

Summer 2023

# RURAL PAPERS

Reporting with commentary on agricultural and rural issues



Rural Cinema • A Message from Tom • What is a Food Value Chain Coordinator?  
Board Member Spotlight • Emerging Farmers • Sunflower Stories  
Native Landscaping • Land Preservation • Civic Engagement • 2023 Annual Conference



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## WHAT WE DO

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

## OUR MISSION

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

## OUR VISION

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

## RURAL PAPERS

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



## KRC STAFF

Tom Buller, Executive Director  
Ryan Goertzen-Regier, Program and Administrative Manager  
Jackie Keller, Project Coordinator  
Teresa Kelly, Food Value Chain Coordinator  
Dakota Welch, Farm Business Navigator  
Charlotte French-Allen, Communications Coordinator

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Cover photo provided by:  
Darrell E. Frey



**Executive Director  
Tom Buller**

Tom owns and operates a vegetable farm and has been growing organic vegetables since 2006. He co-authored "Growing Under Cover: A Kansas Grower's Guide" and "Growing Over Cover: A Kansas Specialty Crop Grower's Guide to Cover Crops" with partners at the Kansas Rural Center and K-State Research and Extension.



He was the founding president of the Kansas City Food Hub, a farmers' owned cooperative and currently serves as the organization's treasurer.

**Program and Administrative Manager  
Ryan Goertzen-Regier**

Ryan grew up and continues to work part-time on his family's fifth generation Kansas farm in Marion County that raises row crops, hogs, and cattle. He has an undergraduate degree in social work and is working on his Masters of Horticulture and Urban Food Systems at K-State.



Ryan is a beekeeper and serves as Vice President of the Kansas Farmers Union and is on the Harvey County Food and Farm Council.

**Program Coordinator  
Jackie Keller**

Jackie Keller is KRC's Sunflower Stories Program Coordinator and has been closely involved with KRC for over 20 years, much of which was spent serving on the board. She's worked with diverse communities at Food First in Oakland, CA, Global Exchange and the San Francisco Departments of Agriculture and Environment. In 2000, she moved back to Kansas and transitioned her parent's 200-acre conventional crop ground to organic, attaining certification in 2004. Jackie is recipient of the John Vogelsberg Sustainable Agriculture Award, Shawnee County's NRCS Water Quality Award and has served on her Farm Service Agency (FSA) County Committee for twelve years. For almost thirty years, she has advocated for healthy soil, water and food access, and social justice.



**Food Value Chain Coordinator  
Teresa Kelly**

Teresa Kelly has served on the KC Food Policy Coalition Steering Committee, as chair and founding member of the Johnson County Food Policy Council. She is a Kansas Leadership Center certified Leadership Coach. As city councilor for Roeland Park, Kansas, she co-chaired the Mid-America Regional Council First Suburbs Coalition. Most recently, as the Director of Operations for the Kansas City Food Hub, a farmer-owned, farmer run cooperative, she developed and implemented processes and systems supporting the movement of local food from farm to fork as part of a strong community-based food value chain. She looks forward to working with farmers and community partners to bring a sustainable foodscape to Central Kansas.



**Farm Business Navigator  
Dakota Welch**

Dakota grew up in southeast Kansas and went on to college first at Pittsburg State University and then finished up an economics degree at The University of Kansas. He and his wife Mary reside in the Kansas City area but still spend many weekends back in southeast Kansas, where they own a small acreage and where his parents and some family still reside.



Helping farmers and ranchers to achieve their goals is a passion of Dakota's, as he's spent most of his career helping traditional family farm operations with their lending needs, including farm purchases. He sees the opportunity to better serve agriculture by bringing landowners and producers together in a seamless transition so that the next generation of producers can begin to steward the land.

**Communications and Event Coordinator  
Charlotte French-Allen**

Charlotte grew up in Rossville, Kansas, where she learned firsthand that small towns and rural lifestyles are the backbones of America. While her early years may signal a conventional farm and ranch upbringing, Charlotte considers herself an environmentalist and spends a great deal of time considering the future of the land and how it will serve her family and future generations.



She and her husband, Kyle, both work to instill environmentally conservative values into their children. Charlotte is naturally curious and strong-willed. She uses that energy to passionately uplift the work of Kansas Rural Center, an organization that she says gives her much hope for the future.

## A message from Tom Buller

It certainly feels like the weather is continuing to get hotter and weirder. After breaking record after record for the hottest day, we approach a different but equally vital marker to pay attention to. This month, we reached Earth Overshoot Day, on August 2nd, 2023. For those of you who are unfamiliar with "Overshoot Day," it is the day of the year when a calculation of the world's usage of resources is projected to overshoot the ecosystem's ability to regenerate. After that point in the year, we are robbing resources from our descendants, and if you are curious about how this is calculated, check out <https://www.overshootday.org/>.

A slight bit of good news is that Overshoot Day 2023 is projected to be two days later in the year 2023 than it was in 2022. That movement is more of a blip than a trend, though. In 2020, when travel and the economy were disrupted due to COVID-19, Overshoot Day was on August 16th, two whole weeks later than it is this year. In 1982, Overshoot Day was in December, and over the past 40 years, we have reached it earlier and earlier in the year. The picture is even more bleak if you look at National Overshoot Day estimates for the United States, where National Overshoot Day in 2023 was all the way back on March 13th. Ouch.

Here at the Kansas Rural Center, we work tirelessly to safeguard and rebuild the health of the land and its people through research, education, and advocacy. We continue to bring positive change to communities and agriculture across the state through our many grant-funded programs. Some of our areas of work include:

- advocating for soil health and resource conservation at the state and federal levels
- empowering local grassroots efforts for Kansans to become civically engaged in supporting their communities
- educating beginning farmers and ranchers to ensure a healthy, productive, and economically viable food system for the future
- encouraging sustainable local economies to keep small farmers on their land for generations to come

I am humbly asking you, dear reader, to support our mission for a more livable future by contributing to the work of Kansas Rural Center. We use your generous contributions for many aspects of our work not covered by grants and other funding sources, such as mileage, office upgrades, event materials, scholarships for those eager to learn, and much more. Your gifts help KRC create

the most effective impact as we strive to conserve the resources of our beautiful state, push overshoot day further away, and create a more equitable and livable future for all!

We alone cannot do everything. While we encourage everyone to adopt practices like shopping local, supporting farmers who use sustainable practices, using less energy, riding a bike instead of driving, cutting back on unnecessary waste, and even simple things like turning off the lights when leaving a room. The challenges we face are greater than what any individual can fix with daily changes in their lives. These things are great ways to feel like you are making a personal impact, but we need to reach out further than ourselves to create systemic change to really move Overshoot Day back to the end of the year on December 31st.

Overshoot Day is a direct challenge to Kansans and everyone across our planet. Your support and contributions to the Kansas Rural Center will allow us to continue doing the necessary work that's been our mission for over 40 years. Join us in working toward meaningful and sustainable change for the betterment of our state and our world.

And please, turn the lights off on your way out.

## What is a Food Value Chain? And what will the Coordinator do?

The USDA recently awarded Kansas Rural Center and its partners a Local Food Promotion Program grant to facilitate the development of a Food Hub serving South Central Kansas. Part of this grant provides for my position as the Food Value Chain Coordinator (FVCC). What does this all mean for KRC and its partners on the grant?

