state's Water Vision process into identifying projects and solutions to the state's groundwater depletion, reservoir sedimentation and water quality problems only to be frustrated at the lack of state funding and commitment.

Climate and Energy Project's Dorothy Barnett explained how Kansas ranks 48th in terms of energy efficiency, but the dockets now before the Kansas Corporation Commission on the Westar/KCP&L merger and energy efficiency might be able to change that. Missouri has a good energy efficiency program and they want to bring those programs to the Kansas side of the KCP&L. A third KCC docket is distribution generation addressing how distribution of solar and wind energy can be designed.

Kansas Interfaith Action's Moti Reiber called for a stronger state climate plan in the absence of federal attention. He also addressed the connections of environmental protection to health issues, calling

for support of Medicaid expansion in Kansas. One in three rural hospitals is facing financial distress largely due to loss of Medicaid dollars. Richard Mabion of the Kansas City NAACP spoke on the needs to educate the low-income community on energy efficiency to maintain community security needs.

KRC's Paul Johnson also talked about local food issues and the need for a permanent food policy council and coordinator at the state level and the need to focus on production and financing needs of growers. The federal farm bill also underlies food and farm policy; 75% of the total farm bill budget goes to the nutrition programs, yet 25% of the subsidies for production go to just five commodity crops (wheat, corn, soybeans, sugar and rice) with little to nothing to fruits and vegetables and the actual USDA food plate. Johnson urged participants to follow the farm bill debates over the next year or two to find ways to support nutrition programs and more production from farmers adopting more sustainable and diverse production practices. About a dozen State legislators spoke to the group on water, land, air,

energy and health topics before the participants fanned out to visit individual legislator offices.

WEALTH Day partners who organized the event are: Climate+ Energy Project, Kansas Rural Center, Kansas Interfaith Action, Kansas Natural Resource Council, KC Chapter of the NAACP, Diesel Health Project, and Grassland Heritage Foundation.

WEALTH Day sponsors included: Kansas Sierra Club, Friends of the Kaw, True Blue Women, Lawrence Ecology Teams United in Sustainability, Kansas Alliance for Wetlands and Streams, Sustainable Sanctuaries Coalition, League of Women Voters of Kansas, King Solar, Community Health Council of Wyandotte County, Citizens' Climate Lobby, Audubon of Kansas, Shawnee County Democrats, Oak Grove Fabrication, JCCC Campus Farm and Sustainable Ag Program, Good Energy Solutions, Kansas Green Party, and Cromwell Solar.



Paul Johnson and Zack Pistora address a full crowd at WEALTH day.

Farm Bill Field Hearing Highlights Economic Concerns for Farmers & Ranchers and Rural Communities

by Jim French

Senator Pat Roberts wanted Kansas farmers and ranchers to be in the center spotlight when the Senate Agriculture Committee held its first Farm Bill field hearing. Several hundred persons representing rural and food policy interests gathered at K-State's McCain Auditorium to listen to the proceedings.

Presentations from three panels comprised of government, education, commodity, and rural development representatives made up the program of the three-hour event. Sen. Roberts chaired the event in partnership with the ranking member, Sen. Debbie Stabenow from Michigan.

In their opening remarks, Sen. Roberts pointed out that the next Farm Bill would be drafted in a much different atmosphere than existed in 2013. Not only is there a new administration, but record prices for all commodities have plummeted. In order to successfully reauthorize a new farm bill, Roberts said that we "must write a bill that works across all regions – all crops."

Sen. Stabenow added that a Farm Bill must also serve the millions of Americans that live in small towns and rural communities, as well as conservation of our farm and ranchland. She looked forward to "new opportunities for voluntary conservation initiatives" as well to new partnerships for funding research.

In the first panel, KSU President, Ret. General Richard Myers; Kansas 1st District Representative, Dr. Roger Marshall; and Kansas Secretary of Agriculture, Jackie McLaskey greeted the Senators and the attendees. All emphasized the important role Kansas agriculture plays in the nation's economy, agricultural and food research, and in international relations.



Bringing attention to the current state of agriculture, Rep. Marshall pointed to recent reporting from Kansas Farm Management Association showing that net income for participating farms went from record levels to less than \$5,000 in 2015.

"We know those levels will fall when they are reported for 2016, and unless something changes, they will be even lower for 2017," said Marshall.

Sounding a theme that would be echoed in all panels, the opening group emphasized the important role of agricultural and rural enterprises while highlighting some of the current economic challenges in the farm and rural economies.

Farmer-Producer Panel

The second panel was made up of farmers and ranchers all of whom also represented commodity organizations ranging from livestock, dairy, grains, and cotton. Kansas Farm Bureau was the only general producer organization represented.

continued on page 6...

