

Rural Papers

Reporting with commentary
on agricultural and rural issues



No. 269

Fall 2018

The Farm Bill Blues: What Happens Now?

by Mary Fund

On October 1, the 2014 federal Farm Bill expired with more of a whimper than a bang. It is not that the expiration is inconsequential, but rather that it was drowned out by the attention given to the conflict-ridden chaos of congressional decision making and posturing of the past few weeks.

Farm Bill expiration is no small thing. It effectively delays implementation of many important conservation programs and shuts down the low cost, but “tiny but mighty” programs that support value added agriculture, organic agriculture (transition and research), beginning farmers, farmers of color, local and regional food system development, and rural enterprise development loans and grants. In addition farmer/rancher sign ups for conservation programs like the Conservation Security Program (CSP), Conservation Reserve Program (CRP), Continuous CRP enrollment, wetland and agricultural land easements, are delayed. Some of the conservation programs still have funds but USDA does not now have the legal authority to use those funds on new projects.

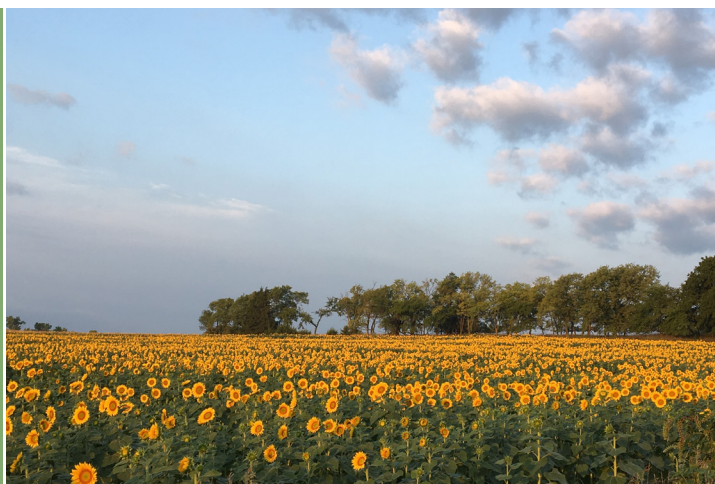
Farmers selling into traditional commodity markets have seen a substantial decline in prices and are experiencing a depressed farm economy—made worse by the recent tariff war and interruption of markets. Now the uncertainty of no Farm Bill only adds to the distress.

The “tiny but mighty” programs have proven a bright spot in the down farm economy providing help and hope to individual entrepreneurs and communities.

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**Register Now
for the
Kansas Rural Center
Food and Farm Conference
Nov. 16-17, 2018
Wichita, Kansas**

See details on pages 9 - 12 inside!



Rural Papers

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by the

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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

The future is closer than we think

By Mary Fund

Amid all the pointing fingers and outrageous claims and lies surrounding the Kavanaugh Supreme Court appointment and the uptick in shrillness in campaign rhetoric recently, you may have missed the biggest story of the century.

On October 8, the UN's Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) released a report stating that we have twelve years to implement urgent and unprecedented changes worldwide - especially among the developed nations of the world- to cut the increasing risks of extreme heat and cold, drought, floods, and the poverty created by the escalating changes wrought by steadily increasing global temperatures and carbon levels. The report says the planet will reach the crucial threshold of 1.5 degrees Celsius (2.7 degrees Fahrenheit) above pre-industrial levels by as early as 2030, precipitating the risk of extreme drought, wildfires, floods and food shortages for millions of people.

Amazingly this dire warning and challenge was 4th or 5th down in the news headlines of many of the mainstream sources I peruse on a regular basis. The safety of stretch limousines and the emergence of yet another hurricane or two (although related to the climate change story) were certainly news worthy and lamentable. But you would think the warning from the world's most renowned scientists that we have twelve years to take action to avoid planetary environmental catastrophe would have merited more than page 2, or 3 or 4 or worse.

Have we all become numb to negative news simply because there is so much of it? Are we paralyzed by this particular news because we think there is nothing we can do? Do we prefer to remain in blissful ignorance and denial - something only possible until it hits closer to home? Are we now brainwashed into thinking anything we don't want to know is "fake news"?

We are told here in the Heartland that we cannot even utter the term "climate change" let alone talk openly about it, as it is too much of a hot button term or it might stir up differing opinions and even conflict. We use terms like weather extremes, adaptation, and climate resilience. This is how we handle things when we protect children—downplay or even refuse to discuss scary bad things. But isn't it time to be adults and hit this thing head on?

It is true that addressing climate change is daunting, and that the really big pieces of the solution require action on a scale only nations and states can reach.

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Small Farmer Commentary

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Unfortunately, the news landed with a thud at the White House and among other national and state leaders in the U.S., so we see little response or responsibility taken.

The good news – if there can be any- is that without knowing it, some of us in the food and farm world are already engaged in the kinds of activity needed to build resilience and a better future.

From our networks across the state, we know people are exercising local leadership and local innovation to solve problems and meet all kinds of needs. We hear about collaboration, cooperation and community. We see increasing local food production, not just for individual economic benefits and to meet local needs, but also results in less reliance on distant perhaps more vulnerable production. To balance that, we hear discussion of a more regional food system so we are less vulnerable to local crop failures and to keep economic benefits closer to home.

KRC and others promote diversified ecologically based farming practices that build soil, capture carbon, and are less dependent on non-renewable fuel and water, and require fewer chemical fossil fuel based inputs. We promote growing fruits and vegetables in addition to grains, and we support a grass based meat production system that reduces carbon emissions. We are talking nothing short of a shift in the food and farming paradigm- the first steps of which are also an early and necessary transformation to stabilize the climate.

While news like the IPCC report appears to fall on deaf ears either because it terrifies or paralyzes us, it makes sense to come together to find positive steps we can take to make our farms, our communities both rural and urban less vulnerable to whatever the future brings.

The present-day division and conflict among us, sown and fueled by opportunistic politicians doing the bidding of a class of wealth owners and powerful corporations (whether done out of ignorance and blind allegiance or intentionally) only keeps us from the work that must be done. The facts about climate change and the possible solutions have been before us for decades. Now is the time we need to start having real discussion about what it means for meeting our basic needs and how to take action. The future is indeed closer than we think. What kind of future is up to us.

At KRC's fall conference, you will not find the big solution to the IPCC warnings, but you will find thoughtful innovative people who are working to find solutions to a number of issues related to our collective future: specialty crop production, soil health, alternative land ownership options, ecological nutrient management, developing a local and regional healthy food infrastructure, extending the growing season with hoopouses, increasing woodlands resiliency, climate change, public health and community resilience, and civic engagement: how to make a difference as well as a "What Now?" an update/analysis following the 2018 elections.

To some, all this may seem naive and simplistic but my favorite Helen Keller quote sums up my hope for the future best: "The world is moved not only by the mighty shoves of the heroes, but by the aggregate of the tiny pushes of each honest worker."

For a complete listing of upcoming Kansas Rural Center events and activities, as well as a number of events that other organizations will be hosting in the near future, please visit the Events Calendar on our website <http://kansasruralcenter.org/calendar/>.

Farm Bill News

Farm Bill continued from page 1...

They diversified income streams, created local jobs, and served communities and in general created opportunities.

Shut down of these programs means there will be no new support to help underserved farmers to get the training needed to succeed in farming, no new investments to help create rural jobs, no funding or research to encourage organic production, and no new rural enterprise development loans or grants, to name a few.

What Now?

Negotiations are proceeding in DC behind closed doors, while many legislators are home campaigning. It is highly unlikely that conferees will vote on a final Farm Bill package before the lame duck session after the elections, but the major pieces may well be determined. The next few weeks before and after the election is a key time to reaffirm what is needed and what you want the Kansas delegation to support.

Last summer, KRC noted that the “House version of the bill had multiple flaws and represented a huge step backward from the policy needed to even begin to address natural resource challenges. Nor did it acknowledge the lack of a level playing field in terms of commodity subsidies or opportunities for beginning farmers or the needs of the poor or low income.”