Most folks are familiar with the physical infrastructure that makes up a supply chain. From producer to plate, the transport logistics, storage, processing, and packaging of products are all part of the links of the food supply chain. But where does the value come in? Recently, there has been an evolution in the system, bringing back the social infrastructure once part of the supply chain.

The pandemic highlighted the gaps left when a consolidated system becomes highly streamlined with an emphasis on moving product from point A to point B quickly at minimal

cost for maximum profit. The social side of the system is lost. The way local food managed to survive and even thrive in the pandemic was to connect with the local community, businesses, and organizations with a common goal to move food to people who needed it when the larger supply chain broke down. It showed how a more connected system considering broader business and community relationships could leverage and develop hard infrastructure to build a stronger local food economy.

As the Food Value Chain Coordinator, I will wear many hats to coordinate this effort. I will work to cultivate and build lasting relationships across the diverse stakeholder community by providing engagement opportunities for open dialog. This includes identifying opportunities and playing matchmaker between farmers, producers, and customers and helps fill in the connections between them. FVCCs provide

technical assistance and identify educational opportunities to help stakeholders scale up and organize for growth. I will seek ways to solve barriers that keep stores, schools, and other wholesale buyers from purchasing local food. As FVCC, I will identify resources to help stakeholders experiment and build innovative businesses and infrastructure to fill in the links that complete the loop from farm to plate.

Most importantly, I am curious and will listen to the wants of the communities in a corridor between Wichita and Salina. Over the next two years, I look forward to assisting community members in finding and connecting the puzzle pieces that result in a common desired outcome. In this case, the desired outcome is a Food Hub serving south central Kansas.



### Why people should reach out to us and how

What might the food corridor staff be able to do for you? Teresa is working to connect with wholesale and mid-tier market buyers for your products. Knowing where you're located and what you have available to sell or anticipate wanting to grow and sell in the future is helpful as we reach out and continue to build the market for local food products. Do you have a question about state regulations on growing or selling a certain product through wholesale channels, a food safety concern you don't have time to track down, or other farm and business questions? Put Ryan on the case to track down the answers for you!

We know how busy and stressful running a farm business can be, so if you want someone to work alongside you to sort out the challenges you're facing, please reach out to us! You can contact both Teresa and Ryan at [foodhub@kansasruralcenter.org](mailto:foodhub@kansasruralcenter.org). To stay up to date with the project's progress by, subscribing to our Central Kansas Food Corridor mailing list, found at <https://kansasruralcenter.org/foodhub>. - Ryan

## A Land Steward for KRC and Beyond

I grew up on a grain and livestock farm in west-central Illinois, in Hancock County, just a few miles east of the Mississippi River and the town of Hamilton, IL. As a child, I roamed around a home quarter section where most of the namable landmarks related, one way or another, to a multigenerational soil conservation project: terraces, concrete weirs, tree plantings, dry dams, and the permanent pasture that remained unbroken even though the cattle were long gone – each with a frequently explained purpose and a frequently retold story of how my great-grandparents or grandparents or parents came to put it there. Other frequently



KRC Board Member, Fred Iutzi

retold stories were about the vital intersection between individual perseverance and collective action: why a co-op board or church committee or Extension meeting was worth Mom or Dad rushing out the

door for, even on a cold winter evening at the end of an already long day, or how Mom hadn't always farmed, but once upon a time had been part of the first wave of women into her previous white-collar profession, the sexist nonsense they faced, and how they faced it down.

A lot my growing up happened during the '80s farm crisis, and my parents and many of our neighbors had a lot of persevering to do – so the inspiration I took from agriculture was more a look in the rearview mirror than it was any concept that there might be a future in farming for anyone in my generation. So when I went to college, it wasn't to study ag – it was to get a liberal arts degree and find my way on some other path. In hindsight, this was fortuitous because it exposed me to new vantage points and vocabularies, like environmentalism in addition to soil conservation, and social justice in addition to equal rights, and it left me just the right amount of confused and conflicted about what I needed to do next. This is the point where Kansas first comes into my story: if my upbringing in Illinois was the fuel and my college days in Missouri were the oxygen, the source of ignition was becoming aware of Wes Jackson and The Land Institute. Here was a radical who tucked in his shirt, and an agricultural research station that still in those

days looked like a cross between a family farm and a guerilla encampment. And, importantly, here were people who were not afraid to name the yawning gap between how things are and how things should be, and still fearlessly set to work crafting the future for agriculture that they wanted to see. Count me in. The places that fire took me have been multifaceted – working on new crops agronomy research, helping rural community and economic developers weave food, ag, and renewable energy, into their work, and organizing co-ops, not to mention moving back to the family farm for a decade and then sallying forth again – but that's where it got started.

The North Star of my career is perennial and continuous living cover agriculture – the idea that everything we know about the world tells us that for real long-term sustainability, we need to keep most of the ground covered with vegetation most of the time, and most of that needs to actually be in perennials. Perennial agriculture is the endeavor of managing our ag land in that way while still producing abundant food, feed, fuel, and fiber. I've just about completed a circuit of the options: permanent pasture grazing systems in grad school and at Practical Farmers of Iowa, perennial biomass crops for bioenergy at Illinois Institute for Rural Affairs, helping resource

The Land Institute's scientists as they develop the world's first perennial grain crops, and now pushing the envelope on what agroforestry can accomplish, in my current role as Director of Research & Commercialization at the Savanna Institute. The time is ripe for integrating trees fully back into our farming systems, whether for direct food and feed production or just for the agroecosystem services, and whether at the edge of the field or right in the middle of it, like in an alley cropping system. At the Savanna Institute, like at other places I've sought out to work, we're doing a transformational change two-step: helping farmers and other food & ag businesses take maximum advantages of the fruit and nut tree crop varieties and production techniques and markets that exist right now, while actively doing the agricultural research and market development needed to fill in the missing pieces, like improved cultivars for more than just a handful of major tree species, and a new wave of market opportunities to pave the way for nut trees like chestnut and hazelnut to be grown and eaten at staple crop scale.

I suppose it's the synthesis of all of the above that brought me to KRC – the idea that in food and agricultural and rural community development, the future is worth fighting for, and that ultimately the only way to do it is together. I also have a deep appreciation for

the wave of sustainable ag and rural development institutions that took root in the 1970s and '80s, and the ongoing role they play in the collective action ecosystem: Illinois Stewardship Alliance and Illinois Institute for Rural Affairs in my home state, Practical Farmers of Iowa where my first job that wasn't bucking bales for an hourly wage was located, and other state and regional groups like Sustainable Farming Association in Minnesota, the Center for Rural Affairs in Nebraska, the Pennsylvania Association for Sustainable Agriculture, and more. When I moved to Salina, KS, in 2016 to take a job at The Land Institute, the only thing I knew about KRC is that it was part of the cohort of institutions I refer to above – but that's the only thing I needed to know to classify KRC's work as essential. I got to know the people and the distinctiveness of the organization much better during my five years in Kansas, and leapt at the chance to join the board in 2021. When Stu Shafer called me with that invitation, I'm glad that he and others were unphased when I told them I had a move away from Kansas and back to my home state of Illinois coming soon. If I can add one idea to the mix at KRC during the three years I will have served on the board when I transition off in 2024, it will be an extra measure of encouragement to remember that network of peer organizations and the opportunity to give and receive ideas and strength across state

lines.