Farm Bill Hearing continued...

In his opening statement, rancher and president of the Kansas Livestock Association, David Clawson, stated that the “KLA members, and the vast majority of cattle producers, oppose the involvement of the federal government in determining how cattle are marketed.” He clarified that this meant continued opposition to GIPSA regulations, which restricted ownership of cattle by major meat packers.

Clawson also spent significant time defending funding for the conservation programs like EQIP and the Agricultural Conservation Easement Program (ACEP). Clawson said, “I encourage members of this committee to remind your colleagues that federal funds spent on conservation are a good investment in our country’s natural resources and the ultimate beneficiary is the general public.”

Reno County farmer, Cameron Peirce, said that the Kansas Sunflower Commission supported full funding for conservation. He singled out soil health as an example of success. Peirce stated, “USDA-NRCS’s soil health initiative has been a big success in the last few years. Producers, agribusiness and commodity investors now understand how important soil health practices are to increasing productivity on the land and protecting our natural resources at the same time. Every effort should be made to encourage producers to adopt practices that improve our nation’s soils.”

Conservation was not the only common thread in the producer panel. To a person, all wanted to make sure that the Title One safety nets, Agricultural Risk Coverage (ARC) and Price Loss Coverage (PLC) along with crop insurance stayed fully funded.

Enhancing trade and supporting the Marketing Access Program (MAP) came up again and again. Pratt County corn producer, Kent Moore, emphasized that “The growth potential for ag exports is greater than any other demand sector today. We believe it is time to increase our efforts to provide access to

these growing markets around the world.”

Finally, several panelists expressed the need to aggressively enhance biosecurity especially in addressing the potential threat of Foot and Mouth Disease. Michael Springer, representing the National Pork Producers Council, said that “an outbreak today of the disease, which last was detected in the United States in 1929, likely would cripple the entire livestock sector,” and “the economic consequences undoubtedly would ripple throughout the entire rural economy, from input suppliers to packers and from processors to consumers.”

Rural Development and Services Panel

The final panel of the day centered on rural communities and businesses. Panelists spoke strongly in favor of continued funding for programs that guaranteed loans, provided funding for utilities and telecommunications, and increased access to quality housing for a growing agricultural labor market.

Sounding a note of concern, Shan Hanes on behalf of the American Bankers Association, warned that the “Farm Credit System has become too large and unfocused, using taxpayer dollars to subsidize large borrowers and Congress should consider legislation that would level the playing field with the Farm Credit System.”

Pioneer Communications CEO, Catherine Moyer, stated that small rural internet development does not have access to “Wall Street” investment but provides essential education, business, and communication services to rural America. “Cost-effective Rural Utilities Service (RUS) loans offered through the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) are therefore an essential resource for small businesses looking to deploy broadband in rural America,” she said.

continued on page 7...

Farm Bill Hearing continued...

Other panelists asserted the same principle that rural America is different and dependent upon these important USDA programs whether in protecting water resources or extending Farm and Home Loan programs to rural towns like Dodge City.

Follow-up perspectives and analysis

Notably absent from the panels were speakers representing more recent innovations in agriculture, rural development, and sustainable agriculture: farmers markets, regenerative agriculture interests, direct marketing enterprises, and micro-business development. Groups like Audubon, Nature Conservancy, and the National Wildlife Foundation had no panel voices. Neither the Kansas Rural Center nor the Kansas Farmers Union was asked to provide a farmer spokesperson. No one representing nutrition programs spoke either, although food and nutrition programs are the bulk of the farm bill dollars and are critical to gaining urban and consumer support.

It was very encouraging to hear strong support for conservation programs – especially those that enhance the management and health of soils and rangeland. Nevertheless, it is questionable whether continued and increased taxpayer money flowing into price supports and insurance offers anything more than a band-aid to recurrent agricultural woes.

Today agriculture receives little or no attention from the newly elected president. It is a time when many in rural America are now experiencing a crisis in credit and income; a time when extreme weather fuels wildfires, floods and tornadoes killing cattlemen, livestock, and destroying homes. In this context, it would be refreshing to look deep into the future and suggest pro-active policies that could lessen the recurrent boom-bust cycles endemic to the agriculture, stabilize rural population, address climate

change, and decrease the high rates of rural poverty.

Most of the testimony in Kansas looked to either strengthen and tweak existing programs and support the status quo. It will be interesting to see if broader perspectives emerge in the months ahead leading to what many hope to be the Farm and Food Bill of 2018.

