

## KRC Announces Fall Food and Farm Conference

The Kansas Rural Center will host its annual Farm and Food Conference November 18 and 19, 2016, in Manhattan, Kansas, at the Four Points Sheraton Hotel. This year's speakers and workshops will embody the theme, **"Transforming Our Farms, Our Food and Our Future: Building the Road as We Go."**

The two-day program will highlight conservation and diversified farming systems with an emphasis on pollinators and soil health on day one, and on local food systems and how collaboration and networking is critical to developing a successful local and regional food system on day two.

The conference promises to have something for a broad spectrum of attendees—from conventional and organic farmers, to beginning and established farmers, conservationists and environmentalists, and local food advocates and community leaders.

"No one has all the answers to building a better food and farming future," states Mary Fund, KRC's Executive Director, explaining the conference theme and content. "But we can't wait until we do. We must do what we can with what we've got, where we are, and "build our road as we go."

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*Summer in Kansas! KRC wrapped up a series of public forums on local foods and state issues in late June, wheat harvest is over, gardens are supplying farmers markets across the state, and KRC is busy preparing for our annual conference November 18-19, 2016.*

## Rural Papers

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

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## Small Farmer Commentary

### Why is Soil Central to Our Health?

by Mary Fund

*“My father-in-law has spent years searching for the holy grail or the silver bullet and he was walking on it all along!” mused one farmer at the recent Fuller Field School in Emporia in mid-July. “Building Healthy Communities” – human, plant and especially soil – was the focus of the speakers over the two-day school.*

*Like minded individuals including crop farmers, grazers, no till farmers, soil health converts, and market gardeners – or all who question the treadmill of purchased inputs, tillage, and increasing production problems for declining returns—all gathered to listen, share and learn from a range of researchers, farmers and speakers. The primary topic was, as Dr. Kristin Nichols, research director for the Rodale Institute, stated it, “solving the carbon problem for soil and human health”.*

*While much of the discussion focused on improving soil health, the connection of a functioning soil community to the human community was alluded to over and over. Colin Seis, farmer speaker from Australia, made the connection between declining soil health and the decline in essential minerals in our food, vegetables and meat. He and other speakers referred to studies such as the landmark University of Texas study of USDA nutritional data from 1950-1999, and others, documenting the significant decline in nutritional quality of many foods.*

*Didi Pershouse, holistic health practitioner and author of **The Ecology of Care**, built on the soil microbial connections or extensive networks among soil microbes and mycorrhizal fungi that Nichols described as essential to healthy soil function, by talking about similar connections and networks in the human micro-biome. “Soil has a digestive system, a reproductive system, and nutrient transportation systems – just like we do,” she explained.*

*“As farmers you are providers of public health,” Pershouse declared. It is about more than commodity production or even food production. “Are you moving in the right direction?” she asked. Farmers impact public health by using practices that protect drinking water, rivers, lakes and streams, provide nutrient dense foods, build strong local economies, and grow healthy communities from the inside out, above and below the soil surface, and provide resilience.*

*While labeling GMO foods is the current controversy, Pershouse focused on farming practices, noting that the heavy use of glyphosate on crops, primarily the GMO crops bred for resistance to it, lowers the density of minerals in those crops. She explained that the pathway glyphosate interferes with in plants is the same as in our own human biome. While we do not know for sure if glyphosate is impacting human gut bacteria, we do know it is present in human systems. A recent study found glyphosate in the urine samples of 98% of the European Union parliament members tested, at levels 17 times the amount allowed in European drinking water.*

*As for soil health, “We have carbon depleted soils,” Nichols said. “We have focused on erosion and not carbon,” she said, referring to the severe droughts of the 1930’s and 1950’s, “but you cannot generate soil by decreasing erosion.” We need a Brown Revolution, she argued, following these principles:*

- 1) minimize soil disturbance (i.e. reduce tillage, use cover crops, compost and mulch)*
- 2) energize the system with diversity;*
- 3) Keep soil covered;*
- 4) Maximize living roots;*
- and 5) insert livestock ( i.e. manage animals including insects for soil health.)*

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*Following these principles will increase soil carbon, and thus mitigate climate change and help crops thrive under climate uncertainty; improve or increase biological activity within the soil, increase water infiltration, improve soil tilth and structure, and provide natural fertility, and decrease erosion and compaction.*

*Speaker Colin Seis, who raises 4000 Merino sheep and some grains on a 2000-acre farm near Sydney, Australia, noted that “Many of the things we do in agriculture make someone else wealthy, but not farmers and ranchers.”*

*He referred to modern agriculture as “more-on” or “moron” agriculture, referring to how reduced soil carbon results in a need for more irrigation (or more run-off, and less infiltration of rainfall), more synthetic fertilizers, more insecticide use, etc. and these in turn result in more reduced soil carbon. Cutting back on or eliminating artificial fertilizers, herbicides and pesticides not only enables better soil health but saves money. “Modern agriculture lacks resilience and ecological function,” according to Seis. “We need more ecologists in agriculture.”*

*Seis described his pasture cropping system where 25% of his farm is in “pasture crops” every year, moving the crops around the farm over time. Pasture cropping is a technique or approach where annual crops are tilled into dormant perennial grass or grassland. Seis has been using holistic planned grazing for over 20 years. He began experimenting with pasture cropping learning and improving or refining the system. He met Fuller and Gabe Brown, North Dakota no till/soil farmer, in 2012 at the No Till on the Plains conference and learned about the impacts and benefits of multi-species cover cropping.*

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## **In Memory- Bob “Grannie” McGranahan**

On June 28, KRC and the organic farming community lost a dear friend- Bob “Grannie” McGranahan, of Harveyville, Ks. Bob died at a Topeka hospital of cancer/pneumonia after a short illness. Short because the cancer- far advanced- was only diagnosed days before his death. To the very end, Bob did it his way. Too stubborn to doctor, possibly aware of the seriousness of his condition, and fully aware of the cost both financially and emotionally to his partner Peggy Miller and his daughters and friends, - he chose to live his days his own way.

Many times over the years Bob would call our house to talk to my husband about an organic farming question or the plans to market his grain, or to figure out where to get seed, etc. He never failed to brighten my day with his long drawl of “It’s a good day to be alive! The sun is shining. I got my sweetheart by me, and I need to talk to yours....”

Bob was not just an organic farmer, although his hard won knowledge of organic farming made him special to many of us. He was an artist and a poet. Not of the official kind, but the kind with keen observation skills and a knack for story telling and language. My flower garden will forever be graced with one of his farm implement sculptures welded from the junk pile and Bob’s creative eye. (He donated a similar sculpture to KRC’s 35th anniversary celebration auction, and it has become a traveling totem, to be auctioned off for the third time this fall among Bob’s friends.)

His eyes could flash with anger and indignation at the “ego-farmers” as he called them or some other social or environmental injustice, but sparkle with oneriness and the sheer joy of being alive and able to laugh. I’ve never known anyone who lived with more generosity of spirit- a spirit that many of us can only aspire to. Rest in peace, Bob. You are sorely missed.