Another factor that's deepened my affinity for KRC are the outstanding cast of executive directors that I've known here. Mary Fund, who I got to know while I was her counterpart at The Land Institute and she was in her final years on the job, was the fulcrum for the organization during a substantial stretch of its history, pulled off the impressive feat of being both strong and creative over the long haul. Connie Bonfy and Zack Pistora both deserve high praise for leaning in to what is possibly the trickiest and most thankless role a person can occupy, that of interim executive director. And it has been a pleasure to watch Tom Buller charge out of the gate over the last year, in what is clearly a case of an organization and an individual rendezvousing with each other at just the right moment.

I'm proud that my life story includes five years as a Kansas resident, but I've always been an Illinoisan. So, as I write this from my dining room table in Bloomington, IL, I will start this way: I hope to see Kansas, rural and urban, as a good neighbor and good example in the movement toward sustainability and justice in the food system. What can Kansas learn from other places? What can Kansas teach to other places? I look forward to this conversation over the years and decades to come.

Continued>>>>

I'll also want to see a future for Kansas where questions are asked and answered (and periodically re-asked and re-answered) along the lines of Wendell Berry's "conversation with nature," which Wes Jackson abbreviates as "What was here? What will nature require of us here? And what will nature help us do here?" I'm also an advocate for asking similar questions with a focus on culture – how can the culture and traditions and ideas of the people who were here and the people who are here now (whether ancient or recent arrivals or anywhere in between) shape a sustainable and just future for Kansas? We know that soil, water, atmosphere, and biota need to be stewarded and regenerated, and that people need nutritious and delicious food and deserve justice and equity. We know some principles about how those outcomes can be met. What does it distinctively look like to do that in Kansas?

Finally, don't be afraid to color outside the lines. Many of the ideas and technologies and examples and precedents needed for a sustainable, just future already exist, and even already exist right in your neighborhood – but some don't, and that's okay. When individuals step forward to work together in groups, and groups set to work, that may or may not be enough to make the tasks ahead of us easy – but it most definitely is enough to make it possible.



FARM TO SCHOOL  
KANSAS

Kansas Rural Center has been across the state working to collect a series of videos to guide farmers and schools to work together. Learn about food safety, creating connections, curriculum, budgeting, and the supply and demand of a school through these 8 videos which can be found at [ksfarmtoschool.org](http://ksfarmtoschool.org)



Tom disusses Kansas Rural Center's resources and support of Farm to School in Kansas



Chris and Shawna talk about the genesis of their farm and partnerships with schools



Megan teaches us the process USD 266 uses to prospect and buy food from farmers



Barb discusses how farmers and schools can create connections and work together on their menu



Brad talks about his vertical gardens and how they sell to schools and encourage gardens



Londa shares information on food safety regulations to help farmers and schools prepare to work with each other



Leah works to deliver fresh food to local schools while creating enthusiasm with youth around their food



Aubry incorporates a vertical garden her curriculum and uses the produce as a revenue stream for students



## Sunflower Stories Community Update

Great news for the Central Topeka Grocery Oasis (CTGO), who signed a Lease Agreement with GraceMed Health Clinic on March 16 for the property where the new grocery store will be built. It took five years (ironically to the day) to get to this point! The CTGO board meets often to establish a design/construction team and pursue fundraising. They have good prospects for project staff and are applying for grants. CTGO's board president has approached me about serving on the Shawnee County Farm and Food Advisory Council. The application will be open to the public on July 31, when I will apply.

As part of the Central Topeka community, Robinson Middle School has been super to work with. During their Career Fair on April 6, Tecumseh farmer and Central Topeka native, Briana Arkenberg jubilantly engaged with many rotations of supervised student groups, who carefully listened and asked questions. Briana showed off bright digital pictures of lush produce and multicolored eggs, displaying her and her husband Keith's passion for soil health, their chickens, and the land. Chiming in was Allen Ratliff, a hemp grower, also from Tecumseh and born and raised in Central Topeka, who talked to the 6th, 7th, and 8th graders about what it takes to be a farmer. He shared his knowledge of soil biology's relationship to healthy plants



CTGO Board President Marge Ahrens and Grace Med Health Clinic CEO, Venus Lee sign Lease Agreement.



Students from Robinson Middle School meeting with Briana Arkenberg and Allen Ratliff



Keith Arkenberg giving a farm tour to young Topekans



Mikayla Kerron handing out pepper and tomato plants to Earth Day participants

and answered when asked which subjects were important to prepare for agrarian life.

More activity with Robinson Middle Schoolers transpired on a slightly rainy day in May, when Keith Arkenberg led a full hour-long tour of his and Briana's Arkenberg Farms for 23 students. Keith queried inquisitive faces on types of plants/seedlings. He demonstrated mechanical arugula harvesting, washing, drying, and bagging. The pupils got to munch on freshly picked radishes after much mud was washed off. The principal now plans to offer the farm tour yearly - YAY KRC for instigating this inspiring activity for inner-city youth! The principal also wants to participate in the KS Department of Education's Fresh Fruit & Vegetable Program, get a school garden going, and partner with KRC on an Earth Day '24 event, possibly to include a screening of "Motown to Grow Town: Detroit's Urban Farming Revolution."

Also in May, and in-person, was KRC engagement with the rural community of Prairie Band Potawatomi Nation (PBPB) near Mayetta. On the reservation at Prairie People's Park was an Earth Day Celebration where around 200 community members came together to have fun, exercise, and learn.

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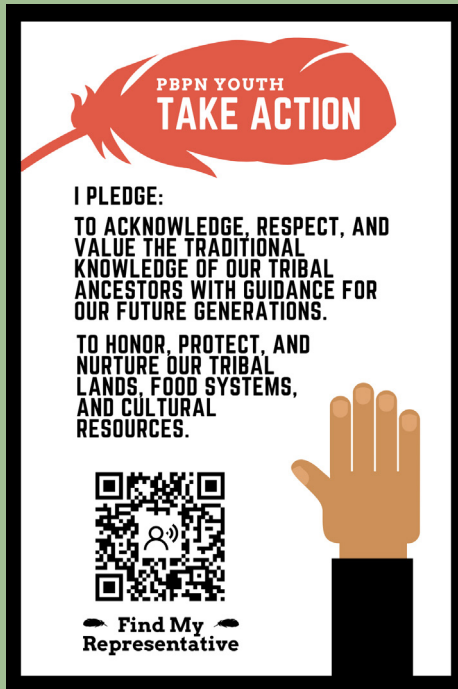
Many took home free tomato and pepper seedlings started in K-State/PBPN greenhouses, and some took K-State Research & Extension (KSRE) soil sample bags with accompanying information. Charlotte, Tom, and I set up a KRC Outreach & Education table to help further educate folks on gardening, including lasagna layer composting/planting and soil testing.

