



Season's Greetings!
from the Kansas Rural Center
Board and Staff

(File Photo: December 2007 Ice Storm)

Managing Drought Risk on the Ranch- KGA 2012 Conference Set for January 21

The Kansas Graziers Association (KGA) and the Kansas Grazing Lands Coalition are co-sponsoring an all day conference, "Managing Drought Risk on the Ranch," presented by the National Drought Mitigation Center, based at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln. The conference will be held Saturday, January 21 at the Harvest House Meeting Room of the Flint Hills Christian Church, 1836 E. U.S. Highway 50 in Emporia, Ks. This is the KGA's annual winter conference.

Registration is set for \$25 for the main registrant per family/ranch and \$15 for each additional person. Students are highly encouraged to participate and are being offered a reduced registration rate of \$10. Lunch is included. To register, please visit www.kansasruralcenter.org for information and a printable mail-in registration form. For more information or questions call Mary Howell, Kansas Graziers Association at 785-562-8726. Read more about speakers and the agenda on page 11.

Rethinking Food Production with an Eye to the Future

by Mark Parker

Agriculture is a fast-moving train and no one knows exactly what's up around the bend. For Dan Nagengast, reconnecting food production with food consumption is critical to keeping that train on the track.

Speaking at the Kansas Rural Center's November 19 Sustainable Agriculture Conference in Emporia, Nagengast laid out compelling concerns about the current industrialized approach to feeding the planet in light of a long list of local and global issues.

"Can our dominant system cope?" asked the Lawrence farmer who recently stepped down after shepherding the Kansas Rural Center for 20 years as its executive director. "I don't think (industrial agriculture) will go away for a long, long time but shouldn't we be looking at different models?"

Decreasing fossil fuel reliance, using water more efficiently, reducing waste and understanding that many costs of the industrial food production model are externalized rather than attributed to the system that incurred them are key issues that must be addressed, Nagengast said. *Contd. on page 5*

Rural Papers

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Rural Papers is the voice of the Kansas Rural Center, Inc., (KRC), a non-profit organization that promotes the long-term health of the land and its people through research, education, and advocacy. The KRC cultivates grassroots support for public policies that encourage family farming and stewardship of soil and water. KRC is committed to economically viable, environmentally sound, and socially sustainable rural culture. The KRC is funded by private foundations, churches, and individual contributions. **Rural Papers** is available to contributors or for a \$25 per year subscription to organizations and institutions.

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Small Farmer Commentary

The Fundamental Questions Don't Change

by Mary Fund

I have been reading through old Small Farmer Commentaries in order to pull a few end-of-the-year pieces together in a small volume as a Christmas gift for my sister. It was her idea; more than a few include family stories or memories, so I am not indulging in a totally self-centered exercise.

But in re-examining all those back issues of Rural Papers, I am impressed at the constancy and commitment of the themes and questions KRC has addressed over the years.

Corporate dominance (globally and locally), disregard for the environment, decreasing numbers of family farms, dwindling opportunities for youth, and increasing dysfunction at the highest levels of government- and irritation expressed by those who prefer to remain deaf to criticism—we have reported and worked on many fronts affecting all of the above.

We've been called "Chicken Little" (among other less printable things) for predicting the sky is falling. But in all those newsletters explaining the problems our food and farm system faces, we have also presented alternatives for production and marketing and a more sustainable local and regional food future.

The fundamental questions that KRC asks have remained the same: Who benefits? At whose expense? And what are the true costs—to the environment, to communities and to our future?

Now, thanks to the Occupy Movement, we can add the question: does it benefit the 1% or the 99%? Does it add to democracy or take away from it?

Unlike many in the economy, farmers are having a good year, at least those who were lucky enough to have a crop to harvest this

past fall. Crop prices are high and farm income is predicted to be 28% higher than in 2010, and 50% higher than the 10-year average.

But the high prices come at a cost. Part of the reason for good times in farming is the demand for grain-based biofuels, low supplies worldwide, and rising global food demands. Not so bad for the farmers with lots of grain to sell, but bad for the hungry and those wanting to get into farming, and not so good for the environment, as fragile land is moved into production, and management decisions are increasingly made based not on long-term conservation needs but on short-term profits. Also, as crop prices are high, so are fuel, feed, seed and fertilizer prices. And farmland prices have increased, soaring in some states beyond the reach of many.

The high capital demands of agriculture (for land, equipment and inputs) make it next to impossible for youth to enter the game. So we have a huge question mark looming over who will produce food and fiber in the future? Who will make the decisions over what we eat and how it is raised? And who benefits from its production?

Our recent Sustainable Agriculture conference drew a fair number of young people interested in getting into farming. (Nationwide, the number of farmers over age 65 far outnumber those under 35.) Those young want-to-be farmers I spoke to at the conference and heard speaking up in the workshops, were articulate, their questions well-prepared, and they were committed to finding a future in farming and food production or a related business, primarily with a local or regional production thrust.

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Meet KRC's New Executive Director:

Why I'm Working for the Kansas Rural Center

By Julie Mettenburg, Executive Director

In the summer of 1853, a caravan of wagons arrived at the mission that would become Eudora in the Kansas territory. They carried the families of minister Abram Still and his grown sons and their wives and children.

According to written histories, the Stills were banished to Kansas by the Methodists for preaching abolition with a bit too much zeal. Thus, they found fertile soil in the territory, with some of the men eventually taking up with John Brown.