There will be a memorial service Saturday August 13 at the Presbyterian Church in Eskridge, Ks. at 1 p.m. Condolences can be sent to Peggy Miller, Bob’s long time partner, at 13076 Dagoon Creek Road, Harveyville, Ks. 66431.



Peggy Miller and Bob “Grannie” McGranahan





## State Policy

### Special Session Ends; Revenue Woes Continue; and Elections Loom

by Paul Johnson

The State's Special Legislative session has come and gone. The Legislature passed a patch to the 2017 school block grant by using one-time funds and moving funds from other programs.

The Kansas Supreme Court has now ruled that this patch will fix the school equity issue for next year so public schools will remain open after July 1. The long-term fix to school funding was not discussed and will fall to the 2017 Kansas Legislature that will be comprised of a few dozen new members.

Until the revenue crisis is fixed, adequate school funding will be impossible given that K-12 public education accounts for 50% of the state budget. School funding will be one of the top issues in the 2016 fall elections.

This school funding patch was constructed with many parts. One time funding of \$13 million from the sale of the Kansas Bioscience Authority was grabbed. Funding was taken from the federal Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF)

block grant and directed to the Parents as Teachers program. These funds are means tested so some parents will have to pay for the services. \$10.5 million in tobacco settlement funds - meant for early childhood programs - were raided. The Kansas Department of Transportation was tapped for \$5 million. \$2.8 million in school virtual aid was redirected. While classroom funding was protected for all 286 school districts, local option budget equalization aid was impacted so that the wealthiest districts - such as in Johnson County were cut \$4.7 million to assist the poorest districts.

The real school funding battle will play out in 2017. A district court panel in Shawnee County has already ruled that the existing school funding formula is inadequate to the tune of \$400-500 million. This case is on appeal to the Kansas Supreme Court and will be heard in September. The two year block grant expires on July 1, 2017 unless the Legislature extends it another year.

The revenue picture for the State continues to darken. May receipts were down \$75 million and June were

down by \$33 million.

Budget tricks such as moving school payments from June to July for the new fiscal year will be employed. The State will borrow \$900 million from internal accounts - a certificate of need - in July to cash flow payments over the 2017 fiscal year.

This mess will land on the plate of the 2017 Kansas Legislature next January. There will be a new Speaker of the Kansas House and many changes in the Kansas Senate. The Governor enters the final two years of his governorship. Very serious, focused leadership will be required to fix the revenue crisis, respond to further Court action on adequate school funding and develop a new school funding formula for Kansas.

### 2016 Election Presents Generational Choice

Elections matter. Kansas has fundamental challenges that cannot be ignored any longer. The self-inflicted revenue crisis threatens the future quality of life in Kansas. Kansas has a serious affordable housing problem statewide. Energy policy deserves a more thorough debate. Kansas has begun a local food and farm dialogue that should expand and incorporate a stronger health component. Medical and mental health services for thousands of uninsured residents should be a priority.

The basics of the Kansas economy should be the top feature of the coming elections. There are no easy answers or silver bullets but Kansans deserve an election debate that has some meaning and substance.

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# Sustainable Agriculture News

## Fall Conference Announced....

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*Jonathon Lundgren, entomologist and agroecologist, and Liz Carlisle, author and fellow in the diversified farming systems initiative at the Berkeley Food Institute, will be keynote speakers at the November KRC annual conference. Lundgren will speak on soil health and value of pollinators and risks to both. Carlisle will talk about her research into the social networks and organizing necessary for an alternative food system.*

“This year,” Fund continued, “ we hope to share with folks the many ways to do that with farming practices, local food systems and communities.”

Each day will include 12 to 15 workshop sessions ranging from the very practical how-to's for farmers and ranchers to policy analysis and issue presentations. New this year, North Central Region – Sustainable Agriculture Research & Education (NCR SARE) is co-sponsoring an entire track of SARE funded farmer research project sessions titled “The Farmer Forum” on day two.

Keynote speakers include Dr. Jonathon Lundgren, on day one. Lundgren is an award winning entomologist and agroecologist, who worked for USDA ARS for 11 years before starting his current project - Blue Dasher Farm, a research and demonstration farm. He will speak on the importance of pollinators and

diversified farming to the health of farming overall and to the food system.

The second day will welcome Dr. Liz Carlisle, currently a fellow at the Berkeley Food Institute’s Diversified Farming Systems Project and teaching at University of California at Stanford this fall. Carlisle is the author of **The Lentil Underground**, a non-fiction book recounting her research and experience working with Montana’s sustainable, organic and local food movement and the social networks that organized to make it all work.

Breakout sessions will focus on local food systems, community food solutions and economic opportunities, farm transitions and beginning farmer opportunities, farming practices and marketing strategies for diversification, conservation on the farm, food and environmental policy, and organizing and communicating for social change. A more detailed agenda will be available later.

Each day will include a lunch from locally-sourced ingredients and will offer conference attendees time for networking and visiting exhibitor booths in order to connect with and learn more about the great people and exciting things happening in farming, food production, and the environment, in Kansas and beyond.

KRC welcomes sponsorships at several different levels and benefits. Cost to attend the conference is \$65 per day which includes access to all presenters, lunch and snacks both days, and a Friday evening social hour. Scholarships may be available.

To learn more about becoming a sponsor, registering, or scholarships at this year’s conference visit <http://kansasruralcenter.org/conference-2016/> or call Natalie Fullerton at 866-579-5469, Extension 701, or email [info@kansasruralcenter.org](mailto:info@kansasruralcenter.org). □

# Feeding Kansas News

## KRC Forums Urge Action Toward Better Food System, Healthier Communities and Engaged Citizens



Natalie Fullerton, KRC's Community Food Solutions Project Coordinator addresses the forum crowd at the final forum held in Iola. Photo by J. Voigt

Connect, network, communicate – and act. These were the goals of KRC's series of spring/summer public forums around the state to stimulate dialogue about local and regional healthy food production, the state budget and revenue crisis, and what individuals and communities can do. 230 people attended the forums held in Hutchinson, Concordia, Colby, Garden City, Ottawa and Iola in May and June.

“As we traveled the state,” stated Mary Fund, Executive Director of the Kansas Rural Center, “we’ve been fortunate to see first hand the creative, amazing things going on to build a local food system that contributes to local economies and improves access to healthy food for families and communities. In community after community, we’ve seen that solutions begin at the grassroots whether it is production, marketing, distribution, or food access. But none of this happens in a vacuum. That is why we

brought the state budget and revenue information to the meetings.”

The purpose of the forums, she explained at each of the meetings, was to provide an overview of local and regional food developments within the context of the state budget crisis and to provide an opportunity for people to share information on local efforts toward healthier food production and access, and to encourage more engagement.

“Communities can do a great deal on their own, but shrinking state dollars and programs impact things like extension research and outreach, limit access for food assistance, and hamper economic development. We need to pay attention to the big picture and how it impacts us.”