Jim French is a farmer and livestock producer in South Central Kansas, former KRC board member, and recently retired from OxFam America.

SAVE THE DATE!!

**KRC's 2017
Farm & Food Conference**

will be held

November 17-18

at the

**Four Points Sheraton Hotel
Manhattan, Kansas**

Plan to come -

**See old friends & make new ones
Learn about sustainable farming
practices you can implement on**

your farm

**Learn how to advocate for issues
important to you**

Food Hubs: What They Are, How They Work, and Examples in Kansas

by Jean Stramel

For over a decade, the Kansas Rural Center (KRC) has worked to promote a farm and food system that increases the amount of fruits, vegetables and other specialty crops grown in Kansas and consumed by Kansans. While Kansas currently imports over 90% of the fruits and vegetables consumed in the state, efforts to get more locally produced food onto dinner tables in Kansas are slowly taking hold, and food hubs are playing a role in this success. KRC's Annual Farm & Food Conference last fall included a workshop that provided an update on some of the food hubs operating in the state, covering how they function, the benefits they provide, and some of the challenges they face.

According to the USDA Marketing Service, "A regional food hub is a business or organization that actively manages the aggregation, distribution, and marketing of source-identified food products primarily from local and regional producers to strengthen their ability to satisfy wholesale, retail, and institutional demand. Regional food hubs are key mechanisms for creating large, consistent, reliable supplies of mostly locally or regionally produced foods."

"Food hubs can play a role no

matter what stage a local food system is in," Marlin Bates told attendees of KRC's workshop on food hubs. Bates served as the K-State Research and Extension Horticulture Agent in Douglas County, Kansas, until he recently took the role of County Extension Executive Director. As the Horticulture Agent, he focused on increasing the local foods' supply by working with new and existing specialty crop producers. Supporting growers includes expanding markets for their products, which means attracting new customers.

The University of Wisconsin Center for Integrated Ag Systems identified five tiers, or relationships, between food producers and consumers. At one end of

the spectrum is personal production of food, including backyard and community gardens, fishing, hunting and gathering. At the opposite end of the spectrum are multi-national food conglomerates such as ADM and Cargill, who distribute on a global scale. In the middle are food hubs, which take food grown by farmers and other producers and distribute it to larger outlets. A food hub serves as an aggregator and distributor so that produce from many sources can be pooled and marketed to outlets unavailable to individual growers. By marketing as a bloc, like a cooperative, the value to the farmer is retained as much as possible.

While the idea and term 'food hub' is currently very popular, it is not new. Rolling Prairie Farmers Alliance, a cooperative CSA (Community Supported Agriculture) subscription service is a food hub although they've been in operation since before the term became common. Rolling Prairie Farmers Alliance

continued on page 9...



Douglas County Extension, Executive Director, Marlin Bates, talks about food hubs at the KRC Annual Farm & Food Conference in Manhattan in 2016.

Feeding Kansas News

Food Hubs continued...

was started in 1993 with help and strategic direction from the Kansas Rural Center, and is modeled on the concept of aggregating produce from multiple farms to sell directly to consumers through a CSA model.

Several studies completed in northeast Kansas between 2011 and 2014 showed a large unmet demand for local foods in northeast Kansas and the Kansas City area. "Building a Deep-Rooted Local Food System: A Food System Analysis for Douglas County, Jefferson County & Leavenworth County in Kansas," published in 2011, outlined a plan to address identified key issues of obesity, and lack of food access and land devoted to growing fruits and vegetables. To address these issues and the demand for more local foods, two groups – the Douglas County Food Policy Council and the Food Policy Coalition of Greater Kansas City – conducted studies to see if the establishment of a food hub was feasible. These studies surveyed 196 growers and 121 buyers, ranging in size from small food stores to SYS-CO-sized companies. Both studies concluded a food hub could be a valuable tool in addressing demand for local products.

Inspired by this assessment, five farmers formed Farm Fresh HQ (farmfreshhq.com), a growers' cooperative, working to aggregate and distribute produce to

markets in the KC Metro area. Tom Buller, a fruit and vegetable grower and part-time KRC staff member, became a founding member of Fresh Farm HQ as he was looking to move away from retail marketing and into wholesale markets. He discussed the structure of the group in the workshop.

According to Buller, the number of members in the organization has grown to ten, and two of the owner/members operate "sub-hubs," one in Olathe and one in Odessa, Missouri, where product is co-mingled and readied for markets. The group has support from a USDA Value-Added grant. They still face challenges of supply versus demand, balancing the needs of farmers with those of food buyers, and managing multiple location and delivery schedules. They strive to hold onto the original purpose and values of why they started the effort, while managing six key components of their Food Hub concept: Marketing and Sales, Aggregation and Delivery, Crop and Stock Planning, Food Safety Planning, Bulk Packing Supplies and Technology Training. The product line is diverse with both organic and conventional, 20 kinds of vegetables, 10 fruits, and meats.