Event organizer Virginia "Osh" LeClere, Environmental Manager for PBPN Planning and Environmental Protection, lent us her red wigglers. Kids who gently found worms nestled in their cozy compost bin received a honey-bee lapel pin as a prize. We gave out zinnia seed packets and set up a trail mix buffet, especially for those who participated in physical activities, including disc golf, a 4k Run/Race, and a 1.5-mile Fun Walk. Members of the Topeka Community Cycle Project led a six-mile bike ride and provided free bike gear. At the same time, younger kids enjoyed a "bike rodeo," which included a safety check, obstacle courses, and games. Flyers were distributed to promote the Rural Cinema seasonal film screenings.

The Resiliency Film Series partnership between Rural Cinema, KRC, and Prairie Band kicked off on June 8 with the screening of "Gather" for HERS (Haskell Environmental Research) interns at the Konza Prairie. Kudos to Mikayla



HERS Interns at "Gather" screening



PBPN Youth Interns at "Youth v Gov" screening



Congresswoman Sharice Davids delivering a message to encourage civic engagement

Kerron, Environmental/GIS Technician, for orchestrating the event, coming up with Pledge language for the Action, getting Raven's Table to provide an all-indigenous meal, and creating a mini-Power Point slideshow reflecting the fun event. The second screening on July 20, "Youth v. Gov" was shown to 24 Prairie Band teens who are in the Summer Youth Worker program. A short Sharice Davids video followed the film, encouraging viewers to "use what they learned to advocate for their communities and contact their elected officials." Davids represents Kansas's 3rd Congressional District and serves on the House Agriculture Committee. She is "excited about KRC's partnership with Prairie Band on the film series." The teens also signed a Pledge Poster, as did the HERS interns. However, this time, each participant received a miniature poster in the form of a magnet with a QR code linked to "My Reps", for looking up their elected representatives. The magnets were given in return for completing a survey. Results revealed positive feedback and the desire to start a community garden!

The third screening event of the series will be open to the entire Prairie Band community on November 2, when "Gather" will be shown after a Fall Harvest Dinner and a Salsa Contest, which will include a Youth category. Engaging the audience in discussion and a

questionnaire will follow the film. "Kiss the Ground" will also debut on the reservation on January 11 and will feature a panel of farmers and water quality experts. Watch for which films KRC will feature after Friday's reception and in Saturday's Film Track during our conference on November 10 & 11!

Regarding communities in the southeast part of the state, last fall, I met with a few Allen Co. rural grocers who started to talk about group ordering. As Rial Carver, the Rural Grocery Initiative (RGI) Program Leader, stated in the previous Rural Papers issue, "...several rural grocers in southeast Kansas began to meet, with the convening support of the Kansas Rural Center, to consider the potential of a group purchasing model, like the one implemented by the RAD (Rural Access Distribution) Co-op in North Dakota. Meanwhile, the RGI applied for and received a Rural Cooperative Development Grant from USDA Rural Development. This grant

includes four main activities, one of which focuses on exploring the feasibility." At the end of January, RGI held an interest session in Iola, where 11 grocers convened. Many considered being RGI's "test case" for the feasibility study, which will be done by the end of 2023.

With RGI taking on this exciting project, I switched gears and coordinated a Farm to School training in Moran at the end of March. Tom presented to a wide range of participants, including the Marmaton Valley High School Ag. Teacher, who's also a producer, a KSRE agent, and staff from Oppa! (a Food Service Management Company) the Project Director of KS Dept of Education's Farm to Plate and Coordinator at Allen Co. Farm Bureau, who's also a producer. I will stay involved with the Rural Grocery Initiative, as they've asked that a KRC Team Member serve on their Advisory Board. I've accepted the role and am honored to be part of this "new chapter in RGI's story as they move forward and grow."

More in Southeast Kansas happened on Saturday, May 20, when I visited two of the eleven farms on the Linn County Farm Tour. I chatted with the owner of Courage Farms, who is working on getting a hoop house and then hopes to sell produce to the school district. Onward to Grace Heritage Dairy, where I bought cloud-like raw, ungraded, unpasteurized goat cheese and held a two-day-old Nubian nurtured by dairywoman Sarah Easdon. Sarah is 'truly blown away' that I've nominated her for the NextGen Under 30 Kansas award in the Agriculture and Food Production category. Honorees will be announced on August 11, and "Day at the Capital" is on September 12, when winners meet the Governor and Lieutenant Governor!



Sara Easdon and beloved goat

View our Beginning Farmer and Rancher Resource Page on the Kansas Rural Center website at [kansasruralcenter.org/bfrresources](https://kansasruralcenter.org/bfrresources). Resource categories are broken down into these sections:



- Business Planning
- Capital
- Conservation/Cover Crops
- Covid-19 Resources
- Events
- Financial and Legal Help
- Food Safety
- Land Access
- Mentorship
- Marketing and Outreach
- Physical and Mental Health
- Training and Education

## Grace Heritage Farm

Farming takes many forms, which has been the case for my family through generations. My great-grandmother grew up on a homestead with twelve siblings. My grandparents both farmed on their family farms until they married and started their own. My parents hobby-farmed and eventually plunged into commercial goat ranching. That brings us to now with Grace Heritage Dairy and my family.

I'd never proclaim to be a self-made person. With agricultural backgrounds and experimenting minds, family get-togethers often center around someone's farm project or brainstorming farm solutions. We laugh, talk, and work together. The last time we worked livestock together, we jokingly observed that "today nobody got mad!" You who have worked livestock know precisely what I'm talking about.

I often get the question, "Why goats?" My response is, "Why not goats?" My grandparents introduced goats to their farm as a way to nurse Holstein

into her primary 4-H project and showed goats around the state. When my parents were married, the goats were part of the deal. It wasn't long before the dairy goats were bred to meat goats to meet local demand better. I kept a dairy goat herd remnant for my 4-H project. Second verse, same as the first: when my husband and I were married, the goats were part of the deal. The pandemic changed a lot of things for a lot of people, including us. It was the catalyst for me to stay home full-time. I was most concerned about losing connections to meet people in the area, so I figured I'd put a sign out in the yard. Guess what? People came.



Sarah Easdon and Family

bottle calves they purchased from a local dairy. It was one of the several plans implemented to save their farm from bankruptcy, and it worked. My mom turned the dairy goat herd

Today, Grace Heritage Dairy provides raw milk and handmade goat cheese from the farm. Kansas laws require we sell raw products directly off of the farm as opposed to providing meet-up or delivery



Here are photos of the many attractions and learning opportunities that can be found at Grace Heritage Farm

options, which has provided challenges of its own. We invested in agritourism activities, and not the overpopulated, commercialized ones! The experiences provided on our farm are genuine. We want visitors who come to leave having felt like they were able to actually do something. No question is too silly. Mistakes happen. We learn together. New to our farm this past spring were classes to empower people to care for their own goats and barn quilt classes for others to simply enjoy the 4-legged kids. Twice a year, we join the Miami and Linn County farm tours for visitors to stop by.

In the midst of all of this, there is one “elephant in the room” that needs to be addressed. Our farm is nine acres. Is that even enough to consider it a real farm? I’ve struggled with this. I have come to a few conclusions, though: 1) If it makes products for others and does so profitably, it is a farm, and 2) being shackled to insane amounts of debt is not a goal of mine. We’ve had to get creative in land access and community relationships to work with this. The primary solution has been gracious relationships with our neighbors. Immediately around Grace Heritage Dairy are primarily horses and cattle, whose forage options differ greatly from that of goats. By building relationships with

our neighbors and sharing pasture ground, our goats increase forage access, and our neighbors have improved pasture quality for their livestock. It’s a creative win-win for all!