Pressure needs to continue to urge support for the Senate version in the final Farm Bill as it offers the better deal for conservation, local/regional food related programs, beginning farmers, and greater support for nutrition programs. Our congressional representatives need to hear from constituents that we need a Farm Bill that:

- Invests in a sustainable future – by permanently funding programs that connect farmers and eaters, support beginning farmers and farmers of color, underwrite organic and sustainable agriculture research, and provide healthy food incentives for families

- includes permanent funding for the following programs, in line with language proposed in the Senate version of the 2018 Farm Bill:

- * **Local Agriculture Marketing Program** (which combines and strengthens the Farmers Market and Local Food Promotion Program, Value-Added Producer Grant Program, Regional Food Economy Partnership Program, and Food Safety Cost-Share Assistance)

- * **Farming Opportunities Training and Outreach Program** (which combines and strengthens the Beginning Farmer and Rancher Development Program and Section 2501 Program)

- * **Organic Agriculture Research & Extension Initiative**

- * **Food Insecurity Nutrition Incentives Program**

- **Protects our shared natural resources** – by protecting the nation’s largest resource conservation program on working farm and ranch lands: the Conservation Stewardship Program

- **Targets support to family farmers instead of Wall Street** – by maintaining payment limits and strengthening eligibility rules for farm subsidies

- **Ensures food access and dignity for families in need** – by protecting the SNAP program from cuts

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What is at Stake This Election? Letter to Kansas Voters

By Mary Fund

Over a year has passed since the Kansas Legislature—led largely by a bipartisan group of women



legislators working across the aisle in true collaborative fashion—reversed the Brownback tax cuts of 2012. Some politicians are banking on the short memories of voters to turn the clock back to that failed experiment. They cling to the idea that cutting taxes—and state programs—is the key to growing the Kansas economy.

Lest we forget, let's remind ourselves that the big issues this election still revolve around the solvency of the state budget and state revenues. After nine rounds of budget cuts and program transfers and successive negative revenue reports during the Brownback administration, the state budget has stabilized—sort of. The 2017 tax “increases” (some prefer to call them adjustments) restored only about 2/3 of the cuts. The rest of the big issues Kansas faces follow closely behind the budget solvency with solutions for most of these problems dependent on healthier revenues: social services and health care for families, individuals, and our elders in need, education funding both for K-12 and our state's universities to ensure quality education for all, affordable housing both urban and rural, agriculture and resource management and protection to ensure our food future, road and bridge infrastructure to support economic activity, and voter rights to assure fair and equitable representation.

Let us remember that Brownback and friends blamed the tanking of the state budget on the “rural recession” and

decline in the energy industry. Some stalwart supporters of the supply side experiment maintain it was simply not given long enough to work. Others argue that we simply did not cut programs enough. But others disagree.

Economists who study this stuff now claim that cutting taxes does not boost economic growth. “Most states that dramatically cut their taxes are underperforming what you would have expected they would,” stated Dan Rickman, economist at Oklahoma State University in a Kansas News Service article. The evidence, here in Kansas and around the country, simply does not support the use of state tax cuts to spur economic growth.

Duane Goossen and the Kansas Center for Economic Growth (KCEG) released a report last March that debunked the argument that the “rural recession” and energy industry decline were to blame for the state's budget woes. The KCEG report says the global decline in commodities prices only accounts for a small portion of the overall economy in Kansas and wasn't significant enough to derail budgets in neighboring states. Also, the agricultural and energy downturn happened after Kansas budgets became unstable.

Let us understand that while the decline in the agriculture and oil industry had an impact, the primary cause of the budget collapse was the tax cuts. The KCEG report showed that Kansas farm income was only 12.9% of gross state product compared to 21.1% in Iowa and 24.3% in Nebraska. Budgets in those states remained stable during the same time span as Kansas' collapse.

Let us also remember the cuts to state services—of children literally lost by the state's child welfare system, of citizens without health care, of cuts to our schools that meant reduction in teaching staff and opportunities, and of road construction projects delayed or cancelled, to name a few.

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Voting for the Future: Mobilizing Rural Communities to Action

By Caryl Hale

“This is who is making the decisions in our elections.” stated Christi Graber, League of Women Voters of Kansas Garden City Chapter. With only four people standing in the room while the remaining attendees stayed seated, representing those who voted as compared with those eligible, Christi sparked a lively conversation at the final “Voting for Our Future” Dinner and Dialogue town hall meeting in September.

The Kansas Rural Center hosted a series of four town hall meetings in Norton, Girard, Concordia and Garden City to provide information and analysis on federal and state level food and farm policy and programs. Within the broader context of state budget and revenue issues and the need for greater citizen engagement, the town halls also focused on local and regional efforts to strengthen community access to food, resources for farmers, healthcare, and education.

Each town hall meeting included speakers from local health and wellness and economic development organizations, and local growers, in addition to state focused organizations including Kansas Appleseed, League of Women Voters of Kansas (LWVK), Kansas Economic Progress Council, and Kansas Rural Center.

Speakers shared local initiatives including hoop house projects, grocery store co-ops, small business development programs and studies, healthcare outreach, and organizational alliance partnerships. The speakers and organizations fielded questions from attendees covering the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) benefit recipient requirements, voter engagement support for the under-represented population groups, and support services for a changing and diverse population in Kansas.

Many of the programs and initiatives shared during the presentations, receive state and federal funds through grants that were revealed to be at risk with the federal Farm Bill in limbo. The Farm Bill houses a variety of programs including not only the nutrition program SNAP, conservation and

commodity and crop insurance programs, but also local and regional food support programs such as farmers market and local food system initiatives, value added producer grant program, and beginning farmer and rancher programs.

These smaller programs help farmers reach new markets, increase access to healthy food and continue to build infrastructure and offer technical assistance resources. If neither a Farm Bill or Extension of the current farm bill is passed by September 30, KRC speakers explained at the meetings, these smaller programs will be lost.

Sharing the local projects and their impact on the community provided examples of state and federal policy and funding positively changing the local health and wellness landscape. Communities were encouraged to continue to spread the successes of these programs with community members and especially policy makers at a time when these programs are at risk of being completely cut out of the final version of the farm bill.

Voter Engagement, But Why?

Of the 125 Kansas House races up this year, nearly 50 will have only one candidate, explains Paul Johnson, KRC policy analyst. There are thousands of unregistered eligible Kansas voters—especially among youth and communities of color, thus the importance of voter engagement.

The League of Women Voters of Kansas gave an update of the changes with voter registration, after the U.S. District Court Judge Julie Robinson struck down the Kansas voter citizenship law last June. Under that ruling, the Secretary of State, must instruct all state and county election officers that voter registration applicants do not need to provide proof of citizenship in order to register to vote.

LWVK also explained additional ways to engage in elections included offering a ride to voters that might not other-

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Sustainable Food and Farming News

Voting... Continued from page 6

wise have a way to make it to the polls, help new voters register and take them to the polls, sign up at the county clerk's office to help as a poll worker (rural communities run the risk of closing polling locations with poll worker numbers down), volunteer to help with a campaign. A new way to encourage greater voter turnout is the new software app, Voter to Voter at www.votertovoter.org, to engage friends and acquaintances in voting during the upcoming election.

Timing of the town hall meetings and the primary election gave opportunity to share current and relevant primary election turnout statistics. Voter turnout while notably lower during primaries at 27% statewide, also revealed diverse results reflecting the current local political climate.

In Norton in northwest Kansas, the first town hall meeting location, the Norton County primary results indicated a higher than average primary election turnout at 39% due to a local magistrate judge race. Voter turnout for Girard (Crawford County in southeast Kansas) and Concordia (Cloud County in north central Kansas) reflected the statewide sentiment toward the primary election with 21% and 30% turnout respectively.

The starkest primary voter turnout statistics, though, occurred during the Garden City town hall meeting with a meek 15.9% voter turnout in Finney County...the lowest primary voter

turnout in the state. With a Hispanic population base of over 50%, this statistic also revealed a deeper issue in voter engagement and representation locally. The visualization Christi Graber opened with, hit home the underlying population representation obstacle.

Take Action.