People were grim at nearly every one of the six stops around the state when listening to a legislative overview and descriptions of the state's downward

spiral of budget and revenues. But the mood shifted 180 degrees when the talk turned to local community and farmer efforts to build healthier communities and to produce more healthy food locally or regionally.

When presented with stories of local organizing efforts, farmer successes, health and wellness initiatives, local food councils, and education on production and marketing, people perked up and the room buzzed with conversation, ideas and stories. “I had no idea so much was going on in Kansas!” exclaimed one participant at the Concordia forum, summing up a sentiment apparent at all of the forums.

Each forum began with a state legislative overview followed by presentations from local groups working on health and wellness and/or local and regional food production and access.

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# Feeding Kansas News

## Forums...

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*Above Senator Tom Hawk addresses the Colby forum about state issues; center, Bernie Koch of the Kansas Center for Economic Growth explains the state general fund pie; and at right David Coltrain, Seward Co. Community College, talks about profits from specialty crops in high tunnels. Photos by J. Voigt*

Speakers such as Sen. Tom Hawk, Rep. Dan Kerschen, and David Coltrain from Seward County Community College, members of the State's Local Food and Farm Task Force, each gave updates at different meetings on the status of the Local Food and Farm Task Force.

In Colby, Manhattan Senator Tom Hawk, a Colby native, detailed the consequences of the state budget situation, including the devastating across the board cuts in education and the deeper and specifically targeted cuts aimed at research institutions. "You can't take away 1/3 of our income and think it won't cut services," he said. "We do have a crisis in our state budget. It has been mismanaged. We need to fix it."

He also discussed the implications of the predicted closure of 25% of Kansas' rural hospitals in the next ten years, and how these closures will

impact rural communities and health. But he noted that, "Local foods and the reauthorization of the Local Food and Farm Task Force were the bright spot in an otherwise very gloomy legislative session." Hawk said that local food production needs the "right kinds of supports," and should be sure to include city slickers, young people, and others who don't have access to land and haven't grown up steeped in agriculture. He noted that the average age of farmers in Kansas is 57 and increasing, and that access to land and training are significant barriers to getting into farming.

KRC's policy analyst, Paul Johnson, provided a legislative update at three of the forums. Urging the crowd in Ottawa to take action, Johnson called this a "defining moment for the future of Kansas." Income tax cuts have had a more devastating impact on state revenue than projected. In the scramble for money, vital parts of the

state's food, health, and social support systems are losing funding. Rural hospitals and health programs are also feeling the budget squeeze. "What will happen to communities if they lose their schools and hospitals?" asked Johnson.

Farmers will continue to feel the state budget squeeze as well. K-State Research and Extension is losing more funding and will not be able to support farmers like they have in the past, at a time when more information is needed on topics like fruit and vegetable production and soil health and climate resilience for all types of farming—conventional grain and livestock production and horticultural production.

In Ottawa, Ron Brown, chair of the state's Local Food and Farm Task Force, described some of the obstacles average Kansans face to access food.

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# Community Food Solutions

## KRC Community Food Solutions Initiative Receives Additional Funding

By Natalie Fullerton

The Kansas Rural Center will continue the Community Food Solutions Initiative for another three years thanks to additional funding awarded from the Kansas Health Foundation this spring.

The project, “Community Food Solutions: Civic Agriculture for Civic Health” will focus on cultivating civic agriculture in Kansas and mobilizing grassroots Kansans and partners to successfully incorporate Kansas farms into the supply chain. Special focus will be placed on Southwest Kansas for development of a regional food assessment.

KRC’s Civic Agriculture for Civic Health Project will continue to engage in a coordinated regional and statewide public policy and community dialogue to grow awareness of the status, barriers, opportunities and policy supports still needed to advance the Kansas food and farming system we envision. The project will promote civic health by bringing communities together around the goal of producing healthy food, and will provide opportunities and resources for communities to connect around a common goal, work towards a shared future vision, and engage in the process of bringing that vision to fruition.

Launched in 2013, KRC’s current three year, “Community Food Solutions for a Healthier Kansas” Initiative produced the report, **Feeding Kansas: Statewide Farm and Food System Assessment with a Plan for Public Action (Feeding Kansas)**.

For the past three years, KRC has worked closely with four other Kansas Health Foundation Statewide Partnership awardees: KC Healthy Kids, Kansas Action for Children, American Heart Association in Kansas, and the Kansas Hospital Education and Research Foundation.

KRC and their partners engaged and educated citizens and statewide public policy makers on the needs identified in the plan and how to take action. Building on the momentum of this project, the new project is designed to empower grassroots Kansans to take the lead in advancing new and identified public policy and actions that better incorporate the state’s farms and ranches into the supply chain thereby improving Kansas’s economy, community, environment, and health status.

Specific activities of the new project will include revisiting the “Feeding Kansas assessment” process in Southwest Kansas to produce a Feeding Southwest Kansas report. We will also engage the State Local Food and Farm Task Force and/or its recommendations and local level food policy councils in policies and supports identified by constituents across the state. We will advocate for increased support for state specialty crop funding, permanent positions within K-State Research and Extension and other higher educational institutions.

The current **Feeding Kansas** report has a specific focus on increasing fruit and vegetable production and access

in the state. Increasing production of fruits and vegetables for local markets would help diversify and thereby strengthen Kansas agriculture, the Kansas economy, and access to healthful foods. Both Kansans’ diets and Kansas’s agricultural landscape are deficient in fruits and vegetables, compared to other food and farm products.

In 2012, 90 percent of Kansas’s harvested crop acres were devoted to growing the following four foods: wheat (9 million acres ), corn (4 million), soybeans (3.8 million), and sorghum (2.1 million). Forage for livestock covered nearly 2.5 million acres. Meanwhile, only 14,359 acres, 0.03 percent of Kansas farmland, were used to produce vegetables, berries, fruits and nuts.

While fruit and vegetable production and access has been a primary focus, the ultimate goals of the projects are engaged, healthy communities across the state and a Kansas food and farming system that will increase residents’ access to and consumption of a healthy plate including fruits, vegetables, whole grains, and a variety of protein sources – both at home and in food outlets, improving personal and community health across the state.

Individuals and organizations who are interested in learning more and participating in this Initiative may visit [www.kansasruralcenter.org/CFS](http://www.kansasruralcenter.org/CFS) and sign up for KRC information and emails, or contact Program Manager Natalie Fullerton directly at [nfullerton@kansasruralcenter.org](mailto:nfullerton@kansasruralcenter.org) □



## Workshop Showcases Benefits of Moveable High Tunnels

by Tom Buller

On May 10, KRC co-sponsored a workshop on constructing a moveable high tunnel with the Sustainable Agriculture program at Johnson County Community College (JCCC) at the Open Petal student farm on JCCC's campus. The workshop was scheduled to coincide with one of the classes for students studying sustainable agriculture, and between students and community participants, 26 people participated to learn about moveable tunnels. The workshop was a hands-on affair working to construct a 30' x 48' moveable high tunnel, for use at Open Petal Farm.