Another food hub operating in Kansas is the High Plains Food Co-op, a group of growers in far northwestern Kansas, which

started in 2008.

Leon Atwell described the evolution of the High Plains Food Co-op at the food hub workshop and has provided technical assistance to the group through his company, Advancing Rural Prosperity. The Co-op currently involves 50 producers serving 300 customers in Colorado, Kansas and Nebraska, and offering 750 products. This food hub is a "virtual food aggregator," meaning buyers place their orders online, and then the order is delivered to different locations.

Annual sales have gone from \$10,000 in 2008 to \$400,000 in 2016, with growth on track to reach one million in sales in the near future. Deliveries were originally monthly, but are now weekly. The group's business model values community, generating revenue for producers, and the cooperative model. They are working with Rocky Mountain Farmers Union Co-op Development Center to link up with other Co-ops from Colorado, New Mexico and Wyoming to increase product supply. The Co-op is a producer Co-op required to have 51% of board or voting membership be food producers. There is a high value placed on the trust between customers, producers and the co-op. The average order is \$80/month, but there is no minimum order amount.

Continued on page 10...

Food Hubs continued...

These Kansas food hubs demonstrate that through cooperation and management it is possible to support growers of fruits and vegetables in Kansas and to increase the amount of locally grown food reaching consumers. Growers and consumers both benefit when these aggregation strategies succeed to increase the amount of local food consumed by Kansans.

The mission of KRC, founded in 1979, is 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. For more information, visit www.kansasrural-center.org.

Jean Stramel is a free lance writer from Lucas, Kansas, who prepared this for the Kansas Rural Center.



Chris Sramek, High Plains Food Co-op, talks with a KRC conference attendee about his work to increase production and sales of locally-grown foods in NW Kansas and the surrounding region.

KRC Grazing Call Monday, May 8 7:30 to 9:00 pm

Join other grazers from across the state of Kansas in a telephone conversation with grazing experts and KRC field staff at 7:30 pm on the second Monday of the month. Hosted by the Kansas Rural Center, these informal discussions will cover all aspects of grazing management.

Anyone can join in the call by simply dialing in 1-877-304-5632. When prompted, dial 300 346 2424 and follow it with the # sign. This will be a toll free call. You are welcome to leave or join the call at any time between 7:30 and 9 pm.

Welcome to Rural Papers new format! We are the same newsletter "reporting with commentary on agricultural and rural issues," just with new paper stock and some color printing added. We thank you for your patience as the Spring issue took a bit longer to publish.
The Editor

KRC Board Elections

The Kansas Rural Center board of directors met on March 11 in Salina for their winter/spring board meeting. The following board members were re-elected to the board for three year terms: Kurt and Andi Dale, Protection; Lisa French, Partridge; Charlie Griffin, Manhattan.; Jennifer Kongs, Lawrence; and Donn Teske, Wheaton.

Officers elected for 2017 are: Wayne White, Oskaloosa, President; Stu Shafer, Oskaloosa, Vice-President; Jennifer Kongs, Secretary; and Laura Fortmeyer, Fairview, Treasurer. At large members of the Executive Committee in addition to the officers are: Troy Schroeder, Albert; Caryl Hale, Norton.; and Zack Pistora, Linwood.

We thank outgoing board member Gary Weisenberger of Lebanon for his years of service on the board.

KRC Staff News

KRC wishes Tom Buller best of luck at his new position with Douglas County Extension as their new horticultural agent. KRC's loss is definitely their gain. Tom worked for us for a year on our Specialty Crop Project and authored, along with Dr. Cary Rivard and Kim Oxley at KSU, our new *Growing Under Cover: A Kansas Grower's Guide*. He'll start his new position in mid-April.

Kansas Local Food Systems Reports and Recommendations: Why Kansas Should Act on Them Now

by Natalie Fullerton

The state established Local Food and Farm Task Force finalized its 2016 report and recommendations early this year. These were presented to the House committee on Agriculture and Natural Resources on February 7, 2017 and the Senate committee on Agriculture on February 8, 2017 by Task Force Chairman, Ron Brown. If you are thinking there are several different reports out there by now, you'd be correct. But all are critically important and all work together paving the way for a more robust food system that creates greater resources for producers, greater healthy food access, and encourage positive economic opportunities.