Following the round table discussions, attendees were encouraged to take action. A list of four options included voter engagement both personally and with community members, sharing comments and concerns with local and state policy makers, sharing personal perspective to educate and influence community members, leadership, and policy makers, and a final open-ended pledge of action. Response to the pledges revealed a growing concern for voter engagement with 68% of respondents choosing engaging in voting as their "next step".

What Next?

Following the town hall meetings, attendees are encouraged to keep engaging at the local level and to share feedback through a town hall survey to help KRC understand better how to provide needed information and resources. Additionally, resources including a Guide to Voting, Questions to Ask Candidates, and a contact list of state and federal representatives

have been made available to aide in taking the next step. Attendees also have the opportunity to delve deeper into civic engagement issues at the "Framing Our Future: What is Right About Food, Farming and Communities in Kansas" farm and food conference, November 16th and 17th in Wichita, Ks. with workshops including "Getting Involved at State Level from Local Perspective" and "Diversity in Kansas: How Kansas Changing".

Additional resources for farm bill updates can be found in the Kansas Rural Center Policy Watch. Voter resources including a list of candidates and sample ballots can be found at the League of Women Voter of Kansas at <http://lwvk.org/>.

To learn more about the town hall meetings and plans for 2019, please contact Caryl Hale at 866-579-5469 ext.702 chale@kansasruralcenter.org.



Paul Johnson, KRC's Policy Analyst, discussed state issues at the Girard and Concordia meetings.

Sustainable Food and Farming News

Raising Vegetables on the High Plains Reaps Rewards and Presents Challenges

By Jennifer Kongs

First in a series of five specialty crop farmer profiles.

Dave Svaty has farming in his family's roots. He grew up on a farm down the road from where he and his wife, Connie—along with his son, Caleb and his family—are tending cattle, pigs, sheep, and vegetables growing in fields and inside hand-built hoop houses near Kanopolis, Ks. in Ellsworth County.

Dave and Connie have raised livestock and sold vegetables from a roadside stand for more than 25 years. Dave, who has a degree in Agronomy from Kansas State University, started working 17 years ago at the local co-op to provide a source of steady income. Three years ago, Dave left the co-op job and at about the same time, his son also lost his teaching job. Connie continues to work as a teacher's aide, largely to keep the family covered with health insurance. The Svatys wanted to try making the combination of meat and increased vegetable production a go, with a focus on high-value crops, like tomatoes, grown in hoop houses. KRC visited Svaty's Produce on March 30, a muddy, blustery day, to learn more about their operation and get a tour of their production.

The Svatys have been able to expand their operation and create a unique setup with ingenuity and DIY skills. Dave custom-built his farmers market trailers to pull behind a truck. The wooden frame features a drop-down side that holds flat crates of produce; a walkway where the Svatys stand to sell from; a spot for a freezer to hold the meat; and large bins for melons, potatoes and other larger, heavier crops. The produce is held at eye level for the customer and everything is easily accessible by the person handling sales at market that day. Dave and Caleb liked the first one so much, Dave built a second one, so they could both have one at each Saturday market where they are vendors.

For the folks who want the on-farm experience, the family built a shop on-site, with customer-friendly reach-in coolers, a walk-in cooler for crop storage, and shelves and boxes for produce sales. The investment, Dave says, would

be worth it to save the driving time to multiple markets each week, and of course, the family hopes for added income from the set daily operating hours of 3 to 7 p.m. on weekdays. The space also has a back room, which has already provided value in getting the produce-washing and storage out of their house. Before the building, washing, storage and prep on Fridays before the big Saturday markets all happened inside Dave and Connie's home, where she bakes and packages homemade kolatches by the tens of dozens for market sales.

Dave and Caleb have been smart about how they re-purpose materials and incorporate made-to-fit solutions for season-extension and crop protection. For example, the calving barn is built with bridge planks Dave bought from the county. He moved an unwanted wooden hoop house frame from Ellsworth high school, which came complete with plastic covering. When their second hoop house, which has gone

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Svaty built a market trailer with a drop-down side that holds flat crates of produce, a walkway where the Svatys stand to sell from; a spot for a freezer to hold the meat; and large bins for melons, potatoes and other larger heavier crops.

KRC Conference 2018

KRC Annual Conference November 16-17 To Feature “Framing Our Future: What is Right About Kansas Food, Farming and Communities”

The Kansas Rural Center will host its annual Farm and Food Conference November 16 and 17, 2018, in Wichita, Kansas, featuring three distinguished keynote speakers as well as a panel of community leaders and workshops. Keynote talks and breakout sessions will exemplify the theme, “Framing Our Future: What is Right about Food, Farming and Communities in Kansas.”

Too often attention, both state and national, focuses on “What’s the matter with Kansas?” The conference will highlight the hard work going on across the state to keep or create jobs and opportunities, to rebuild communities, and to share information on diversifying farming and food enterprises, to develop food councils and related food businesses, and how to advocate for these positive changes.

“Kansas – especially rural Kansas--faces many challenges as does our economy overall,” states Mary Fund, KRC Executive Director. “The infrastructure for a new food economy, or a new economy, is not here yet. But, we are building it one farm, one business, and one community at a time. This year’s Farm & Food Conference will help tell the stories of how Kansas is alive and the innovative ways in which people are working to keep it that way.”

Three nationally renowned keynote speakers will provide national context and experience to growing local economies through healthy food systems from the soil to the dinner plate.

Friday November 16 keynote speaker, Dr. Mary Hendrickson, University of Missouri rural sociologist, will talk about community wealth and how local food systems can transform economies. Dr. Hendrickson is an energetic, optimistic advocate for rural and community economics and culture. She has spent 15 years working to create local food systems in the state of Missouri through University of Missouri Extension where she gained valuable on-the-ground experience in transforming food systems. Dr. Hendrickson is one of the authors of “Harvesting Opportunity: The Power of Regional Food System Investments to Transform



Mary Hendrickson, Univeristy of Missouri

Communities,” published by the Federal Reserve Bank of St. Louis last year.

On Saturday November 17, Dr. David Montgomery, University of Washington professor, winner of a MacArthur Fellowship, and author of *Dirt: The Erosion of Civilizations* and *The Hidden Half of Nature: The Microbial*

Roots of Life and Health, a collaboration with Anne Biklé, his wife, will explore the connections between soil health and human health and the farming practices needed for a transformation in agriculture and health. His most recent work is *Growing a Revolution: Bringing Our Soil Back to Life*. Anne Biklé is a biologist with professional experience in watershed restoration, environmental planning, and public health. Anne’s address will focus on soil and human health connections. Her work and research connecting the two has appeared in many magazines, radio and documentaries.

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David Montgomery and Anne Bikle

KRC 2018 Conference



KRC Farm & Food Conference November 16 - 17
 The Hotel at Old Town 830 E 1st Street N Wichita, KS 67202

“Framing Our Future: What is Right About Food, Farming and Communities in Kansas”

Tentative agenda. Subject to change.

Agenda Friday, November 16, Day 1

- 8:00 am Registration Opens, Light Breakfast
- 9:00 am Welcome and Introduction (Ballroom), Mary Fund, Executive Director
- 9:10 am Keynote - “Growing Community with Local and Regional Food Systems” - Mary Hendrickson - Rural Sociology Associate Professor, University of Missouri, and contributor to “*Harvesting Opportunity: The Power of Regional Food System Investments to Transform Communities.*”
- 10:15 am Networking, Exhibits Open, Silent Auction Opens

Breakout Sessions	Beginning Farmers and Next Generation	Practical Farming: In the Field	Building a New Economy	Advocacy
10:30 am	Exploring Land Link Program Options in Kansas - Mary Fund, Cade Rensink	Gearing up for Specialty Crops: Equipment Needs for Small to Large Operations - David Coltrain	Developing Local and Regional Healthy Food Access and Infrastructure: Kansas Examples and the Path Forward - Krysta Harvey, Tom Buller, TBA	Advocating for Farm to School in Your Community - Rachael McGinnis Millsap, Barb Depew, Andrea Alma

Noon Lunch featuring locally produced and sourced food

1:00 pm Plenary Session: “What is Right About Kansas Farms, Food and Communities?” - Marci Penner, Luke Mahin, Debbie Beardon, Donna McClish, Steve Swaffar, and Ed Reznicek