As we look toward the future, we are in the process of rebranding to Grace Heritage Farms. We are currently breeding a meat herd from our dairy herd to run concurrent herds. Customers have asked us to provide goats for their own personal



Sarah’s son Josiah kissing their goat

slaughter, and we are able to meet that need. Our dairy will hold steady at its current size, serving milk and cheese clients by appointment. Agritourism opportunities will fluctuate with the interests of our community and the needs of our family.

The beauty of farming is the flexibility of schedule. On the one hand, going out of town during the milking season, even overnight, is very difficult. On the other hand, it is no trouble to help out a neighbor on any day, at any time. The natural

seasons provide our farm and our family the opportunity to work long hours outdoors for part of the year and to enjoy more time inside together during the winter months. As the seasons change within the year, we also acknowledge how seasons change within life itself. Each season brings its own blessings, and we work with that. I look forward to the day when my young children grow and contribute their own ideas to the farm. I also mentally see the days they leave to start their own lives and that the farm model will change again. These seasons do not scare me or our family. We rest confident in the eternal hope of our Lord Jesus Christ. The farm is a gift for Him that we have the privilege to steward. It’s no surprise to us that everything could change in the blink of an eye, and we are well aware that everything we have here will pass away. But it’s the people! The souls of people do not ever pass away. What an honor it is to meet friends, neighbors, and visitors; what a gift it is to meet the needs of those around us; what a delight it is to share our lives with each other. Curious about any of it? Give us a holler, and we’ll arrange a time for you to stop on by!

Contact Sarah

Email: [Graceheritagedairy@gmail.com](mailto:Graceheritagedairy@gmail.com)

Phone: 913-259-4448

Website: [graceheritagedairy.com](http://graceheritagedairy.com)

## Urban and Suburban Native Yards

You've noticed you don't have to wipe as many bugs off of your windshield as you used to, you saw an article about how the bees are in trouble or insect numbers are collapsing, someone gifted you a native flower, you want to replace your water-guzzling, 17th-century French lawn with xeriscape... these are only a few of the things that may have brought you into conflict with the monoculture lawn you were raised with. Whatever has got your neighbors raising their eyebrows, more and more people are joining you, so don't back down now. Here are some of the ways you may be gravitating away from the 1950's "seed, water, fertilize, water, cut, repeat" attitude toward our front and back yards and what to do to communicate your intentions in a positive way.

**Natural landscaping** is usually the first noticeable deviation. Whether it is taller grass, flowers, ripping out the boxwoods and replacing them with Aronia, laying cardboard and mulch to kill turf grass, encouraging violas and white clover, the most common phrase you'll hear is "why is your yard so messy?". My first neighbor to say something wanted to know if I needed to borrow his mower. Was mine broken?

Let's address the broad spectrum of city and HOA rules.

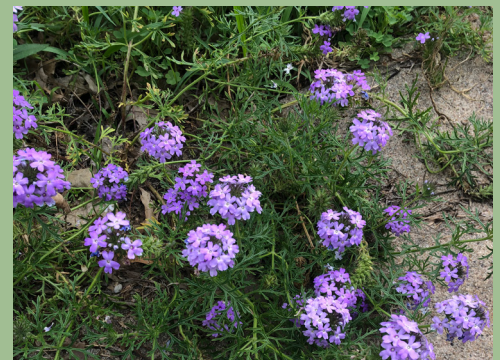
First, know your rules. If the yard must be 5 inches or less and you don't want to mow much if at all, the road of least resistance would be to find plants that generally grow to this height or below. Buffalograss, blue grama (eyelash grass), Viola sororia, wild strawberries, rose and prairie Verbena, Missouri evening primrose are all plants that will grow out instead of up. These can all take an occasional mowing if they escape the inch limit.

around you. Installing signs explaining what you are doing, such as: Monarch Waystation, pesticide-free-zone, pollinator habitat and more will inform and help dispel city managers' and neighbors' concerns.

Signs for these can be found at <https://www.healthyyards.org/activities/yards-signs/>. Signs for xeriscaping, urban gardening, or more personalized styles can be ordered from [Etsy](#), [SongBirdGarden.com](#),



Missouri Evening Primrose  
*Oenothera macrocarpa*



Prairie Verbena  
*Glandularia bipinnatifida*



Rose Verbena  
*Glandularia canadensis*



Common Violet  
*Viola sororia*

Followed closely by knowing the rules, is making your changes obviously "on purpose" to those

or anywhere that makes personalized signs. Place the sign where it can easily be seen

by the casual observer - close to a mailbox or an edge of your property, not blocked by other structures.

my signs have started to be overgrown by my enthusiastic natives.

from a forester called out by the power company to mark trees "I absolutely love what you are doing. I hope no one is mean, because I wish everyone everywhere was doing this." I have heard zero negative comments this year.

I often wonder how good my yard signs are for explaining their purposes. A great indication came this summer when my neighbor told me she wanted me to put my signs somewhere she could see them better. She said she loves to point out what we are doing with our yard to her friends and family, and they all like to read the signs to better understand. This is a far cry from "Do you need to borrow our mower?" and "You are bothering me with those plants. They are backyard plants!" which were both things people said to me during my first year of native landscaping.

A friend recently was reported to the city by her neighbor for not complying with the 12-inch rule on grass. The front yard was mowed, but the back/side yard was "messy" and tall. She had bought a prairie seed mix and successfully cultivated it. A city official agreed that not only were they glad she had installed her native mix, but she could keep her newly installed prairie if she made it look like it was "on purpose". She bought signs and included a few small fencing designs to make it look purposeful, and has had no more problems from the city.

In fact, something you should understand right now, before we go any further, is that you may encounter quite a bit of pushback your first year or two. The signs help a lot. Even then, one of those comments was made even after the first sign was there. It was made by someone who had spent their whole life with one, single image of how a front yard could look in their head. Now that we are in our fifth year of native landscaping, comments I heard this summer included "I love your yard. It's the reason I come down this street on my walks," and "Can my daughters pet the monarch caterpillars right here at the edge? They are always so excited to see them," and one particular favorite

**Have a design in mind.** This will dispel a lot of your neighbors' anxiety. Being able to explain yourself is important. Have a small, personal spiel ready so you don't feel surprised.

**Examples:**

"We are planting for the bees!"

"I'm using mulch and rocks to take the place of grass so I don't have to water as much."

"I want to grow enough pumpkins for the kids in my neighborhood who can't afford them."

Continued>>>>



These are the signs I have for my yard. They are all signs that require my yard to meet certain standards, such as food, water, shelter, and low pesticide and herbicide use. The Monarch Waystation sign indicates that I also have at least one type of native-to-my-area milkweed available for Monarchs. The St. Kateri Habitat denotes that I also have a spot for human enjoyment of the natural world in my yard. As you can see,

“Did you know that fireflies are becoming endangered? I’ve stopped using pesticides because it kills them.”