Stu Shafer, the head of Johnson County Community College's Sustainable Agriculture program, provided opening remarks about how the new high tunnel would fit into the farming system at The Open Petal student farm. Open Petal Farm produces vegetables and fruits incorporating heavy use of cover crops, crop rotations and minimal tillage to maximize sustainability.

The farm already has one moveable tunnel, which was an old design, on heavy skids made to be pulled by a tractor. The workshop worked to construct a new moveable tunnel, made by Four Season Tools, that is designed to move by hand, pulled on rollers that slide over v-shaped rails mounted on the ground. The tunnel can be affixed to the rails at one of two different locations. The structure is also secured with additional ground anchoring.

Greg Garbos, owner of Four Season Tools, a Kansas City based high tunnel manufacturer specializing in moveable structures, highlighted the reasons why moveable high tunnels are powerful tools for specialty crop production.

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**The big question for Kansas growers that came up is- how to design a tunnel that is easy to move, yet can be secured under the high wind loads faced here?**

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Foremost, he pointed out that moveable tunnels allow rotation of the ground under cover, which can allow natural precipitation to leach out salts build up in the soil, and provide a simple way to aid crop rotation planning. This ability to rotate is amplified by being able to move the high tunnel over crops started outside as the weather cools, or move the tunnel off of crops that no longer need protection as the season warms up.

For example, a winter planting of frost-tolerant greens might have protection in January and February until early March, when the tunnel is moved onto a new spot and planted with tomatoes. The tomatoes get the benefit of early protection in the tunnel, while the greens are also

ahead of where they would be if just planted outdoors.

Garbos also described some of the engineering challenges of moveable high tunnels. There are currently 3 different systems for moveable tunnels available on the market- sliding upon skids, sliding on a pipe track, or using a v-shaped track like the tunnel being constructed at JCCC.

The big question for Kansas growers that came up is- how to design a tunnel that is easy to move, yet can be secured under the high wind loads faced here? Garbos said his system was designed so that the v-rails are secured to the ground, and the tunnel is secured to the v-rails with steel cables and it is also secured to additional ground anchors similar to mobile home anchors.

Another aspect that is a bit less obvious is the overall need for rigidity of a moveable tunnel. These tunnels are heavily braced so they don't deform while moving, so there was some discussion of the design of these different braces.

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# Sustainable Food and Farm System News

## Grower and Extension Collaboration Yields Production and Management Success for Kansas Tomato Grower

By Jean Stramel

There is an old adage that things skip generations. That is the case for Todd Griggs, who is now growing tomatoes and other vegetables on the land where his grandparents had a large truck garden and farm stand near Augusta for decades. A good portion of the land was sold by them for development and is now engulfed by the city, but Todd still has enough room for four high tunnels on the property.

A high tunnel, also known as a hoophouse or polytunnel, is a tunnel of metal hoops planted into the ground, and covered with plastic. They provide crops protection from heat, cold, pests and wind. Use of high tunnels is growing across the country as vegetable producers turn to them to offer crops protection and extend the growing season.

Griggs Bros. Farms includes Todd and his two sons, currently away at college, but they certainly have done their share of labor getting the operation set up. Eight more high tunnels are being built in 2016 as demand for locally grown produce is high and Todd would like to feed into this demand with his high quality products.

Todd had stints in construction, warehouse management and as a game guide in Wyoming before coming back to farm vegetables, bringing valuable skills to build and maintain growing facilities. When he decided to return

to farming in 2010, he started attending workshops for growers and learning about the regulations. That year he grew 2500 tomato plants on two acres.

He started out using a fairly conventional system of growing in fields, then made a 180-degree turn when he met K-State/Butler County Horticultural Extension Educator Larry Crouse, who told him about season extension and growing in high tunnels.

“I would not be this far down the road if it weren’t for Extension,” he claims. Working with Crouse, Todd has been able to expand and improve his production. “It is nice to have someone to evaluate the research or to send photos of pests and diseases.”

After careful consideration, Todd built his first high tunnel in 2012, and added three more in the next few years on his property. Two of eight more are being added He has applied for cost-share assistance from USDA - Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) funds through the Natural Resources Conservation Service.

Griggs Bros. Farms’ major crop is “red” tomatoes (varieties are not revealed), with bell peppers and cucumbers second and third in production. He also grows squash, onions and cabbage in outside fields. He has 8 acres available for



*Butler County Extension Agent Larry Crouse, and Todd Griggs, Augusta farmer, have collaborated successfully to expand and improve Griggs’ tomato & vegetable farm. Photo J. Stramel*

production between his backyard high tunnels in Augusta, and fields outside of town.

Growing in high tunnels allows Todd to harvest 12-14 pounds more marketable fruit per plant than he can by using only field production.

Todd and Extension’s Larry Crouse have developed a collaboration which benefits both – Todd is making money and growing his business in a very efficient system, and Larry Crouse does his part to help fulfill the KSU Extension goal of increasing the amount of fruits and vegetables grown in Kansas. Though Kansas ranks 7th in agricultural exports among states, it’s citizens buy 90% of their food from outside the state.

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# Sustainable Farm and Food System News

## Grower and Extension ... *Continued from page 10*

According to Todd, his production system has been fine-tuned and adapted as needed, “with a considerable amount of trial and error”, implementing time-saving steps where he can. He has carefully chosen what to outsource and what to keep in-house.

His first high tunnel was a greenhouse he bought used and re-constructed into a high tunnel. Seeds are started in a propagation chamber with lights, frost blankets and electric heaters starting January 10th - “when I get back from the Vegetable Growers Conference”, he adds. The greenhouse tables are brought in February 1st for the next stage of growth, then removed from the high tunnels when plants go into the ground and grow bags between March 1 and March 15.

A medium of rice hulls is used in the grow bags and tomatoes are fed a 4-18-38 Chemical fertilizer of Calcium nitrate and Magnesium sulfate (Epsom salt) which is applied automatically for 3 minutes per hour during the day. Once plants are big enough, a trellis system of re-bar is constructed to support the growing plants. The tomatoes grown directly into the ground are staked using a Florida “stake and weave” system with Honduran pine stakes as supports. Plants are inserted into the soil through slits in the woven ground cloth on the hoop house floors. The sides of the high tunnels can be rolled up for critical air movement. He rotates crops as much as he can from year-to-year to suppress disease and is researching cover crops that might be useful. Shade cloth is used over all high tunnels.

The only real insect pest that is of

concern is spider mites, but they usually come late enough in the season and Todd used to take the attitude of “just let them have it”. Extension Entomologist Raymond Cloyd conducted a site visit and recommended the introduction of predatory spider mites, which feed on the damaging spider mite species. These are ordered through Hydro Gardens, a Greenhouse Supply company. Todd will also use a Parafin-based spray if needed to control insect pests. Occasionally, early blight or Septoria Leaf Spot have become a problem.

To no surprise, weather and marketing are Todd’s biggest challenges. Right now he is too big for just farmers markets, but not big enough yet to supply a major grocery chain or distributor. Griggs Bros. Farms sells produce at a roadside stand at the Augusta facility and five farmers markets including El Dorado, Derby, Winfield, Arkansas City and Augusta.