2:00 pm Break, Networking, Exhibits Open

2:15 pm	How These Farmers Are Making a Non-traditional Succession or Farm Transition Work - Dennis Demmel, Dave and Deb Welsch, Mark Jansen, Pete Ferrell	Basic Financial Management and Record-Keeping for Specialty Crop Production - Tom Buller	Climate Change, Public Health & Community Resilience: What You Can Do To Make a Difference - Rachel Myslivy and Dorothy Barnett	Diversity in Kansas: How Kansas is Changing - Elina Alterman, Hugo Perez-Trejo, Richard Mabion, Bertha Mendoza
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3:45 pm Break, Networking, Exhibits Open, Snacks

4:00 pm	Alternative Land Ownership Models Offer Opportunities: The Sustainable Iowa Land Trust (SILT) Model - Susan Erem	Ecological Nutrient Management for Soil Health- Candy Thomas	Urban Agriculture: Closing the Gap Between Community and Food Access - KC Project Rally, Donna McClish, Luke Snow	What Now? Update Following Elections & Farm Bill Including WEALTH - Rachel Myslivy, Dorothy Barnett, Paul Johnson, Zack Pistora
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5:30 to 7:00 pm Social - Network with old and new friends over appetizers and a Kansas beer, wine or cocktail. Dinner on your own.

KRC 2018 Conference



KRC Farm & Food Conference November 16 - 17
The Hotel at Old Town 830 E 1st Street N Wichita, KS 67202

“Framing Our Future: What is Right About Food, Farming and Communities in Kansas”

Tentative agenda. Subject to change.

Agenda Saturday, November 17, Day 2

- 8:00 am** Registration Opens, Light Breakfast
- 9:00 am** Welcome and Introduction (Ballroom), Mary Fund, Executive Director
- 9:10 am** Keynote: “Growing a Revolution” - David Montgomery - University of Washington professor and author of “Dirt: The Erosion of Civilizations and The Hidden Half of Nature: The Microbial Roots of Life and Health”
- 10:15 am** Networking, Exhibits Open

Breakout Sessions	Beginning Farmers and Next Generation	Practical Farming: In the Field	Building a New Economy	Advocacy
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10:30 am	Extending the Season with Hoophouses - Cary Rivard	Alternative Agriculture Methods that Support Pollinators - Jackie Keller, Jack Geiger, Jake Bevans	How Soil Health is Helping to Reshape the Story of Agriculture in Kansas - Jessica Gnad, Gail Fuller, Luke Snow, Dr. Trish Jackson	Industrial Meat Production: How to Fight Back - Craig Volland, Ashlen Busick
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Noon Lunch featuring locally produced and sourced food

1:00 pm	Building resiliency on the farm (and beyond) - Gail Fuller and Lynnette Miller, Dale Strickler	Best Management Practices for Specialty Crop Production - Tom Buller	Meat - Labeling and Claims - Julie Mettenburg, Farmer Girl Meats	Building Community Through Art: Using Creativity to Strengthen Rural Communities - Erika Nelson, Tom Hallaq, TBA
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2:45 pm Keynote - “The Hidden Half of Nature” - Anne Bikle - Biologist and co-author “Growing a Revolution: Bringing Our Soil Back to Life.”

3:45 pm Break

4:00 pm	Adding Value to Your Farm Through Specialty Markets - Ed Reznicek, Daniel King, Others - TBA	Drift – Impacts and Actions - Ellen Mohler, Todd Griggs, Pesticide Action Network	Increasing Woodlands Resiliency and Carbon Sequestration - Wayne White & Bob Atchison	Civic Engagement: Rural Advocacy on a State Level - Kelly Rippel, Kevin Barone
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5:30 pm Adjournment: Return Evaluations

KRC 2018 Conference

KRC Conference...Continued from page 9

Also on Friday, KRC will host a panel facilitated by Marci Penner with the Kansas Sampler Foundation focusing on, "what is right about Kansas food, farm and communities." The panel of community and farm leaders will share their stories about innovative approaches to rebuild communities and local economies, protect natural resources, and develop special markets.

Each day of the conference will also include 12 workshop sessions featuring presentations and panel discussions on building a new food economy, farm succession models, beginning farmers and the next generation, production and marketing, soil health and conservation practices and management, and state policy, community and civic organizing

efforts in Kansas, and more. The full agenda is available online at www.kansasruralcenter.org.

Cost to attend the conference is \$70 per day or \$135 for both days which includes access to all presenters, lunch and snacks both days, and a Friday evening social hour. Both days will include a lunch from locally-sourced ingredients and will offer conference attendees time for networking and visiting exhibitor booths.

Contact the Hotel at Old Town for room reservations at 316-267-4800 . They will continue to offer discount rate of \$99/night plus taxes/fees dependent on availability up to the conference, so first come first served!

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KRC 2018 Farm and Food Conference - November 16 - 17, 2018

Registration Form - Deadline Monday, November 12, 2018

Thank you for your interest in attending our conference. Full conference information and online registration and online payment option at: <https://kansasruralcenter.org/>

Please select which days you plan to attend:

_____ \$70 Friday, November 16

_____ \$70 Saturday, November 17

_____ \$135 Both Days/Friday, November 16 and Saturday, November 17

_____ Total Payment Enclosed

_____ Enclosed check payable to KRC.

Send check to: Kansas Rural Center, 4021 SW 10th Street, #337,
Topeka, KS 66604

Name(s): _____

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Address: _____ City: _____

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Please list any dietary restrictions: _____

No refunds after November 6.

Sustainable Food and Farming News

Success in Diversity: Agritainment and You-Pick Yield Surprising Results

By Jennifer Kongs

Second in a series of five specialty crop farmer profiles

Frank Gieringer was raised in Edgerton, Kansas, and started farming outside of town when he graduated from high school. “I started with hogs,” Gieringer says, “but got out of that business in the ’80s, when things went downhill.” Fast forward to today, when he and his wife, Melanie, own 160 acres, own an additional 80 acres with their son, Bryson, and farm more than 1,000 acres. They raised row crops for years, then about 11 years ago, began to diversify.



Frank Gieringer, Edgerton, has found success with diversifying his traditional crop farm, to orchards and berries, bringing his son into the operation.

The sixth hoop house is home to the purple and cheddar cauliflower, a popular add-on buy when people come to pick strawberries.

“We’ve found a design we like from Stuppy Greenhouse in Kansas City. It is a greenhouse frame that has bigger, stronger pipe and drop-curtain sides,” Gieringer says. “We typically get our plastic and other building supplies from FarmTek. I hired someone to make custom ends with wooden frames, which probably cost us \$1,500. The ends

KRC toured Gieringer’s Orchard and Berry Farm on a cool April day last spring, following a weekend with unusually low temps that reached into the teens. The Gieringer’s peach trees were just blooming—and survived the late frost—and the hoop houses were full of fledgling tomato plants and cauliflower.

The Gieringers started growing in hoop houses a little more than a decade ago. This year, the farm has planted about 400 tomato plants in each of five hoop houses.

are more permanent and anyone on the farm could handle closing them if a storm is coming in. We found the zippered ends that come with the FarmTek kits to be too difficult to work with. We’ve had nine years with these custom hoop house ends.”

“We’re probably raising too many tomatoes at this point. We’re going to try to steer away from growing quite so many in future years. We’re no longer moving all the tomatoes off the farm or at the farm, likely because people come out here for fruit, and I don’t want to sell wholesale.” Gieringer says. “Having the tomatoes early brings people to our farmers market stand, but come August, we can’t move much volume because everyone has them.”

The family has a stand at the Overland Park farmers market, where, in addition to tomatoes, they sell vegetables and any fruit excess from the you-pick operation (which isn’t much). The family also uses this time with customers as a marketing tool to invite people to come to the farm for the you-pick experience.

“If you’re wanting people to come to your farm, you have to grow something that puts a little fire in their britches,” Gieringer says. “Peaches, strawberries, things like that. They may buy tomatoes or cauliflower while they are here, but they won’t drive here just to get those items.”