**Plant design** is part of your masterstroke that will bring people to your side. Although **chaos gardening** - throwing out a bunch of seeds and letting them go to town - is basically how nature does it, the human eye needs to be retrained to allow for this. It would be quite an accepting neighborhood indeed, where one could go from three-inch grass one year and 15-foot sunflower jungle the next.

Instead, I would recommend studying **English gardening**. Take a 3’ X 3’ X 4.24’ triangle plot. If this was an English style plot with Old World plants (**Fig. 1**), we could put a whole corner of yellow hollyhocks in the back, two lavender bushes on the side, four white rose bushes on either side and cheated slightly behind each lavender, with a whole host of orange begonias planted every year down front. If we are planting natives (**Fig. 2**), replace the hollyhocks with Rosinweed, and the lavender with Wild Blue Indigo. Replace the roses with Slender Mountain Mint and cheat them in front of the Indigo instead of behind. Replace the begonias with Butterflyweed. Every color and size has been accounted for in the switch. As with the Old World plants, natives take a couple years to grow and fill in.

**Pesticide and herbicide-free zones** can be established using signage, as discussed above. It will be up to you to determine whether or not you want your neighbors to know you’ve made this decision, and that you want their chemicals to stay on their property. There is a proactive and considerate way to go about this from your side of responsibility. You’ve made the choice. You’ve decided that you want them to know you don’t allow pesticides. This choice also needs a pre-planned spiel from you:

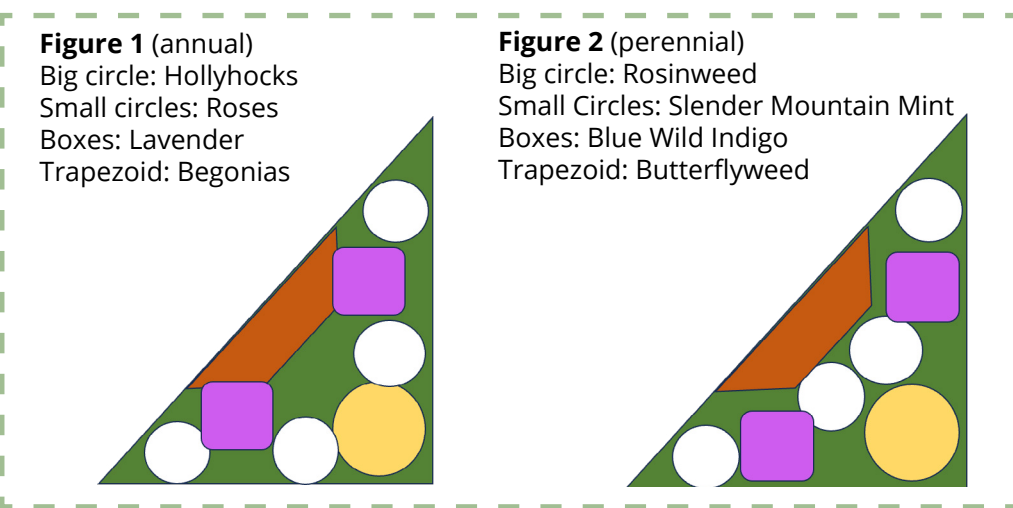
**Examples:**

“Please be careful spraying in this area. The chemicals you are using could kill our blueberries that we intend to eat.”

“Did you know the spray you use to kill mosquitoes kills the fireflies your grandkids were chasing? A fan would work just as well for the mosquitoes, and there would be more fireflies for your grandkids to make memories with.”

“I was wondering if we could agree that I’ll make sure my tall stuff doesn’t creep into your yard, and you’ll let me know when you spray your lawn, so I can turn my sprinklers on to protect my plants.”

These are all conversations we have orchestrated in our neighborhood, with increasing success. It can be startling for some when first addressed. It is as if your “tall yard” affects them, but their poisoned yard doesn’t affect yours. Over time, they will see that you intend to carry on as you have, and they can choose to be amenable or not. You can reassure your neighbors in many ways. Maybe you are replacing your non-native daylilies with coreopsis: offer them your daylilies. Maybe your front yard garden has a surplus of raspberries. Put them in a container and gift them. Your yard has a plethora of monarch butterflies. Offer to show their kids or grandkids the pretties. For non-amenable neighbors, you have choices. It could be as simple as another conversation. It could be more





complicated. I've seen thousands of dollars of plants lost to a single overspray situation. Your local extension office can direct you to a place that will sample your soil and plants to determine what, if any, chemicals have come into contact with your plants. Pesticide companies, herbicide companies, and many crop farms carry overspray insurance, which is who will be reimbursing you, if it isn't a personal overspray situation.

There are **other ways you can help**. For whatever reason, you may still be shying away from destroying your 17th-century French landscaping (the gardeners in charge of Versailles have replaced the non-native landscaping there with natives and have stopped spraying pesticides - you could have your own 21st-century French landscaping).

It is possible that you live in an apartment or rent your home, and don't have control over the permanent plants in those places. Apartments that have a deck or a stoop could still contain **native potted plants**. Annuals such as Black-Eyed Susans, coreopsis, and Leavenworth's eryngo are beautiful and pollinators love them.

A small **dish of water** with colorful stones is still a place for a bee or bird to grab a sip. Remember, they can fly several stories up! Even something as simple as **shutting off your**

**outside lights** at night or closing the curtains if you are staying up late, will help moths, beetles, birds, and fireflies who all suffer when our lights stay on past the sun's bedtime.

If you have the space, look into **putting up a bat house**. All of our native bats are under pressure, the same as birds. Keeping them safe and healthy keeps our ecosystem in balance.

**Keeping the snag** (dead tree), instead of cutting it down to the ground is incredibly helpful for birds that will use it as a nest and a grocery store. Woodpeckers will create some of the first holes, and bluebirds will often use them later. Remove large limbs that could create safety concerns. Leave as much as you are comfortable with.

Register your yard as a **Homegrown National Park**, joining over 32,000 people who are committed to promoting and conserving nature.

**Read.** Gazillions of books out there can teach and inspire you about whatever gardening or native experience you are looking for.

**Listen to podcasts.** I drive, because I live in the Midwest, and there are few public transportation options. Find podcasts about topics you are interested in, and listen to them while you drive, do the dishes, or fold the laundry.

**Stay connected** to the people who will support you. Find and follow blogs, social media groups/individuals who are planting, bug hunting, bird watching, starting community gardens, hiking, and more. Download apps to your device that will help you as you learn. Great apps for plants are PictureThis and PlantSnap. Merlin and eBird will help you identify and locate bird species. iNaturalist can help identify fungus, plants, and animals, including insects and fish as long as you can get a picture of it. Many people use the Google picture identification feature, but it does not take location into account, which is incredibly important for many species' identification.



Rebecca Stevenson is an amateur ecologist, and owns her own native plant nursery and landscape company, Your Wildscape, LLC. She runs a school garden in Tecumseh, KS. Rebecca can be contacted at [rebecca1@yourwildscape.com](mailto:rebecca1@yourwildscape.com).

## Permanently Protecting Land in Kansas

A Tragic Event Becomes the Catalyst for Positive Change

The native prairies of Kansas are ecological treasures thousands of years in the making. In 1990, a single plow destroyed one of these treasures overnight.