The company utilizes Integrated Pest Management (IPM) according to KSU Extension procedure and follows their recommended GAP standards of “Generally Accepted Practices” for produce production and handling. The GAP certification is required for large distributors so at least he will be ready if he gets into these larger markets. Griggs Bros Farms is currently the second largest tomato grower in the state of Kansas.

Griggs Bros Farms has a Food Safety Plan in place, which all employees are trained to follow, and a record keeping system recommended by KSU. The GAP plan provides a guide with Standard Operating Procedures (SOP’s) designated for production and handling, from starting seeds through marketing. These standards are not currently required by the State of

Kansas but this is under discussion, and Todd wants to be ahead of the game and ready if the GAP standards become required in the state.

The lack of population density in his area has caused him to look beyond south central Kansas to sell product. Buyers from eastern and western Kansas, as well as northern Oklahoma, pick up his produce to distribute in their areas and he sells to other growers and roadside stands who need supplemental product. According to K-State/Horticultural Extension Educator Larry Crouse, “Todd’s insistence on quality keeps people buying”.

By working together, grower Todd Griggs and KSU Horticultural Extension Educator Larry Crouse are helping expand the production of produce in Kansas, and increasing availability of locally grown vegetables. Todd and his sons of Griggs Bros Farms should have no trouble continuing the Griggs legacy his grandparents started in truck farming two generations back. With the markets growing, they should be busy for years to come. □

*Jean Stramel is a free lance writer, and retired USDA NRCS District Conservationist who lives in Lucas, Ks. She provides this article as part of KRC's Community Food Solution Project funded by the Kansas Health Foundation.*



# Women in Farming Profile

## Finding a Place for High Quality Grassfed Beef

by Jean Stramel

Back in the mid 1990's, Judy Decker was raising kids with her husband on a small tract of land near Emporia. Then she attended the K-State Sustainable Agriculture Conference and heard Joel Salatin speak about grass-fed beef and pastured poultry and she thought "I can get into that". She knew the feed lot and confinement thing just wasn't in her.

Now twenty years later she is running a successful business on their Renaissance Farms Ltd., incorporated as a Sub-S entity in 1998. She is raising grass-fed Galloway beef and selling all she can produce using the farm website and Facebook as her marketing tool.

She and her husband had already been raising a bucket calves, and keeping a few cows and calves on their twelve acres, but this new concept made her start looking for more land. In 1999 they bought 100 acres north of Emporia and now run two herds on that land, plus another 135 leased acres across the road. It was a perfect fit for Judy who has a degree in wildlife biology from KSU, and worked on the Kanza Prairie research land near Manhattan during the final year of her undergraduate studies and for a year as a graduate student.

"I just have a real love and passion for grassland ecosystems, so this whole cattle thing was very fascinating to me - it gave me an excuse to be there with the grassland system- managing it."

She and her husband attended the Jim Gerrish grazing school in Missouri (he is now in Idaho), and discovered the book **Grass Productivity**, by Andre Voisin, which she recommends to anyone wanting to gain an understanding of the grassland ecosystem as it pertains to livestock production. She was on her way.

Finding a breed was the next quest. She believed in the idea that not all cattle are capable of producing quality beef from grass in a timely and economical manner and so went looking for the genetics that can do that. Through list serves, reading and word of mouth, she ended up with some Solid Galloway cows from Wisconsin and has been very pleased with the breed and its performance on grass. This breed is recognized in Europe as an environmentally friendly ruminant.

As it turned out, marketing was not difficult. At the time, they were already selling pastured poultry. So when they had some beef ready to sell, she wrote it on a chalk board so her poultry customers could see what was available and people bought it, were very pleased and kept buying it. Her customer base is now expanded far beyond these poultry buyers through word of mouth and her on-line presence. She recently gave some to her son in Kansas City; and his



*Judy Decker has been raising Galloway beef for grassfed beef market since the late 90's. Photo J. Stramel.*

roommate's father, who raises Angus beef, wanted to buy a side of her beef, claiming they were the best steaks he had ever eaten, even claiming they were at least as good as Omaha Steak Company. "I felt bad because I wrote back and said they were from a six-year old cow!", she said.

Now she uses her website and Facebook to market her product to people looking for grass-fed beef. Much of it goes to Kansas City customers, who order a side of beef and then drive to Olpe, Kansas to pick it up from the processor. She sends an email that includes tips for selecting cutting options. Judy is on site when her beef are being processed because "I want to feel and look at the steaks. I know who the genetics are - what bull and cow - and I just like to keep an eye on things and make sure it really looks and feels like it should." The owner of the plant was OK with this. "People are paying a lot of money for this beef," I told him.

*Continued on page 13*

# Women in Farming Profile

## Grassfed Beef...

*Continued from page 12*

She periodically does follow-up with customers, providing a review sheet they can send to her with anonymous suggestions, which she feels allows them to be more forthcoming in their comments. Judy takes quality control very seriously.

Judy runs two groups of animals on the land "up north". On the pasture acres they own, she rotationally grazes the herd, giving a 3-5 day paddock of grass. They see huge benefits to giving the grass some rest, but they have not set up the leased land into a paddock system because they are never sure from year-to-year whether the land will be available to them, or the owners will sell it.

When looking for land in the 90's their criteria was "cheap". The 100-acre tract bought in 1999 was in very poor shape nutrient-wise, having previously been "farmed out" and overgrazed. Once they bought it, they set about building soil fertility with rotational grazing, inter-seeding new species, and planting 28 acres of "go-back" land into two different mixtures of native species. The soil has a high clay content so if it rains it does well, but also makes it a challenge during drought since clay likes to hold onto the moisture.

After they bought the land, seven main pasture units were set up using 1-strand, 12-gauge high-tensile wire to create the primary paddocks. She will sometimes sub-divide these further, depending on the season and grazing pressure available. All exterior

perimeter fences are barbed-wire. Watering points were developed including two pit ponds, one using USDA cost-share. Water is pumped from the pond into a 3200-gallon tank, then gravity fed to the paddocks through an above-ground pipeline. They also have two tire tanks installed by Judy's husband, accessible from multiple paddocks.

The drought of recent years led them to hook up to Rural water to put in a Cobett energy free waterer, which works very well and which Judy loves. These improvements allow them to keep the cattle on this land all winter long. She will use range cubes to lure them to the truck when she checks on them. She finds her animals are very winter hardy using her system.

She and her husband will drive up on weekends and put out 4-5 hay bales in rings, which lasts the week. They try to move the feeding areas around to build fertility but it often depends on weather and ground conditions and maintaining access to the area.

The forage base is a mixture of 50% cool season and 50% warm season grasses, with a variety of forbs. They have had a problem with Western ragweed, which the cattle will eat, but not enough to control it. They will periodically frost seed Korean lespedeza, which gives a huge "pop" in summer productivity on the cool season paddocks, and provides a green forage. They have also tried drilling oats, turnips and rape on an area they call "the tillable" patch, which once had a good stand of crabgrass but it has not persisted, so the inter-seeding

gives it more production. Regardless of what they graze or plant, it is a huge improvement from when they bought the land, when "you could see a mouse run across the ground".