The you-pick and agritainment features have become the biggest focus for growth for the Gieringers. “We built our first building to sell you-pick peaches right by our house, and we are now trying to move to the adjacent 80 acres we bought down the road,” Gieringer says. “That’s where we’re trying to move to agritainment,” Franks says. The farm has a food truck for lemonade and strawberry donuts, a playground space, and offers you-pick strawberries, raspberries, blueberries, blackberries, pumpkins, and, soon, apples. In the fall, the farm adds a haystack maze for the pumpkin-patch visitors.

The family has 9.5 acres of peach trees, home to about 1,000 trees of multiple varieties. In recent years, the family added farm-to-table dinners in the orchard. “We string lights in the trees and set up tables between the rows of peach trees,” Gieringer says.

Sustainable Food and Farming News

Prairie Wind Produce Proves Specialty Crops Work in SW Kansas

By Charity Horinek

Water gardens have been a part of public and private gardens since ancient Persia and China, but Southwest Kansas is not an area that has typically been well-known for water features. Prairie Wind Aquatics in Garden City set out to change that in 2000, with owners Steve and Kandy Michel opening their water garden business in an older building with no windows and no sales floor.

And now, it is a thriving business serving a wide variety of clients, and has recently expanded into other kinds of gardening – such as specialty crop growing, with a division called Prairie Wind Produce.

“The water garden business has grown and expanded into landscape supplies, trees, and special order landscape plants for clients,” Steve Michel said. “We started growing specialty crops in 2017. We did OK, and learned a lot.”

The Michels already had three high tunnels at the store being used for other crops and one at home, so they are converting some of the high tunnels to vegetable production.

“We have always grown vegetables. They are easy for us,” he said.

They have been Master Gardeners since 2001, and Steve oversees a community garden at the Finney County Extension Office. His Master Gardener group also does vegetable trials for Kansas State University research each year. And, he said, gardening is in their blood.

“Both of us had parents who were gardeners, so we grew up growing vegetables,” Michel said.

In their first season of growing vegetables for sale, they grew mostly outside as they convert some high tunnels – which Michel said has limited what they can grow. They had a 90-foot-by-90-foot garden plot last year, but have up to four acres to work with.

“I’m reworking a 72-by-72 area now, and have another 150-by-250-foot area tilled and ready to go,” he said. “We just need more water lines and hydrants.”

The Michels grew 30 different vegetables last year and will change the type of pepper grown this year to better fit their current market.

“We have not advertised as we are still limited in production, but we sold everything we grew last year,” he said. “We remodeled part of our store sales to include a produce market with glass coolers, and that has worked well. We are still working on getting our walk-in cooler installed in the shop.”

The Michels market to the public through the produce store, and have plans to expand to restaurants and grocery stores as they can ramp up production.

“Expansion has been a challenge, with the infrastructure changes and capital needed,” Michel said. “We have applied for a Natural Resources Conservation Service high tunnel cost-share program.”

Adding the specialty crop sales to their business has kept them very busy this past year – especially since Steve also drives a school bus six hours a day. He and Kandy hire high school-age summer help, who also help out on Saturdays during the school year.

“We can’t go to the farmers markets on Saturdays, as that is our busiest day of the week at the store,” he said, adding that they keep the store open six days a week, and see strong sales all week. “We’re still working on finding the right mix of vegetables.”

Michel thinks Southwest Kansas is ready for a much bigger specialty crop presence, with the right growing conditions and strong demand for produce. Currently, he sees a lack of specialty crops other than tomatoes and cucumbers, and a growing demand for broccoli, cauliflower, kale, spinach, lettuce, micro greens, and other crops.

“I see a huge potential for specialty crops – especially vegetables high in Omega 3 content, which lose much of their value the longer they are in transit and storage,” he said. “Offering veggies within seven days of picking is huge – yes, it is a challenge, but the demand is there.”

Prairie Wind Produce can be found on Facebook with a business page as well as a group called “Prairie Wind Veggies,” and is located at 1413 W. Mary Street in Garden City. Their phone is (620) 276-0700, and email plants@wbsnet.org.

Sustainable Food and Farming News

Greenhouse Dream Sparks Specialty Crop Business in South Central Ks.

By Charity Horinek

We often hear how Kansas farmers feed the world, but for Ellen Mohler, that cliché wasn't enough.

"They always say, 'We feed the world, we feed 155 people,' but we aren't even feeding our neighbors. We don't even feed ourselves," Mohler said. "We get all of our food from grocery stores. We don't know where it's from and how it's grown."

It was that desire to feed her family and her neighbors directly, with home-grown foods, that led Mohler to dream of having her own greenhouse. Then she attended a "Women Managing the Farm Conference," and the die was cast – she would make that greenhouse dream a reality, and start her own business.

Mohler, her husband, and their son, are the fourth generation in their family on a commodities farm just north of Sawyer in Pratt County. Besides her desire to have a greenhouse, she said she wanted to expand her own family's healthy food choices.

"We had gotten more interested in soil health and no-till farming, when I went to the women's conference," she said. "I had gardened for years. And then, my husband was diagnosed with diabetes, and we turned that around through diet. I started thinking how a lot of our ailments and problems are related to our diet."

Mohler opened Mulberry Lane Greenhouse, Garden Center, and Farm Market for business in March 2014. Her 24-foot-by-36-foot greenhouse is open from March through May, and features organically grown bedding plants and vegetables for sale. She added shrubs last year, by customer request. Mohler also delivers baked goods and eggs from her pastured chickens to Pratt every Tuesday.

"Years ago I used to bake breads and sell them at the Farmers Market in Pratt. But then I got busy with homeschooling and the farm, and stopped doing that. But people really want homemade food, and it has always sold well," she said.

Mohler began attending the Farmers Market in Pratt again last spring, with a variety of produce, eggs, and her baked goods. She has standing orders for her weekly baked goods

and egg deliveries. Because the family rents their farm from her mother, they have not been able to expand the business much since opening.

"Renting means that I can't get loans to expand on the property," she said. "But we do have a garage that we plan to turn into an inspected kitchen and farm store, hopefully this year."

Some of the products she makes and sells include sweet sourdough bread, cookies, pies, quick breads, cinnamon rolls, garlic bread, jams, jellies, and homemade noodles. "Food sells better than plants," Mohler noted. "When we open the farm store, that should help with food sales, giving us a place to sell instead of just delivery. And we will be able to offer more gluten-free options."

A "meal bundle" may also be in the works as Mulberry Lane expands, offering a week's worth of meals and desserts.

"We are in our fourth year right now, and our customer base has increased every year," she said. "We will double our customer base in year five. So my best advice to someone who wants to start a business like mine is 'Don't give up.' Expect it to take a lot more time and money than you anticipate. Set your expectations lower than what you think, but don't get discouraged and don't give up."



Ellen Mohler opened Mulberry Lane Farmers Market in Pratt, Kansas, in 2014.

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Mulberry Farm...

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Mohler currently grows one acre of sweet corn and one acre of mixed produce. “We are limited to two acres of irrigated plot without a special permit,” she said.

The vegetable plot includes potatoes, onions, carrots, squash, cucumbers, tomatoes, peppers, and a variety of other produce. Mohler also picks up local honey from a producer at Norwich to sell at the Pratt Farmers Market, along with her own noodles, eggs, chickens, and produce.

The biggest challenge to operating a specialty crop and greenhouse business, Mohler said, is the Kansas climate – along with resources such as time and money. “One of my biggest challenges is the weather, as far as growing things,” she said, adding, “But spray drift is another big challenge. We grow right in the middle of a lot of conventional commodity farms. We even had to move our main produce location because of spray drift, and it has done better this year.”

Marketing is another challenge Mohler has faced, and met with success. Mulberry Lane has a Facebook page and a website, and relies heavily on word of mouth to sell products and gain more orders. But she says there is room for more such businesses in the area.

“My business is unique for south central Kansas, as we have very few local growers,” she said. “We definitely need more growers in this area. There is more demand than product. And with Farmers Markets, the more people you have selling, the more you sell. A bigger selection draws more customers.”

Mohler also dreams of working with others to someday open a locally grown food store in Pratt.

“A store location would make it convenient for people to buy and eat locally grown food,” she said. “I started doing delivery because people won’t come out to the farm. Convenience is what sells.”