The destruction of the 70-acre Elkins Prairie west of Lawrence was carried out by a new landowner who wanted to ensure that the land would be available for development. Ignoring requests from the county, city and local advocates to preserve the land, the owner plowed the prairie in the dark hours of an early November morning.

Fortunately, the tragic plowing of the Elkins Prairie ended up having some positive impacts. A group of people who had witnessed the prairie's destruction committed themselves to figuring out ways to prevent something like this from happening again.

Recognizing that Kansas landowners needed a tool that would allow them to conserve their land, the group worked in collaboration with a variety of agricultural and environmental organizations to promote and bring about state legislation that authorized the use of conservation easements in Kansas. With this legislation in place, the Kansas Land Trust was born.

### Conservation Easements: Voluntary and Forever

A conservation easement is a recorded deed that a landowner can voluntarily place on a piece of property to specify the allowed land uses and restrict future development on the land. These rights and restrictions stay with the land through all future landowners. Conservation easements are the central tool used by KLT.

“At KLT, we conserve natural open spaces for all future generations by developing and managing conservation easements- a permanent legal agreement between the Kansas Land Trust and voluntary landowners where KLT promises the protection of land forever,” says KLT Executive Director Kaitlin Stanley.

The Kansas Land Trust’s easements protect and preserve lands of ecological, agricultural, scenic, historic, or recreational significance. Once an easement is established on a piece of land, the Kansas Land Trust holds the development rights in perpetuity—meaning forever. KLT visits each of its protected properties yearly to ensure that the terms of the easement are being honored and works with landowners to connect them with land management resources. Acting as forever stewards of its protected



Steinfort conservation easement in Geary County. Photo credit Jerry Jost



Akin Prairie Wildflower Walk in Douglas County led by Kelly Kindscher. Photo credit Jerry Jost.



Moyer Ranch conservation easement in Geary County. Photo credit Bruce Hogle

properties is a commitment that KLT takes seriously.

“Each KLT easement is unique and every KLT easement is monitored annually. Perpetual monitoring of land, a guarantee of Kansas Land Trust conservation easements, provides insights into ecosystem vulnerabilities and can help ensure easements are managed well and their conservation values are protected through time,” Stanley says.

To date, KLT has conserved more than 40,000 acres in 22 counties, across 80 properties in Kansas, with more than 1,300 of those acres being open to the public. The Kansas Land Trust is one of thousands of land trusts across the U.S. and one of a handful in the state of Kansas.

### Positive Impacts for All

The list of long-term benefits gained from land conservation is extensive. Protecting prairies and woodlands preserves biodiversity, wildlife habitat and scenic landscapes. Protecting stream banks reduces flooding and erosion and improves water quality. Conserved agricultural lands help ensure resilient local food systems. Expanding public access to protected lands provides increased connection with nature and improved physical and mental health.

As extreme temperatures, drought, flooding and wildfires become more common, the fact that land conservation can help slow the effects of climate change by storing carbon is a particularly notable benefit.

### THE KANSAS LAND TRUST IMPACT

Over the past 32 years, the Kansas Land Trust has permanently conserved more than 40,000 acres across 80 properties

30,512 ACRES OF PRAIRIE

3,271 ACRES OF WOODLANDS

1,355 ACRES OF PUBLIC HIKING

3,575 ACRES OF PRIME FARMLAND

7 LANDS WITH A THREATENED SPECIES

173 MILES OF PROTECTED STREAM BANKS

FOR MORE INFORMATION, VISIT [KLT.ORG](http://KLT.ORG)



“Although there is evidence that nature-based solutions, such as land conservation, are the most cost-effective and immediate way to decrease the impacts of climate change, they only receive around 2.5 percent of available funding for climate mitigation,” says Stanley. “Land conservation is a tangible, immediately available, and cost-effective climate solution.”

### KLT Community

While conserving land is the central mission of KLT, providing opportunities to connect with nature is also an important part of their work. The organization regularly offers public walks, volunteer workdays and other fun events on protected properties.

On Saturday, October 7th, KLT will hold its Tenth Annual KLT Conservation Classic Disc Golf Tournament on the Thornfield Disc Golf Course in Johnson

County. Thornfield, a private course used exclusively for fundraising events, is located on one of KLT’s protected properties and is nestled within woodlands, meadows and streams along the Blue River. All levels of players are welcome, and all proceeds benefit KLT.



Liz Weslander, Communication Specialist - Kansas Land Trust

For more information on events and ways to support KLT, visit [www.klt.org](http://www.klt.org). Landowners interested in learning more about conservation easements can contact KLT at 785-749-3257.

## What's New at Kansas Rural Center?

It has been an exciting year so far at the Kansas Rural Center and July has been an active month for us. We are happy to announce two new long-term collaborative projects for the Kansas Rural Center, both of which kicked off in the month of July.

First, we are partners supporting Wichita State's Environmental Finance Center on the Heartland Environmental Justice Technical Assistance Center. WSU is one of 17 Environmental Justice Thriving Communities Technical Assistance Centers (EJ TCTACS), announced in partnership with the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and the U.S. Department of Energy (DOE), that will help underserved and overburdened communities across the country advance environmental justice. Wichita State University's EJ TCTAC will serve communities throughout EPA Region 7, which consists of Iowa, Kansas, Missouri, Nebraska, and Nine Tribal Nations. The EJ TCTAC will provide technical assistance, guidance, and training to remove barriers and improve accessibility for communities with environmental justice concerns. It will also work to ensure that more communities can access federal funding opportunities, like those made available through the Inflation Reduction Act and Bipartisan Infrastructure Law. The Kansas Rural Center is happy to be a

partner on this project and will work to conduct outreach and support to rural communities across Kansas who are impacted by environmental justice challenges.

The second big collaboration we kicked off in the month of July was our partnership with the Heartland Regional Food Business Center (RFBC) led by the University of Nebraska-Lincoln. The USDA has organized regional food business centers across the United States, and the Heartland Center will work across Arkansas, Iowa, Kansas, Missouri, Nebraska, Oklahoma, and a designated tribal corridor. The partnership encompasses 14 Key Partners and more than 19 collaborators, including land grant universities, non-profit organizations, tribal and indigenous groups, and grassroots organizations. The Heartland RFBC has three primary objectives: develop a regional asset map of resources available to food businesses and producers, increase collective outreach, technical assistance, and extension activities that promote utilization of these resources, and administer business building sub-awards to accelerate new market opportunities for producers and food businesses.

Our key partners are the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, New Growth Community Development Corporation,

Center for Rural Affairs, Comunidad Maya Pixan Ixim, Great Plains Indigenous Water Food and Trade Coalition, Iowa State University Extension and Outreach, Kansas State University Research and Extension, KC Healthy Kids, Kerr Center for Sustainable Ag, Oklahoma State University Food and Agricultural Products Center, The Food Conservancy, and the University of Missouri Extension. The Center will provide a variety of kinds of technical assistance to build new and strengthen existing farm and food businesses including cultivating demand through new retail and institutional markets. We will leverage our collective networks and use asset mapping to identify existing food hubs, kitchen incubators and other resources to provide producers ways to increase revenue, improve business viability and access more buyers. For many food businesses, the most exciting part of the Heartland Regional Food Business Center will be the opportunity to apply for a Business Builder grant of up to \$100,000 to support the development of their business. Dakota Welch has been hired to take on the position of Farm Business Navigator and will be available to guide small and beginning farmers through their financial opportunities. Another position opening will soon be announced as part of this project. The Kansas Rural

## Civic Engagement for Healthy Communities

Center will work to encourage business development for small farms across the state of Kansas through technical assistance in business planning and management and helping to connect them with existing resources.