In late 2014, the Kansas Rural Center published the Feeding Kansas report which laid out seven recommendations for public action to develop assistance for local food systems development. Then in early 2016, the Local Food and Task Force presented over 20 conclusions and recommendations to the legislature which included several of KRC's recommendations and others based on research and interviews with industry experts and leaders. The Kansas Department of Agriculture also held an Agriculture Summit in August, 2016 to hear from Kansas farmers and industry and organization leaders on what

opportunities and barriers exist in their fields. Specialty crops were one of the focused issue areas, and the room was packed. Furthermore, several local level food and farm councils have completed food systems analyses that outline the status of their food systems, and strengths and weaknesses.

This year the seven member Local Food and Farm Task Force introduced six new recommendations in their December 2016 report, which target directives that include the identification of financial opportunities, technical support, and training necessary to expand production and sales of locally grown agricultural products; strategies and funding to make locally grown foods more accessible; and factors affecting affordability and profitability of locally grown foods.

The Task force did an incredible job of identifying and distilling the over 20 recommendations from last year's report into six concise and needed actions to continue local food systems growth in the state.

However, to date the proposed legislation has not been introduced and little legislative action has been seen on these recommendations aside from introduction of Senate Concurrent Resolution No. 1604, which would amend the state constitution to lower the rate of sales tax on food.

The state budget crisis has possibly crippled action on recommendations this year. So what makes all these recommenda

continued on page 14...

The six recommendations include:

- **Form a state Local Food and Farm Advisory Board**
- **Create a Kansas Department of Agriculture Local Food Systems Coordinator**
- **Establish a Kansas Wine Council**
- **Support K-State Research and Extension Specialty Crop Positions and Programs**
- **Establish Kansas as a Specialty Crop Leader by forming a Specialty Crop Council**
- **Lower state food sales tax to 5.3 percent.**

Women in Farming News

Registration is Open for KRC Women in Farming Workshop, Farm Tour and Roundtable Discussion - May 5 and 6

The Kansas Rural Center invites women farmers or want-to-be-farmers, women landowners, and women interested in sustainable farming, food production and local food initiatives to attend a Women in Farming Workshop on Saturday, May 6, 2017. This all-day, women-only workshop and farm tour will be held from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. at the Walton Rural Life Center, (500 Main St., Walton, Kansas) about 8 miles from Newton, Kansas, and the nearby Morning Harvest Farm run by Paula Sims with her husband, Eric. Save the date on your calendar for this educational, hands-on learning opportunity.

Saturday's workshop will provide useful tools and information for women farmers who are needing assistance with loans and financing, financial farm planning, how to monitor and build soil health on their farms, and ideas for how to get involved in regional and local food initiatives. Discussion with and questions from those in attendance are encouraged as part of the presentations.

The Walton Rural Life Center is a charter school with a focus on agriculture - students raise live-stock and tend a garden as part of the curriculum. As part of the event's effort to support local food education, at-

tendees will be encouraged to bring supplies to donate to the school (participation in this supply drive is optional). A list of needed supplies can be found at the school's website.

Following the presentations, attendees will head to nearby Morning Harvest Farm, and learn from the Sims' methods of producing and marketing grass-fed beef, seasonal produce, and pastured pork and poultry and eggs, raised on non-GMO, soy-free supplements and grass. This year, Morning Harvest Farm is adding a unique freshwater fish operation. Attendees will have a chance to learn how the Sims run their diversified operation, including the farm's CSA program.

Saturday's workshop and farm tour requires an RSVP, and a \$15

registration fee to cover lunch, the farm tour host, and materials.

To RSVP, please visit - <https://kansasruralcenter.org/women-in-farming-workshop/>, or email - info@kansasruralcenter.org, or call 866-579-5469.

If you want to attend but are coming from out-of-town, KRC has reserved a block of rooms at the Comfort Inn. Call 316-804-4866 by April 28 to reserve your room at the group rate of \$84.99 (plus tax). Tell the hotel you are with the KRC Women in Farming Workshop. The hotel is located at 1205 E 1st St., Newton, Kansas, and provides free continental breakfast.

Continued on page 13...



Getting ready to tour Red Tractor Farm, near Lawrence, during a 2015 KRC Women in Farming workshop.

Women in Farming News

Women in Farming Workshop continued...

On Friday evening, May 5, KRC will host a roundtable discussion and social hour for workshop attendees and local women from 7 to 9 p.m. in the Community Room of the Harvey County Courthouse at 800 N. Main Street in Newton. Informal comments by experienced women growers and community organizers will be followed by open discussion and questions and conversation. Women with questions about how to start a local food policy council, how to manage direct marketing, how to think outside-the-box about ways to bring healthy food to their communities, or other ideas and questions around healthy and sustainable local food production are invited to attend this discussion. Snacks, coffee and tea will be provided.