But for now, her ever-growing business and her plans for a commercial kitchen and farm store give Mohler plenty to focus on.

“I am way too busy,” she said with a laugh when asked how opening Mulberry Lane has impacted her life. “I never have enough time for everything.”

Mulberry Lane Greenhouse, Garden Center, and Farm Market is located at 90315 SE 30th Avenue, Sawyer, Kansas. Phone: (620) 770-1313. She keeps her Facebook page regularly updated, and also has a website: mulberrylanekansasfarm.com.

Charity Horinek is a freelance writer from Sublette, Kansas, contributing a series of stories on local and regional food in SW and SC Kansas to KRC, including Prairie Wind Produce and Pedro’s corn chips articles in this issue.

Farm Bill Blues...

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Whether or not Congress can come together to resolve major sticking points to pass a final Farm Bill—or anything else for that matter—is anybody’s guess. Whether we will instead see an extension is also up in the air. What we do know is that we have been here before. This is the second Farm Bill cycle in a row that allowed an existing Farm Bill to expire without even an extension in place—and we came through that.

Many major Farm Bill programs like crop insurance, commodity programs, and even the nutrition program (SNAP) continue regardless of passage of a new Farm Bill because they have permanent baseline funding beyond the life of the Farm Bill. The uncertainty and insecurity created for all of agriculture and rural communities by not having a bill may push Congress to action. Let’s make sure there is support to include the innovative programs above. Work now before the elections to learn what your candidate supports and tell them what is important to you. Then vote as if your food and farm future depends on it.

Kansas Congressional Delegation Contact Information:

Sen. Jerry Moran
DC Ofc: 202-224-6521

Sen. Pat Roberts
DC Ofc: 202-224-4774

Rep. Roger Marshall,
1st Dist.
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Rep. Lynn Jenkins
2nd Dist.
DC Ofc: 202-225-6601

Rep. Kevin Yoder
3rd Dist.
DC Ofc: 202-225-2865

Rep. Ron Estes
4th Dist.
DC Ofc.: 202-225-6216

Sustainable Food and Farming News

Desire to Add Value Leads Family to Tortilla Chip Business

By Charity Horinek

Visit a Mexican restaurant in Southwest Kansas, and you will most likely eat tortilla chips that were grown and produced nearby, thanks to the Winfrey family of Plains.

Since 2001, Leon and Nancy Winfrey and son Dustin Winfrey have operated Southwest Tortillas, utilizing their own crops to manufacture fresh corn tortillas they sell to restaurants, where they are fried and served to customers in the form of chips and salsa. The company also produces bagged tortilla chips under the brand name Pedro's Corn Chips, which are distributed to and sold through small grocers in the region.

"It started as a way of marketing my corn," Leon Winfrey said. "We needed to find a way to add value to our corn. So I decided to sell it through a bag. I'm not selling corn chips; I'm selling my corn in a bag instead of an elevator."

The family started small, researching and finding the perfect variety of food-grade white corn that grows well in Southwest Kansas and produces a top-quality end product. They started out hauling their corn to Dallas and Oklahoma City for tortilla production, where they learned that Southwest Kansas turns out to be an excellent climate for corn production.

"Our heat unit and our climate raises the best quality corn in the nation," Winfrey said. "I had thought the Corn Belt must be where the best corn was raised, but the factories in Dallas told us this is the best corn they had ever seen. It turns out that Southwest Kansas, the Oklahoma Panhandle, and the Texas Panhandle produce the best kernel of corn due to altitude, heat units, and climate. Our test weight is usually in the 62 to 64 pounds per bushel

range, and the average in the Corn Belt is around 56 to 58 pounds max."

Winfrey soon learned he could add even more value to his product by cooking and producing the tortillas himself rather than trucking his corn to factories in Dallas. "This opened our eyes to how much food is raised in this country and how much food is consumed," Winfrey said. "When we were hauling to Dallas or Oklahoma City, we could only take a semi load a day. It was a fraction of what they were processing. I gained a real understanding of how much corn is used, and it's unbelievable."

Southwest Tortillas is located in a blue metal building on the edge of Plains, where they cook 1,000 pounds of corn every day and have six employees (including the Winfreys). They built their clientele one customer at a time through old-fashioned door-to-door sales.

"My wife, son and me started knocking on doors. As we'd see a new restaurant pop up, we'd stop in and ask them to taste our product, to serve it to their customers and see what they thought," he said. "We'd do the same with small grocery stores in the area. After awhile, consumers started asking for our chips, and they almost market themselves now."

The biggest challenge in a business like this, he said, was in learning what the consumer wants and how to get his product in their hands. "They want a bigger bag. They want to see the chips inside, that they

aren't all broken," Winfrey said. Pedro's comes in a distinctive clear bag with yellow and red design. "Then I had to learn about how products are placed in a grocery store, and learned how people shop. We are creatures of habit. We don't shop for groceries. You go shoe shopping or clothes shopping, but you go grocery buying. When you're shopping for clothes, you try on things, you roam the aisles looking to see what they have. When you are buying groceries, you know exactly where things are. So I have to catch your eye as you scan through the aisles. And then when I have your eye, I have to get your attention. My bag needs to have something on it that makes you pick it up."

Other consumer behavior, such as the habit of turning right in stores, reaching out to grasp things on the right, and buying the same products repeatedly, also factor in when Winfrey is marketing his product to a grocery store and getting it on the shelves. The company did sell its product online at one time, but doesn't have a website anymore, finding shipping costs prohibitive.

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Winfrey displays his Pedro's Corn Chips in a field of corn near Plains.

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Svaty profile ... Continued from page 8

through four seasons, kept losing its plastic covering, Dave boxed in the ends with wooden frames to keep the hoop house together better. Turns out, wind is often a specialty-crop farmer's most challenging nemesis. The shape of the hoop house has other shortcomings: "I made a mistake in buying a round hoop house. I should have bought one with sidewalls, because I can't get in close enough along the sides with equipment," Dave says in retrospect.

Dave has built a lean-to greenhouse onto his home, heated with the home's old woodstove. "I came home one night, and told my wife I was going to build a greenhouse. So, I dug this space with a skid loader."

When I visited, the greenhouse was full of green, growing life. Because of a previous year's infection, the family now primarily raises tomato varieties resistant to tomato spotted wilt virus, including 'Mountain Glory' and 'Skyway 687.' They are trying some varieties—especially cherry tomatoes—that are not resistant, such as 'SunGold,' because of their popularity with customers. The greenhouse held dozens of flats filled with starts of tomatoes, sweet peppers, hot peppers, cauliflower, cabbage, broccoli, Brussels sprouts, celery and herbs. Once I left, he was planning to plant three colors—red, yellow and orange—of seedless watermelons on electric heating mats to keep the soil warm enough for germination.

There are also fig trees in buckets in the greenhouse that Caleb and Dave are planning to experiment with based on expertise from a fellow farmer in New York. Caleb, his father says, connects to other growers online who are also trying unique setups around the country. I joked with Dave about him being cutting edge, and he smiled, but readily reminded me it was Caleb who was making the new connections.

The farm's growth and diversification has not come without its struggles. "The first year was great. The second year, we lost all of our tomatoes to tomato spotted wilt virus. We have also lost tomatoes after uncovering them to spray drift," Dave says. Their history with a nearly complete crop failure caused by TSWV is why the family emphasizes TSWV-resistant varieties for their tomatoes and peppers.

After losing the tomato crop two years ago, Caleb needed to take on off-farm job working on wind turbines. "He has three kids, and we had nothing to fall back on, so he had to get a job for security. He wants to farm and he has a space, and we have markets to go to, but you need health insurance and you need steady income, and you can't do that as a starting specialty crop farmer," Dave says.

The family still raises close to 60 acres of conventional wheat and soybeans, accounting for an estimated 20 percent of the family's farm income. Dave says the farm gets better returns on the vegetables than the meat, especially the lamb and chicken. The pork and beef, largely because they are more popular meats in his area, have higher profit margins. The family has about 200 head of sheep, a dozen cattle and fewer than 10 hogs.