Stay tuned as these opportunities develop for more information on how KRC can support you!

-Tom Buller, Executive Director, Kansas Rural Center

next meal is coming from? As unsettling as that may be, it is the reality here in Kansas. Throughout our state, and especially in Southeast Kansas, where I have lived my entire life, there are signs of food insecurity all around. You see it with the lack of choice of where to buy fresh food and an overreliance on dollar stores for groceries. It's families who don't know how they are going to afford school supplies or put money in their kids' school meal account. And you see it when the local churches hand out food boxes once a month, and the line extends several blocks out.

At Kansas Appleseed, we are committed to ensuring our communities are thriving, inclusive, and just. What that ultimately means is we work towards making sure families have food on the table, that everyone is able to participate in elections, and everyone benefits from a fair justice system.

Every year, Kansas Appleseed travels throughout the state to connect with like-minded, curious individuals to work toward a common goal: ending hunger in our communities. In our meetings this year, we posed the question: "What does hunger look like in your community?"

It was no surprise that answering this question was the most sobering part of the day. Answers from community members

– some directly impacted by hunger and those who work the front lines every day – included: long lines at food pantries, people making the impossible choice between utilities and groceries, relying on bike share programs as main modes of transportation, skipping meals... the list went on and on.

Then came the next question– the hardest but most exciting of the day– "What does a hunger-free Kansas look like to you?" It is no surprise that what came after this question was posed made our team smile from ear to ear. Our communities know exactly what they need to thrive, and the ideas we heard at the summit that day reaffirmed that belief.

The big theme we heard throughout the answers to this question was that more Kansans needed to be at the table in the decisions that matter to them and their communities.

There is no shortage of people doing the work around our state working to fight food insecurity. The issues surrounding food insecurity and poverty are systemic, and they require holistic solutions that include everyone in the process. These holistic solutions are why it's important for Kansans to participate in all aspects of their communities, including voting and even running for office.

Continued>>>>



**Kansas**   
**Appleseed**

For a second, think about your typical third grade classroom. Walls full of colorful art, kids eager to learn, maybe even a class pet... would you be shocked to learn that one in seven kids in this classroom don't know where their

During the 2022 general election, 91.91% of the southeast Kansas population that is voting age were registered to vote. 41.84% of those registered voters actually voted. Similar statistics exist across the state. Imagine what we could accomplish if more folks participated.

For better or for worse, food insecurity is always on the ballot. We can elect officials that see the long food pantry lines, know that the choice between utilities and food is impossible, and fight to ensure no Kansans are hungry. Local offices such as the city commission, county commission, and school board determine the policies in our communities and they are where our voices can be most impactful. Unfortunately, too often, incumbents are unopposed on a ballot, creating a city or county system run by the same folks for five to ten years. This limits voters' options and greatly reduces the amount of systemic change for locals advocating for their community.

We should be asking school board candidates about their plans to expand access to child nutrition programs. Would they support after-school supper or offering universal free meals to the students in their district?

We should be asking city and county commission candidates to talk about how they will support the houseless community and if they will reject

policies that criminalize those who must sleep on the streets. We need active, informed members of the community to run for office. This includes people who may be experiencing hunger and poverty or people who work with those experiencing hunger and poverty.

If you're interested in running for office, there are a few key points that you might want to know before throwing your hat in the ring.

You don't have to know everything and everyone to run for office and make a difference.

There will surely be a few reasons that come to the top as you think about why you are running for office, but what matters most is that you care enough about your community to run in the first place. Additionally, you don't (and won't!) have to know every detail of the office you are running for. Sure, you will want to know important details, but there may be pieces of the office and of the campaign itself that you will learn how to do along the way.

**Be curious and ask questions.**

The key to creating healthier, strong communities is ensuring everyone has a seat at the table and a voice to be heard. As a candidate, it is imperative that you remain curious and interested in what your community members have to say!

**It takes a village!**

Campaigns are won when many people come together because they believe in the candidate. A key piece of campaigning, especially in rural areas, is to ensure there is a robust group of people helping and supporting you on the journey. You will likely need someone to help with campaign management, fundraising and money, communications, and more.

Creating the change our communities need takes just one person to step up and declare that a new way is possible. It can be you. It should be you. When the opportunity comes your way, we hope you'll be the voice and the change for your entire community.

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## Get Ready for KRC's Annual Conference

Join Kansas Rural Center this November 10th and 11th in Topeka, KS, for our Annual Food and Farm Conference. This year's theme is "Urgency and Resilience: Cultivating a Thriving Future."

Many of us know that the 'conventional farming mindset' will need to be adjusted in order for us to have a resilient and more sustainable food and farm system. The time for that change is now, and you are not alone. KRC is gathering experts and resources to make farm transitions successful and profitable for agricultural practitioners. These agricultural changes will help create the backbone for a healthy, local food supply to feed our communities and protect the future of Kansans.

Join Kansas Rural Center as we take these necessary steps toward our thriving future!

### Two Days, Two Venues

This year, the Bulk of Day 1 will be held at the Sunflower Foundation near I-70 in West Topeka. Day 2 Will be held at the Ramada, Downtown Topeka. Please visit our webpage to reserve your room at the Ramada.



## Urgency and Resilience *Cultivate a Thriving Future*

### Day 1:

Friday's Intensive Sessions will be held at the Sunflower Foundation and include a panel on mental health, a local foods round table, a beginning farmer's boot camp, a walk through available NRCS programs, SARE integrations, WFAN's Women Landowners Learning Circle, and a Farm Tour at Prairie Band Potawatomi Nation's Industrial Hemp Facility.

We will end the day at the Ramada Convention Center, Downtown Topeka, with a reception and an evening with the "Yes Men," who will show their film "Peace Pipeline" and discuss their creative form of activism and civic engagement.

### Day 2:

Saturday, November 11th, will be held at the Ramada in Downtown Topeka. Our keynote, Matt Sanderson, will discuss Kansas's future and the place of farmers in its longevity. Later in the day we will have a panel to also discuss water in Kansas.

Other sessions for day two will include an update from our Sunflower Stories communities, including the Central Topeka Grocery Oasis and Prairie Band water quality. We will also have sessions for farmers selling wholesale, agrivoltaics, and SARE sessions curated on the topics of crops, livestock, and community.

Kansas Rural Center is also thrilled to offer film sessions throughout the day this year. The three films we have chosen are "Food Sovereignty in Indian Country," "Kiss the Ground," and "Out Here." Each film will end with an audience discussion.



To stay up-to-date on our conference schedule, registration, where to stay, and sponsorship opportunities, or any changes please visit our webpage at [kansasruralcenter.org/2023-annual-conference](https://kansasruralcenter.org/2023-annual-conference)



# KANSAS RURAL CENTER

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ADDRESS \_\_\_\_\_

E-MAIL \_\_\_\_\_

RP 08/2023