They only spot spray pastures when necessary and are up front with customers about this if they ask. Some choose to move on, but that is OK with her. She wants them to get the beef they want and she uses the production system she needs to get her product on the table.

Judy pays attention to cost of production, paying themselves rent for the land and paying her husband to make the hay. He likes to put up hay and owns the equipment. Renaissance Farms owns only a cattle trailer and old truck for pulling it, and another older truck for hauling hay bales. She would like to see more research available on the costs and benefits of using cover crops for livestock forage and "how it pencils out".

Judy feels there is a need for more farmer workshops on keeping track of cost of production because "we need more quality local foods, but it shouldn't be on the backs of the farmers". She feels that without knowing true production costs, profitable product pricing is a guess.

Judy is passionate about helping the Galloway breed thrive and grow in the US. That's why she goes to the time and expense of hauling animals to the Denver Stock Show.

*Continued on page 14*

## Briefs

### GMO Labeling Bill Heads to the President's Desk

On July 14, 2016, the U.S. House of Representatives passed, by a 306-117 margin, the GMO labeling bill (S. 764) crafted by Senate Agriculture Committee Chair Pat Roberts (R-KS) and Ranking Member Debbie Stabenow (D-MI) in consultation with industry groups.

The Roberts-Stabenow bill had previously passed the Senate on July 7 by a vote of 63-30 and now heads to President's Obama's desk. The White House has indicated that the President will sign the bill.

Once signed into law, the bill will preempt state authority across the country and nullify Vermont's first-of-its-kind mandatory GMO labeling law. In place of state authority, the bill would establish a complex federal

"bioengineered food" disclosure system, which would give large food companies three options for labeling GMO ingredients: a barcode or QR code on packages that would require a smartphone app in order for consumers to find out more information about a product, an on-package symbol (to be created by USDA) denoting GMO ingredients, or an on-package statement that the product contains GMOs. The bill defines what types of biotechnology and what types of products, albeit vaguely, that will need to be labeled under the new regulations.

Upon enactment, the implementation phase of the GMO labeling policy will begin. The first step of this process will start with the U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) Agricultural Marketing Service (AMS). AMS will have two years to develop rules and regulations for the national labeling systems. □ *From National Sustainable Agriculture Coalition Weekly Updates, July 14, 2016.*

## KRC Notes

### KRC Receives Mini-grant for Women in Farming Workshop

KRC has received a \$3500 mini-grant from the Great Plains Conference of the United Methodist Church to support women in farming educational workshops on local food opportunities. We are planning a full day farm tour for south central Kansas with numerous stops and presentations for September or October. We hope to hold a round table discussion the night before for those who need to come in early. Stay tuned for complete agenda and location.

The funds will also support a special workshop session for women farmers at our November fall conference. □

## Women in Farming Profile

Continued from page 13

"I guess my heart is in helping this breed excel and get back into the mainstream of the cattle industry, and I have found I love doing that". She brings individuals to the corral at her home and loves the process of weaning and gentling them. She gets them used to being washed and cleaned for show.

Judy is now selling breeding stock, putting photos of sale animals on Facebook. This enterprise now accounts for half of the farm income. The Renaissance Farms website sells the beef and directs people to the breeding stock page. She is amazed at how many followers they get and enjoys the contact with the buyers she

attracts. She has seen the Galloway breed take off in the last 7-8 years and is glad to be helping in that regard.

By 2005, Judy was so involved in the Grassfed beef industry that she organized a big conference in Kearney, NE called "Grass Genetics, Plus". "The thing I did different from other conferences is that I wanted to display live cattle. Potential producers could talk to the owners about what environment they were being raised in." The conference attracted attendees from 19 states and over a dozen breeders from all over brought cattle for the display pens. This conference was the precursor to the very successful Grassfed Exchange

Conference.

Judy has found her place raising high quality grass-fed beef. The low maintenance animals she breeds and raises help her promote a sustainable food product important for building the resilience we need for the increasing challenges of droughts, floods and helping build local and regional food production systems. Her website is [renfarms.com](http://renfarms.com) and she can be reached at [galloway@renfarms.com](mailto:galloway@renfarms.com). □

*Jean Stramel is a free lance writer who lives near Lucas, Ks. She interviewed women farmers in 2015 for the Kansas Rural Center's Women in Farming Project.*



# State Policy News Continued

## Generational Election....

*Continued from page 4*

The revenue crisis will necessitate many changes. Reinstating a top bracket for the wealthiest individual income taxpayers is one step bringing in over \$400 million. The 333,000 businesses (limited liability corporations, sole proprietorships, subchapter S corporations) exempt from income taxes since the 2012 change, should pay income tax on non-wage earnings over \$100,000 and this would cut the tax loss to Kansas from \$250 million to \$25 million.

A 5-cents fuel tax could be added bringing in \$50 million for the highway fund. Statewide school property tax was 35 mills in 1994 and lowered to 20 mills in the late 1990's. Some portion of this funding should be restored to help fund schools.

The State made promises to assist local units of government with revenues they lost as the State lowered property taxes for business machinery and vehicles. These promises were forgotten in the great recession but should be restored in a recovering economy.

Kansas has the second highest sales tax on groceries in the country. There should be a plan to lower the sales tax on food over a period of years.

**Affordable housing** has fallen off most any political priority list. Kansas has 1.2 million housing units with 68% owner occupied and 32% rentals. According to 2010 U.S. Census numbers, 40% of the renters (160,000) are cost burdened paying over 35% of income for housing expenses (including utilities) while 16% of homeowners are cost burdened. During the term of Governor Bill

Graves, he had an affordable housing task force and research was collected on the cost and availability of housing in each county. Today the Kansas Housing Resources Corporation collects none of that detailed data. The Governor is focused on repopulating rural counties and one of the greatest barriers is affordable housing.

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**“The basics of the Kansas economy should be the top feature of the coming elections. There are no easy answers or silver bullets but Kansans deserve an election debate that has some meaning and substance.”**

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Affordable housing is essential to many special populations such as the elderly with assisted housing, the mentally ill and the disabled. Single mothers with children are particularly challenged to find affordable housing and avoid the dilemma of food insecurity for their families. Housing must be considered an integral component of economic development plans in all areas of the state.

The **energy debate** in Kansas is bubbling. Kansas City Power & Light (KCP&L) - through its owner Great Plains energy - is moving to buy Westar - the largest electric utility in Kansas that serves over 600,000 customers. KCP&L is now before the Kansas Corporation Commission (KCC) negotiating a rate plan to offer energy efficiency programs in Kansas. KCP&L has over \$60 million in such efficiency programs in Missouri. Of the

50 states, Kansas has been around 45th in having utility based or governmental energy conservation programs.