Dave has his concerns for the future of vegetable farming. One is FSMA, the Food Safety Modernization Act, and how to update to meet all of the requirements, especially regarding his family's combination of livestock and vegetables. His lambing barn, which is separated by a barrier wall but connected under one roof with a growing spot for early greens to take advantage of the animals' heat, would likely be forbidden.

"I'm an exemption, but we try to be up to speed. It is overwhelming, some of the specific rules and the amount of written documentation that would be required. My wooden picking crates wouldn't be allowed, I couldn't let my dog go into the field with me when I pick, but we have rattle-snakes and I want my dog with me."

Dave also wonders whether having multiple weekday markets in different parts of town — rather than a concentrated time in one spot — is best for farmers' sales. The most economical setup for where and when to hold markets is a commonly discussed direct-sale farmer struggle. "In summer, we saw more foot traffic to the farm store, which is ideal for us, but winter has been harder," Dave adds.

He worries about new farmers getting started, and existing farmers adding or diversifying their operations, with the heavy financial burden associated, given the current structure for financing and health insurance.

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.Svaty profile... Continued from page 18

Working without a fallback, as he is now, leaves “no margin for error” with the growing and marketing. When asked what changes could help his farm be more successful, Dave responds that he feels strongly that the sales tax on food should be eliminated, for the sakes of both farmers and consumers. “It is difficult to track, and compared with neighboring states, we’re putting a tax on poor people trying to buy groceries.

He also recognizes a need for a better system to protect against drift for sensitive crops. “I have neighbors that do their best to be careful, but even on windless days, we see the damage.” He also suggests that when feedlots or other concentrated operations move in nearby, that the specialty crop farmers who need clean water be protected. As his farm shows, there are multiple ways to grow food and build livelihoods through agriculture in Kansas, and he would like to see them all treated with equal protection.

Despite his concerns, as we walked through the fields, Dave’s love of growing food and raising animals was tan-

gible. He proudly pointed out the field planted days before with 2,200 pounds of potatoes (he named the dozen or so varieties off the top of his head); his sandy soil that grows juicy melons; and the baby lambs he has protected with their mamas in the barn.

Dave shared new ideas he wanted to test this year—clearly skilled at coming up with unique solutions to the various challenges farmers face. He spoke of incorporating oats as a cover crop before planting melons; a new method for stringing and covering tomatoes he’s keen to experiment; harvesting asparagus throughout the year; and more. When he spoke of challenges, he appeared distraught and overwhelmed by handling the bulk of the work solo, as if he were watching the end of an era. But, while visiting the farm, it’s hard to see anything but hope and potential while watching the lambs bounce, listening to the calves call, and passing through the warming hoop houses filled with new life.

Jennifer Kongs is a freelance writer with Bark Media in Lawrence, Ks. who produced this story as part of KRC’s Specialty Crop Block Grant funded by the Kansas Department of Agriculture through USDA’s SCBG Program.



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Success in Diversity...Continued from page 13

The family still raises conventional corn and soybeans, and has adapted over the years to a no-till system. “In our row-crop side, we are all no-till. We are able to do that because we grow GMO varieties and we have greatly reduced our pesticide use. We still use an herbicide to do the no-till, but we have seen a major reduction in our spraying.”

Gieringer says the diversification has been worth the work and change of mindset. He says 2017 was the first year the diversified, specialty-crop business beat out the conventional crops in net income. This new focus, and the shared buy-in to the additional acreage, was part of Bryson choosing to come back to the farm and putting real skin in the game.

“It is an incredibly expensive undertaking to expand into what we’re growing into. We’re doing bigger-scale stuff and we’ve borrowed more money, and up until now we’ve grown organically,” Gieringer says.

Take, for example, the newest expansion underway: a high-density, trellised apple orchard. “The orchard technique is largely planted in Honeycrisp on Geneva dwarfing rootstock, planted on 2-foot centers,” Gieringer explains. “The goal is to get a fruiting wall by tying the tree up a trellis, and once it reaches 10 feet, let it fruit and fill the space.” This keeps the trees narrow, meaning the aisles in between are open and the trees are more easily pickable, right at eye height. “Most orchards will be going to this, but it is incredibly expensive,” Gieringer says.

Or consider the plasticulture strawberry operation. The family has about 56,000 plants, replanted and rotated annually, on black plastic in rows with wide, mowed paths in between, covering about 5 acres. “We’ve got about 25 acres of deer fence, which was put up in late summer 2017. We needed it up for the strawberries, and we were tired of moving temporary fence every year we rotated our strawberries. Decided to bite the bullet and do it right,” Gieringer says.

He estimates with the deer fence, labor, plugs, irrigation, black plastic, covers, fungicide, fertilizer and harvest boxes, a farmer will invest about \$10,000 an acre the first year. “But, if you following the Plasticulture Strawberries handbook out of Ohio State and do it exactly by the book — without skipping

steps and each step on time — you will be successful.” Gieringer estimates you should get 1 pound of berries per plant on average. At about \$3.50 per pound, you can start to estimate a payback period on the investment.

Their farm is largely supported by the large, nearby population center of Kansas City. On the highest-volume day last year, Gieringer estimates 2,200 people came out for you-pick strawberries. Subsequent years are much less investment-intensive, however, labor costs will continue to be an issue. In truth, labor costs are one of the Gieringer’s most limiting factors.

“In January, we sent out 52 W2s, most of whom are high school temps. We have four full-time people right now,” Gieringer says, “and just hired our first ‘inside’ help to handle accounting, FSMA, etc.” On one strawberry weekend this year, he says his wife sent out \$1,200 in paychecks.

Another concern, as shared by other specialty-crop growers, are the regulations and FSMA. But, Gieringer says, “Anybody who’s going to do this full-time and is going to be serious needs to be FSMA compliant, because even people who are exempt will be held accountable if they have an incident. It’s going to kick out a lot of the older producers who won’t go through the process, but it will present more opportunity for somebody who is willing to go through the steps and bear the expense.”

The family is no stranger to adapting to change when necessary. For example, they modified their parking when the operation took off and began to think more about customer flow. “We had consultants come in and help us design our operation so we could handle thousands of people at a time,” Gieringer says.

With their continued growth, innovation and prime location, thousands of customers each weekend from strawberry season to the end of apple season isn’t much of a stretch of the imagination.



Storefront at Gieringer Orchard

Ceres Trust Offers Pollinator Protection Support

The Kansas Rural Center has received a second year of support from the Ceres Trust for KRC's Pollinator Protection Project. The \$20,000 grant will help KRC to provide information and education on the harmful impacts of pesticides and chemical drift on pollinators, farming practices that protect pollinators from pesticides or that reduce or eliminate pesticide use, and strategies for minimizing or preventing pesticide damage on farms and in apiaries. The project will also focus on public policy and programs that support a diversified, ecologically based agricultural system that promotes pollinator health. Contact Joanna (Voigt) Will for more information at jvoigt@kansasruralcenter.org.

Nell Newman Foundation Support for SW Kansas Research and Outreach

KRC is also pleased to announce a second year of support from the Nell Newman Foundation. These funds will help support research in Southwest Kansas examining food system and social/cultural challenges the immigrant and migrant population encounter. Thank you to those KRC supporters who helped match this \$5000 grant with over \$7700 in match during August! Funds will provide general communications support for KRC as well as support for the research project. Contact Mary Fund at mfund@kansasruralcenter.org for more information.

KRC Receives USDA RMA Grant for Specialty Crop Risk Management Outreach and Training

KRC also received approval for a USDA Risk Management Agency (RMA) grant of \$90,919 over 18 months. The "Educating Specialty Crop Growers and Ag Professionals for Improving Risk Management" Project will offer workshops for specialty crop growers on business and financial management tools, crop insurance options, and additional USDA programs for specialty crop producers. It will also offer one-on-one assistance for limited number of producers in farm financial analysis using Finpack farm analysis software.