The Friday night roundtable is free to attend. Please RSVP for the roundtable to help us provide adequate snacks, drinks and handouts.

Following the roundtable, those wishing to continue the conversation can regroup at the Comfort Inn conference room. A reservation for the workshops Saturday or a hotel room are not required to a part of Friday's event.

For more information and TO REGISTER, please visit - <https://kansasruralcenter.org/women-in-farming-workshop/>, or email KRC at info@kansasruralcenter.org, or call 866-579-5469.

If you are unable to attend this event, mark your calendars for the second workshop in our series, which will be held June 10 with a farm tour of Lucinda Stuenkel's pasture-based beef operation at Sunny Day Farms near Palmer, Kansas, Clay County in North Central Kansas.

This workshop series is funded in part by a mini-grant from the Great Plains Conference of the United Methodist Church, and sponsored in part by the Harvey County extension office, the Harvey County Food Policy Council, and the Kansas Center for Sustainable Agriculture and Alternative Crops /Kansas SARE Program.

Briefs

Pathways to Land Access: A Study of the Conservation Reserve Program - Transition Incentives Program in Four States

(From NSAC Weekly Update March 20, 2017)

USDA's Conservation Reserve Program Transition Incentives Program was created in 2008 as a way to connect retiring farmers who own CRP land to beginning farmers and ranchers looking to farm sustainably. Through CRP-TIP, retiring farmers continue to receive rental payments for their land in CRP if they are selling/renting their land to traditionally underserved farmer groups (i.e., beginning farmers).

In order to evaluate CRP-TIP usage and provide strategies to increase awareness about the program, USDA's Farm Service Agency recently published a new report Pathways to Land Access as part of a cooperative agreement with the Center for Rural Affairs, Dakota Rural Action, and NSAC. Pathways evaluates the usage of CRP-TIP and provides context and strategies for how to increase awareness of and participation in the program, with a focus on four key states (IA, NE, ND, SD) that have a large number of acres enrolled in CRP.

Additionally, the report attempts to explain the major factors that influence CRP-TIP participation, including administrative, economic and environmental factors.

Read more at http://sustainableagriculture.net/blog/pathways-to-land-access/?utm_source=roundup&utm_medium=email.

Feeding Kansas News

Kansas Local Foods continued from page 11...

tions so important and why should Kansas (policy makers and advocates) be acting on them now?

The health of Kansas people and the economy are both good answers. But there is also strong, undeniable growing local food demand. More farmers are interested in diversifying existing farms or beginning farming with a focus on specialty crops.

Interest is also high among foundations and a range of other organizations in investing in developing local/healthy food systems. The number of farmer's markets, local food and farm councils, and farm to table restaurants and other retail outlets have also been steadily increasing. Yet, despite Kansas's growing efforts, state support for research, experts, and planning to help grow agriculture industries outside of conventional crops and livestock in Kansas is disparagingly limited.

KRC speculates that advancing local food systems could be a key factor to strengthening the health of the state and local economies and people, particularly in deep rural areas that not only struggle to feed their residents but also to attract young people to stay or move to these areas. Water, and how it impacts our state's agricultural and health environment, is becoming increasingly scarce

and has entered this conversation in a big way over the past several years. We are also entering into predominantly hard economic times in the farming world. Acting on support for local food systems development could be more important now than ever.

KRC has observed an increase in farmers and hope-to-be farmers of all walks of life who are interested or starting to add fruit and vegetable production to their operations.

More and more people are attending KRC's annual Farm and Food conference looking to learn more about how to incorporate these and other value added practices to their farms and communities. But Kansas is behind in adequate funding and priority setting for research and outreach for K-State Research and Extension and other institutional leaders to help these farmers expand and scale up effectively. KRC's report as well as both Local Food and Farm Task Force reports call for more Extension specialty crop support and programs from our state leaders.

Paul Johnson reported in the March 17th issue of KRC's Policy Watch that while 50% of the USDA Food Plate consists of fruits and vegetables (those five servings a day), barely 20% of Kansans meet that goal. While Kansans spend \$770 million yearly on fruits and vegetables, less than \$40 million (5%) is

grown locally. As the number of dairies in Kansas has fallen from 5,600 in 1980 to under 400 today and 50 of these dairies have two-thirds of the dairy cattle in the state, there are only 10-12 dairies bottling milk on the farm and serving local markets. Kansas is also down to 75 meat processors/plants that handle under 5% of the meat market in Kansas. Processing of live poultry is only done at a handful of small meat processors while the consumer demand for local, pasture raised chicken continues to increase.