The utilities and the KCC do not have a comprehensive understanding of energy efficiency opportunities in Kansas. No one knows how many of the 1.2 million housing units are adequately insulated. Kansas' greatest use of electricity comes in the summer caused by air conditioning but has no analysis of the efficiency of those air conditioners and the cost to replace old air conditioners instead of building an expensive natural gas fired peaking unit. Efficiency improvements - be it lighting or new motors or insulation or air conditioning - is substantially cheaper than generating power and the Kansas economy benefits with lower utility bills, more local consumer spending, less coal pollution and water savings.

The **'local food and farm'** debate continues to expand in Kansas. The State's 'Local Food and Farm' task force produced a report for the 2016 Kansas Legislature and this task force has been extended for another year with a second report to be presented to the 2017 Kansas Legislature in January.

The United States Department of Agriculture reports that a Kansan spends \$2,685 on food yearly (half for groceries, half for purchased meals) with just under 10% (\$260) spent on fruits and vegetables. For 2.9 million Kansans, the total for fruits and vegetables purchases is around \$770 million yearly but today only \$32 million (4%) is grown in Kansas.

One-third of all adults in Kansas are obese while one-third of Kansas children are overweight or obese

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## State Policy

Legislature...

*Continued from page 15*

the health care system hundreds of millions in extra medical costs.

In 2008, Kansas had 320 cities with a grocery store but today 85 of these cities' only grocery store have closed and most of these cities have populations under 2,500.

In 2006, Kansas set a goal to generate 20% of its electricity renewably by 2020. The goal was met in 2016. If Kansas set a local food goal of 10% by 2022, over \$700 million in food purchase would stay local and reverberate throughout the entire state.

**Health Care.** Over 300,000 Kansans have no medical coverage. Kansas could expand the Medicaid program (KanCare) and provide coverage to 150,000 of these Kansans. This would generate thousands of new jobs and give some relief to several rural hospitals that are suffering huge losses in taking care of the uninsured. Kansas could design this expansion along the lines of Indiana or Arkansas with employment requirements and the use of private insurance plans.

Kansas privatized the Medicaid program into KanCare by giving contracts to three managed care organizations (MCO's). Kansas does not have an independent ombudsman to monitor the MCO's and assist consumers with complaints over coverage. Kansas has spent tens of millions on developing a new automated eligibility system that is years behind with severe cost overruns. The contractor has now admitted there are over 15,000 on a waiting list for KanCare services. With no expansion of KanCare, mental health services are denied to many.

## Small Farmer Commentary

Continued from page 3

Now Seis is working on multi-species pasture cropping. "Emphasize the soil and the money will follow" was the response to questions about the economics of building soil health.

Both Nichols and Pershouse referred to best management practices (BMP's as putting bandaids on. "They do not solve the problem," stated Nichols because they do not solve the soil carbon problem. "Context is everything," stated Pershouse. "Learn the principles and not the practices."

Pershouse's soil health principles are adapted from those of USDA soil scientist Ray Archuleta:

1) provide shelter, moisture and nutrient

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By law, the 27 community mental health centers are required to serve everyone.

The State has provided a state block grant to cover the uninsured but as the budget crisis deepened the level of state support has fallen significantly. One consequence is that jails and emergency centers are bearing the costs.

Elections matter. A civic dialogue can have true significance. Campaigns can mean something. Candidates can debate substantive issues and come to Topeka prepared to act. The basics of the Kansas economy - revenues, affordable housing, energy options, local food opportunities, medical care - require extra attention and action. As a voter, your role is essential in demanding an informed discussion and a plan of action. □

Paul Johson is policy analyst for KRC, and a market farmer near Perry, Ks. Contact him at [pjohnson@centurylink.net](mailto:pjohnson@centurylink.net)

- for soil life by covering it year round;
- 2) minimize physical, chemical and biological stress;
  - 3) create conditions and food for microbial network to develop;
  - 4) use plant diversity above ground to increase biological diversity above and below ground;
  - 5) integrate diversity of animals to move nutrients, microbes, seeds, and water
  - 6) and get to know the context of the land.

"The future is in grazing," stated Fuller who is in the process of turning more of his farm over to perennial grasses, and beginning to experiment with Seis' pasture cropping system. He and partner Lynnette Miller are also adding enterprises (small livestock and vegetables) to diversify income streams while providing healthy food for their community. So, diversity and connections are as important above ground for healthy communities as they are to soil health below.

Gail's annual field school now in its 5th year, has become in his own words, "the support group for recovering conventional farmers." It certainly provides much food for thought and an open forum for discussion and thinking outside the box sorely needed in Kansas. By focusing on soil health, as Gail and the speakers stressed, we solve many of agriculture and the food system's challenges for the future.

□

## Moveable Tunnel...

*Continued from page 9*

Tom Buller, KRC's Specialty Crop Consultant, also provided comments about KRC's Specialty Crop Block Grant that funded the workshop. The project will also complete a follow up to the Growing Under Cover guidebook, focusing on crop specific growing practices and economics.

After the presentations, people got down to work. The participants were divided into groups and work proceeded simultaneously on several different tasks at the same time. Participants were encouraged to rotate among the groups to get a feel for the different jobs.

Two groups worked on constructing arches for the structure, one group focused on the main arches, and the other on the two unique end wall arches. Another group worked on building the side walls that included mounting the rollers.

While all this was proceeding, people took turns hammering in the 3-foot ground anchors to secure the v-track rails to the ground. The goal was then to bring everything together and place the arches on top of the sidewalls to complete the main frame of the structure during the workshop, leaving only the pulling of plastic to occur at a later date. Due to unexpected difficulties, the workshop did not get that far.

The ground anchoring posts were 3 feet long and in numerous spots, solid limestone was encountered at about 16"-18". These anchors are designed to sit directly on top of the rails, and



*The work crew gets down to the nitty gritty of construction of a moveable high tunnel at Johnson County Community College. Photo from Tom Buller.*

leaving them not completely buried would mean that the tunnel would not be able to roll down the rails. So the stakes were pulled back out, cut to the appropriate length and replaced.

The additional time this required meant that while all of the pieces (hoops and sidewalls) were constructed, the group did not have time to put it all together. This also meant that in the future, more additional ground bracing would be needed, as the rails would not be as secure as designed.

While the high tunnel construction was not completed, the workshop was still a success. Participants commented that they appreciated the hands-on nature of the workshop. Over two-thirds of the farmers who filled out the workshop evaluation noted that this workshop made it more likely they would add a moveable high tunnel to their production systems in the future.

Stay tuned for more high tunnel events in the fall.

### **Join KRC for our Monthly Grazing Teleconference Call**

**on the second  
Monday  
of every month  
7:30p.m. to 9 p.m.**

Hosted by Dale Kirkham,  
and joined by KSU's Gary  
Kilgore and Keith  
Harmony to discuss  
forages and grazing system  
management.

Join the toll-free call by  
entering  
1-877-304-5632  
and enter conference room  
number: 300 346 2424#  
For more information,  
contact Dale Kirkham at  
620-344-0202



# Feeding Kansas News

## Forums....

*Continued from page 7*

But Brown pointed out that the “sugar diet” offered by vending machines and convenience stores remains readily available. When Kansans do make it to the grocery store, they are faced with a 6.5 percent sales tax, the second highest rate on food in the nation. When coupled with local sales taxes, these can nearly double.