Ag professionals such as crop insurance agents, extension agents, and FSA staff will be offered two regional workshops and two farm tours to increase their knowledge and understanding of specialty crop production, grower needs and challenges so they better understand how to serve them. KRC is working closely with Tom Buller, Douglas County Extension, Lindsay Elliott, formerly with Johnson County Extension, and many other consultants to offer workshops, trainings and farm tours, and develop educational materials. Finally, the project will also work with Johnson County Community College to integrate workshop content (i.e., record keeping, QuickBooks, business planning, crop insurance information, and USDA programs) into a college-level Sustainable Agriculture program to support adoption of these practices by new and beginning farmers. Contact Mary Fund for more information.

New Board Member Joins KRC

KRC welcomes new board member Luke Snow of Wichita, to the board of directors. Luke was appointed to the board at the October 11 board meeting.

Luke is currently president of FarmShop LLC, which opened in 2015. They focus on short chain, local food logistics, and currently own and operate the Old Town Farmers Market (OTFM), Wichita's downtown market. OTFM is now a growing and thriving, year-round market.

Through FarmShop, Luke also works to incubate small, locally focused businesses in and around Wichita. In September 2017, they opened In Season Bistro, a pop-up eatery at the Farmers Market, that sources from market producers and Kansas farms. Snow also works in commercial and residential properties installing edible landscapes, vegetable and pollinator gardens, and more.

"We believe that streamlined access is paramount if local food systems are to have any chance of competing with grocery store convenience. As Wichita's local food system evolves," he says, "we hope to create and implement a food hub in Wichita while striving to maintain that trusting, personal connection between consumers and producers."

Lessons Learned from Specialty Crop Farmers Publication Soon to Be Available

The need for more information and sharing successes spurred KRC to develop the “Linking Experienced and Beginning Kansas Specialty Crop Farmers to Share Information for Establishing Successful Specialty Crop Enterprises” grant project, funded by a USDA Specialty Crop Block Grant administered by the Kansas Department of Agriculture (KDA) during 2017 to 2018.

Last February, KRC hosted a one-day learning circle of five beginning and five experienced specialty crop farmers, to facilitate discussion of challenges, barriers and needs experienced by the growers, as well as opportunities identified. The notes and comments from the learning circle plus farmer profiles are shared in a report to be available for download by November 1 on KRC’s website. A limited number of print copies of “Lessons Learned from Specialty Crop Farmers Across Kansas”, will also be available at the KRC fall conference.

KRC Conference ...Continued from page 12

Conference sponsors to date include: League of Women Voters of Kansas, Eastern Kansas OCIA Chapter, Green Cover Seed, Center for Rural Affairs, Kansas Agricultural Mediation Services, Kansas Alliance for Wetlands and Streams, Kansas Chapter of the Sierra Club, Graze the Prairie, Audubon of Kansas Women for Kansas, No Till

on the Plains, Central Plains Organic Farmers, Kansas Farmers Union, The Land Institute, Kansas Forest Service, American Ag Credit, Socially Responsible Agriculture Project, Service-member Agricultural Vocation Education Corp (SAVE), Kansas Black Farmers Association, Westar Energy, and Kansas Center for Sustainable Agriculture and Alternative Crops; Kansas SARE, Kansas Permaculture Institute, and Kaufman Seeds.

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“The freight went out the roof. We’d be shipping \$12 worth of chips and it would cost \$16 to ship them,” Winfrey said. “It wasn’t cost-effective. But we do still have loyal customers who call us and we do ship to them.”

They are also responsive to customers’ needs. When restaurants started asking for salsa to go with the chips, Southwest Tortillas hired a cannery to produce its salsa. “It’s our recipe, and uses all fresh produce,” Winfrey said. “Now the salsa is such a good seller!” The restaurant business, he estimates, is about 50 to 60 percent of the company’s sales. They sell whole raw tortillas or quarter-cut raw tortillas to about 40 restaurants in Southwest Kansas, South Central Kansas, and Oklahoma, in about a 150-mile radius of Plains.

“We are located right between Liberal, Garden City, and Dodge City, and there are a lot of Mexican restaurants in the area,” he said. “But at the beginning it was a tough sale. They were

all using a food service truck for their chips. So even though our price was about the same, I didn’t have a salesman out there pushing our product. We had to visit them and let them try our chips, and their customers liked them. If you have good chips and salsa, people will still there.”

The business has expanded in size over the years and the family hopes to continue that trend. “We have doubled over the last four years, and aim to grow our production at least 20 percent a year,” Winfrey said.

Pedro’s Corn Chips have gained a loyal following in the region, and most small grocers in the area carry them at the request of customers. Any many restaurants have repeat customers who come primarily for the freshly made, never-ending basket of chips and salsa.

The Winfreys’ business goes to show that an enterprising spirit and an eye for quality each step of the way can add value to a small farm’s products. “I raise a non-GMO, gluten-free, home-raised product,” Winfrey said. “From the time I plant the seeds to the time I put it in the bag, it never leaves my hands.”

Southwest Tortillas can be reached at (620) 563-9181.

What is at Stake This Election...Continued from page 5

Let us remember the 30,000 voters purged from the state system—by use of a clumsy voter management system that did not ask enough questions to confirm identity.

Let us remember complaints from polling places of long lines and confusion and the stories from those who were turned away from the voting places.

Whoever sits in the Governor's chair and in the State Legislature next January has a daunting task ahead of them. Rebuilding the Kansas economy and the services it provides or should provide its citizens has a long way to go. The agricultural economy is still in the tank and even though we hear blustering news of how great the national economy is doing, many of us have not felt or seen it.

As you vote, think about what direction you want to see the state budget and services go. Is thinking of what you would do with your little piece of any income tax cut really going to improve your life? Ensure your kids and grand kids' education, health and safety? Will it repair your roads, and provide public safety and protection? Remember, tax reform is not just about taxes but what they pay for.

Women 4 Kansas E-Newsletter Best News Summary Available

Possibly the best e-newsletter in the state can be found via the Women for Kansas organization. "Women for Kansas News You Can Use" provides vital information about critical issues in the state, links to news articles you need to read but may not find in your usual news feeds, tips on how to get involved in Kansas, a voters' guide to where the Kansas candidates stand, and lots, lots more. Check the newsletter out at <http://womenforkansas.org/news-we-can-use/>. You can find archived recent newsletters, and you can contribute to their work or join on their website, too.

NCR-SARE Farmer Rancher Grant Proposals Due December 6

The North Central Region SARE Farmer Rancher Grant program is now open. Proposals are due by 4 p.m. (CST), Thursday, December 6, 2018. If you have questions about the grant, please email Kerri Ebert at kebert@ksu.edu or Joan Benjamin, NCR SARE program coordinator, benjaminj@lincolnu.edu.

From ATTRA Weekly Update Cooperative Ownership Models Offer Alternatives for Farms

A feature in Civil Eats showcases several farms across the country that operate under cooperative business models. These models include member ownership by either a group of farmers or consumers, as well as worker-owned farms. The cooperative model can help beginning farmers start out, as they share work and tools with others. It can also help farms manage risk, including climate risk, by spreading that risk among members.

Cooperative business models are also a way to build community support for a farm that can help sustain the business through a bad season or losses due to weather or natural disaster. Meanwhile, worker cooperatives can help attract new farmers by offering a stake in the business, rather than just conventional compensation.

<https://civileats.com/2018/10/03/co-op-farming-models-might-help-save-americas-small-farms/>

Jury Determines that Glyphosate Causes Cancer

In the case of a California school groundskeeper claiming that Monsanto's glyphosate product Roundup caused his non-Hodgkins lymphoma, a jury found that not only did Roundup cause the cancer, but they awarded him \$39.3 million in pain, suffering and economic damages and that Monsanto acted "with malice or oppression" and awarded an additional \$250 million in punitive damages.

According to the Center for Food Safety, the victory comes despite a concerted effort by Monsanto to discredit the findings of the International Agency for Research on Cancer (IARC), an agency of the World Health Organization (WHO), that, in 2015, concluded that glyphosate is "probably carcinogenic." Center for Food Safety (CFS) has been actively defending IARC's scientific conclusion against Monsanto's attacks, including intervening in a lawsuit brought by Monsanto against the listing of glyphosate as a carcinogen under California's Proposition 65. (From CFS News Release August 10, 2018) <https://www.centerforfoodsafety.org/press-releases/5400/jury-determines-that-roundup-causes-cancer>



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