Over the past three years, Kansas has seen a great uptick in the number of local level food and farm councils and task forces across the state along with the State Local Food and Farm Task Force tackling some of these issues. To date there are at least 13 established local councils and 10 emerging councils in every region of Kansas.

Their priorities range from healthy, active living to helping communities increase access to healthy food for all residents to supporting local farmers in growing and marketing their products locally. There is clear, growing action from communities to create systems that help navigate and strengthen healthy food access, local food production and support for healthy people and a healthy economy.

continued on page 18...

KRC Promotes Better Specialty Crop Production through Conservation Strategies

Incorporating conservation practices into fruit and vegetable production systems was the primary topic for Tom Buller's presentations at the four regional Farmers Market workshops sponsored by the Kansas Department of Agriculture around the state in February. KRC's current Specialty Crop Project is focused on encouraging fruit and vegetable producers to incorporate soil health and other conservation based strategies to boost productivity and profitability in order to grow the specialty crop sector of agriculture in the state.

At the Wichita workshop, Tom presented the keynote presentation on "Building Healthy Systems for Profitability," to around 120 people at the Central Kansas Market Grower and Vendor Workshop. He discussed various conservation based strategies to improve system health, productivity and profitability, but the main focus was on cover cropping. He also discussed mulching, minimal and no-till fruit and vegetable production, Integrated Pest Management (IPM), and planting buffer strips or "farmscapes" to encourage populations of beneficial insects and pollinators. These kinds of practices, when incorporated in a systematic way into a grower's production methods, can improve soil health, system health and overall productivity while decreasing the need for off-farm inputs which can help the bottom line.

Buller gave a shorter version of this presentation to each of the other three regional conferences, but focused primarily on cover crops as they are easily the most effective way to boost soil health in most production systems. There is a demand for this kind of information among growers in Kansas, as one attendee from the Olathe presentation noted, "Very good introduction, we would benefit from more detailed workshops on all aspects of vegetable production, soil health, crop cover, no-till strategies, etc."

The regional farmers' market workshops provide market vendors a chance to access information on growing fruits and vegetables, selling direct to consumers at farmers' markets, and various programs that are beneficial to growers, such as the Savor the Season program, the Senior Farmers' Market Nutrition Program, and Double Up Food Bucks. Each conference also had a chance for vendors to share their successful practices and ideas with each other. Between 75-120 attended at each location.

In addition to presentations on soil health and cover cropping, Buller spoke about high tunnel growing in Wichita based upon KRC's 2016 *Growing Under Cover: A Kansas Grower's Guide*. At both Hays and Girard, he also spoke about strategies for successful farmer's market vending, based upon his experience as a former market manager and current market vendor.

In addition to speaking to growers across the state about conservation strategies, Buller presented to the Kansas House Agriculture Committee on specialty crop production in Kansas and the needs of specialty crop producers. Also presenting were Missty Lechner, American Heart Association, speaking about the development of Local Food and Farm Councils across Kansas; Rebecca Floyd, Executive VP of Kansas Development Finance Authority (KDFA), who spoke about Beginning Farmers Loan options available through KDFA; and Susan Metzger, Assistant Secretary of the Kansas Department of Agriculture, who talked about the work they have done over the past three years to promote specialty crops in Kansas, including the farmers' market workshops, and the Savor the Season project.

KRC's Specialty Crop Project is supported by a USDA Specialty Crop Block Grant through the Kansas Department of Agriculture.

KRC 2016 Contributors

Thank you to the following individuals and organizations who contributed to the Kansas Rural Center in 2016.

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**Kansas Natural Resource Council
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Resources and Events

Growing Under Cover: A Kansas Grower's Guide Now Available Online and in Print

Written by Tom Buller, Kansas Rural Center; Dr. Cary Rivard, Kansas State University, Fruit and Vegetable Extension Specialist; and Kim Oxley, Research Extension Associate, Kansas State University, *Growing Under Cover: A Kansas Grower's Guide*, provides success stories from Kansas farmers who use tunnels on their farms, additional general management strategies, and specific cropping advice for some of the most successful crops grown in high tunnels in Kansas. This is the second of two Growing under cover publications from KRC.

This is a great resource for growers who are looking to start growing in high tunnels, as well as those who already have a high tunnel and are seeking to optimize its use. It will also provide a foundation for growers seeking to understand the basic management practices and needs of various crops within high tunnels.

The publication is available online at the KRC website at <https://kansasruralcenter.org/growing-under-cover-2-is-here/>. A limited number of hard copies are also available.