Neighboring states Colorado and Nebraska have declared groceries exempt from sales tax. It is easy to see how the conditions in Kansas make cheap calorie rich foods more appealing, and unhealthy foods do not just affect individuals who consume them. As Johnson informed the forums, “Obesity costs the state an extra \$1100 per person in terms of health care costs.”

Another blow to the economy, according to Brown, is that over 90% of the food consumed in Kansas comes from out of state. Several speakers emphasized that only 4% of the fruits and vegetables consumed in Kansas are actually produced in state, leaving a large gap but providing significant economic opportunity to scale up production of fruits and vegetables, as well as other foods, in Kansas.

In at least one forum, Johnson suggested we look at the renewable energy sector for an example of forward thinking. In 2000, one wind farm existed in Kansas. The state set a 20 percent goal for renewable energy. To date, the number of wind farms has increased to 20 with four more under construction. “Can we do that for local food? Set a percent goal for

Kansas production?” he asked.

At nearly every meeting, League of Women Voters (LWV) representatives highlighted the critical challenges to Kansas voters—registering people to vote, getting registered voters to vote, and addressing the list of 17,000 recently purged from the voting rolls. Registering to vote in Kansas has become needlessly complicated, according to LWV, as new state law requires proof of citizenship. This has created problems for many young voters and confusion among those reregistering. But the importance and value of individual votes has never been higher.

At each forum local organizations provided information on grassroots efforts to organize local food councils, health and wellness initiatives, farmers market creation or expansion, food access and school initiatives around healthy food, school gardens, and more.

Round table discussions filled the final portion of each forum. These sessions gave participants the chance to discuss challenges, opportunities, and actions individuals or groups can take to attract more farmers to the area or help beginning farmers interested in specialty crops, expand local food access and markets, develop local or regional food alliances, and how to empower community voices.

Farmers attending told stories of production and marketing challenges, and desire to scale up production if enough support could be found. More traditional crop and livestock farmers also spoke about the need for diversifying their farms, and helping their communities become inviting to

not just more young farmers but to young people in general. . Health officials talked about the difficulty of getting food assistance for those needing it most.

The forums clearly provided opportunities to begin community dialogue on a range of food and farming topics, community concerns, and state issues. Participants met new allies and learned of local or regional activities they had no knowledge of before the meetings.

Based on the buzz of energy surrounding the round table discussions, most participants left with new ideas and ways to move forward whether on their farming operations, potential markets, helping increase access to healthy food in their schools and communities, and ways to get involved in local voter registration efforts.

KRC will continue to facilitate communication among all of the forum attendees, expand the base of those interested in local food and farming issues and more forums, and provide information on state policy issues relevant to local and regional food production and access.

The Feeding Kansas Forum series is part of KRC’s “Community Food Solutions for A Healthier Kansas Initiative” funded by the Kansas Health Foundation (KHF). KRC recently received additional funding from KHF to continue the Community Food Solutions work for another three years. □

*Mary Fund, Joanna Voigt, Natalie Wolfe, and Natalie Fullerton contributed to this article.*

# Resources and Events

## KDA Seeks Participants for Statewide Survey of Specialty Crops

The Kansas Department of Agriculture and K-State Research and Extension are seeking specialty crop producers to participate in the Statewide Survey of Specialty Crop Production. A specialty crop is defined by the USDA as fruits, vegetables, tree nuts and dried fruits, as well as horticulture and nursery crops, including floriculture. Although the development of specialty crop production is exciting for both producers and consumers of local food, it presents a number of challenges due to limited regional production history.

The purpose of this survey is to investigate the economic impact of specialty crop growers in Kansas and their effect on local food systems. Information gained from this survey will allow KDA to better promote the specialty crop industry in the state. It will also help identify and prioritize what tools can be provided to encourage the growth of the agriculture industry to meet the demand of specialty crops and to increase the competitiveness of specialty crops in Kansas.

As an incentive for completing the survey, KDA will provide metal signs to participants indicating "Specialty Crops Grown Here" which producers can post near their farms and field locations reminding those nearby that specialty crops are grown in the area.

The survey should take approximately 45 minutes to complete. Those interested in participating should complete the survey available online at [agriculture.ks.gov/specialtycropsurvey](http://agriculture.ks.gov/specialtycropsurvey), or it can be mailed by request. Deadline for completed surveys is Oct. 1, 2016. The survey is funded by USDA's Specialty Crop Block Grant.

## Donate to KRC While Online Shopping

Do you buy books, music, shoes, or other items you can't find locally on Amazon.com? If so consider using Amazon Smile, and select "Kansas Rural Center" as your charity of choice

This component of Amazon.com allows users to shop as you normally do, only Amazon will donate .5% of your purchase to a charitable organization of your choice at no added cost to you!

On your first visit to Amazon Smile ([smile.amazon.com](http://smile.amazon.com)), log in using your amazon.com info. Then search and select "Kansas Rural Center" before you begin shopping. Amazon will remember your selection, and then every eligible purchase you make at [smile.amazon.com](http://smile.amazon.com) will result in a donation to KRC.

While we support local businesses, and urge you to do so, we also know we all use online shopping some of the time. This is an easy way to support KRC initiatives like Feeding Kansas, Women in Farming, Tunnel to Table and other efforts by just doing what you already do!



\*Suggested donation of \$60 /year provides KRC "Friend" benefits: KRC e-mail alerts, one-year of Rural Papers Newsletter, and Policy Watch E-Updates.

Subscriptions to Rural Papers (\$35) and Policy Watch (\$25) are still available separately.

You can also sign up and donate online at:

[www.kansasruralcenter.org](http://www.kansasruralcenter.org)

Please remember KRC in your estate planning or will. Contact us for more information at [ksrc@rainbowtel.net](mailto:ksrc@rainbowtel.net).

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 4021 SW 10th St. #337  
 Topeka, Ks. 66604

info@kansasruralcenter.org  
 www.kansasruralcenter.org

**Change Service Requested**

**Calendar**

**August 1, August 15 and August 29, KFU Summer Fun Farm Tour Series.** Morning Farm Tours followed by lunch and afternoon presentations at National Ag Hall of Fame. Contact Mary Howell for more information at 785-562-8726, or [www.kansasfarmersunion.com/events/](http://www.kansasfarmersunion.com/events/)

**August 8, KRC Grazing Call, 7:30 p.m. to 9 p.m.** Call 1-877-304-5632 & enter conference room number: 300 346 2424#. contact Dale Kirkham at 620-344-0202.

**September 13, Life After CRP, Tuttle Creek WRAPS sponsor. 9 a.m. -11:30 a.m. Marysville; 1:30 to 4 p.m. Washington.** Contact Barbara Donovan 651-247-8292 or [donovanmn@aol.com](mailto:donovanmn@aol.com).

Please check the KRC website for updated and more detailed calendar and announcement information on the above and for additional events at:  
[www.kansasruralcenter.org](http://www.kansasruralcenter.org)

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