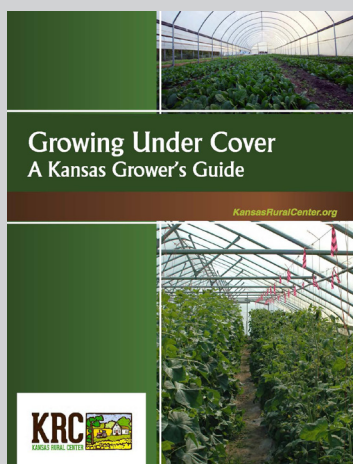
Contact info@kansasruralcenter.org to request a copy or copies. A full color pdf is available for download or printing; and a

black and white pdf is also available.

The report was funded by USDA SCBG through the Kansas Department of Agriculture.

Growing Under Cover Volume I: Guide to Polyunnel Options for Kansas Growers is also available on KRC's website at www.kansasruralcenter.org/our-publications/.

Growing Under Cover: A Kansas Grower's Guide is available online and in hard copy. Visit www.kansasruralcenter.org, or contact info@kansasruralcenter.org.



Local Food News

Kansas Local Foods continued from page 14...

But greater technical assistance is identified as a great need at the state level to support these growing local efforts and interests.

All of the food systems reports and recommendations to date are paving the way for more robust food systems that help create greater resources for producers, greater healthy food access, and economic opportunities. However, much work is still needed to let our state policy makers and institutional leaders know how they can help chart the path forward.

Everyday Kansans are the greatest and most valuable voices and we should continue putting that power to work now more than ever. I challenge you to get involved in or support your existing or potential local food and farm council and other local efforts. Call your legislators and let them know what you care about.

As stated in the most recent Local Food and Farm Task Force report, "While we recognize the reality of our state budget, we must continue to show our top level leaders that this is a priority and a need to continue growing the opportunities for this industry in our state."

Weed Killer Roundup Faces New Safety Doubts

Monsanto is being sued by citizens who maintain that glyphosate, the active ingredient in Roundup, is responsible for their cancers. On Tuesday – March 14 – the judge overseeing the case unsealed some of the documents that have been filed related to the case, and nobody comes out clean – not the company and not EPA. The court documents included Monsanto’s internal emails between the company and federal regulators. The records suggested that Monsanto had ghostwritten research that was later attributed to academics and indicated that a senior EPA had worked to quash a review of glyphosate that was to have been conducted by HHS. EPA determined in 1985 that glyphosate should be classified as a group C carcinogen – possibly cancer-causing in humans but lacking sufficient studies of humans and animals – only to reverse that decision six years later. EPA has been constantly at odds with the majority of the scientific community over the potential dangers of glyphosate. (From *Esquire* March 20, 2017, and *New York Times* March 14, 2017.)



About twenty beginning organic farmers attended the Farm Starts Organic Transition Training held in Hays on March 24, co-sponsored by Kansas Organic Producers and NFO. The training was part of the NFO Beginning Farmer and Rancher Project aimed at helping beginning farmers (defined as those in farming less than ten years) transition to organic farming. Several father/son teams attended as did several young farmers taking over their parents’ operations. Another workshop will be held in northeast Kansas in late August or early September. Stay tuned for more information.



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Calendar

Saturday, May 6, 2017

Women in Farming Workshop
9 am. to 5 p.m.

Walton Rural Life Center, Walton, Kansas,
(about 8 miles northeast of Newton)
\$15 - lunch and materials.

*Includes tour of
Morning Harvest Farms.*

Friday, May 5, 2017

Women in Farming Roundtable
7 p.m. to 9 p.m.

Harvey County Extension Community Room,
*Informal conversation with women farmers and
community organizers. Free.*

To register for both events, go to www.kansasruralcenter.org/women-in-farming-workshop/, or email info@kansasruralcenter.org.

Save the Date - June 10 Women in Farming Workshop Location TBA, but includes farm tour at Sunny Day Farms near Palmer, Kansas. Look for more information on our website soon.

Inside This Issue

**Two Hundred Gather for WEALTH Day
at State Capitol**

**Small Farmer Commentary: Thinking Bigger: Wildfires
and Health Care**

**Farm Bill Field Hearing Highlights Economic Concerns
for Farmers and Ranchers**

**Food Hubs: What They Are, How They Work, and
Examples in Kansas**

**Kansas Local Food Systems Reports and
Recommendations: Why Kansas Should Act on Them**

KRC Women in Farming Workshop, Saturday May 6

**KRC Promotes Specialty Crop Production Through
Conservation Strategies**

KRC 2016 Contributions