The Stills went on to establish the town of Baldwin City along with its small university and eventually migrated elsewhere in the state. My ancestors, the offspring of Andrew T. Still, ended up in Franklin County, Ks. where my grandfather was born in the spring of 1919 on a 160-acre homestead just northeast of Princeton.

In 1948, the homestead across the road came up for sale on the sheriff's steps, so my great-grandparents purchased the place and moved into its sturdy old farmhouse. Around the same time, my grandfather came home from KU and the war with his bride, and bought his own farm where my mother was raised.

My grandfather farmed these family homesteads on the Kansas Osage Cuestas during the great heyday and transformation years of American agriculture. He farmed rotations of wheat, barley, corn, beans, oats and alfalfa. He dairied, butchered beef, fed hogs and put up silage and hay. The land usually supported extra men on the payroll. They worked hard but it was a good living.

I was raised in my great-grandparents' old farmhouse bought on the sheriff's steps. But by the time I came along, farming had been reduced to a figment of American nostalgia, although no one was admitting it yet.

My parents had a cow-calf and seedstock operation and tried some cropping, but our small piece of the Osage Cuestas was mostly a shelf of rocky hillside. They tried expansion with the purchase of my aunt's farm in 1977 (paid for years earlier with butter and egg money that supplemented her schoolteacher's income), but they nearly lost everything as interest rates ballooned and the payments doubled.

I milked a guernsey cow, slopped pigs, bucked hay bales, drove the old M Farmall, herded cattle on horseback. I also survived the experimental strawberry years, the sweet corn years, and the triticale years, as we tried anything that would help keep the farm afloat.

To this day, my dad says one reason they still own their farm is that he ignored the advice that Sen. Bob Dole delivered to a luncheon in Ottawa one day in the late 70s, to plant fencerow to fencerow, to take on debt for the big equipment needed to do so, to get big or get out. Ultimately, my parents' off-farm jobs supported the farm and paid it off, too.

Go Big or Go to the City

For us children of the 1980s, raising 4-H steers and sewing quilts and canning garden vegetables provided the illusion that rural life remained a viable choice, but we could look around and see that there would be no



Julie Mettenburg

future in it. Many kids like me went on to professional degrees and careers in big cities, leaving behind rural communities in decline, although some economists say that's the benefit of one Kansas farmer feeding 125 people plus you ~ that we can move on to these "higher value" positions.

I stayed in ag for a while, with my first job as a reporter for a major beef industry magazine. I was suspicious that the way the livestock and grain industries were going, toward "efficiency" ~ via industrialization, mechanization, concentration, economies of scale and vertical integration ~ was not positive for the food, the animals, the environment and certainly not the farmers doing it. This put me in an adversarial position as a reporter within the industry.

I spent those few years in the feedlots and on the high plains of western Kansas, Oklahoma, Texas, Nebraska and eastern Colorado. I spent hours in meetings of the Beef Board and National Cattleman's Association. I can't count the times in which I was "schooled" in the realities of "the way

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Farm Bill Rebooted

by Mary Fund

Now that the Congressional Super Committee failed to come up with a deficit reduction plan, it appears that Congress will revert to the more normal Farm Bill process of crafting a stand alone bill in 2012, complete with hearings and debate. However, the proposed bill developed for the Super Committee by the four Agriculture Committee chairs will likely serve as the foundation for writing the new Farm Bill this year, starting in February.

Just days after the Super Committee failure to come up with an overall budget deficit agreement, Senate Agriculture Committee Chairwoman Debbie Stabenow spoke at the annual Farm Journal Forum in Washington, D.C. She indicated they would not be “starting from zero” but would use the work already done for the Super Committee as a launching point. She also expressed interest in getting a bill passed “as soon as possible.”

However, with the current Congress keep in mind that almost anything can happen, so options are being kept open as Congress grapples with larger spending, tax, and deficit measures.

A few policymakers have suggested starting over with a clean slate, largely due to the commodity section of the bill. There are also titles or programs that were not dealt with in any detail

in the Super Committee version of the Farm Bill, such as the credit, rural development, and research titles.

Sequestration. The biggest fiscal reality in play now that the Super Committee did not act is the automatic cuts to government spending that will trigger in January 2013. Unless Congress takes some kind of action to untrigger the cuts, or finds some areas of agreement on big ticket budget items (like payroll tax cuts, the alternative minimum tax, Medicare payments to doctors, etc.), the Congressional Budget Office (CBO) estimates cuts to Farm Bill programs of \$15.6 billion. (The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program or food stamps and the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) are exempt from sequestration.)

According to the National Sustainable Agriculture Coalition, a difference between automatic cuts and a Congressional decision to cut is that under automatic cuts the biggest share of the \$15.6 billion in reductions would come from crop and revenue insurance since it has the biggest budget. Under a regular farm bill scenario, crop insurance is less likely to be cut.

What Was Not in the Super Committee Farm Bill. Since the quickly crafted Super Committee

proposal will likely be the foundation for the upcoming debate, it is worth noting what it failed to address.

The biggest failure was the lack of payment limitations in commodity payments. In fact, this version doubled the payment limit and left gaping loopholes still in place while cutting investments for rural development and job creation in rural areas.

Basically the proposal would have replaced direct payments (payments based on historical base acres and paid each year regardless of market price or farm income conditions) with a grab bag of commodity support options. But the proposal failed to address the need for payment limitations within this grab bag. It would have continued the biggest loophole that has been part of the commodity support system for two decades~ the loophole that allows people to dodge the “actively engaged in farming” requirement, which allows mega farms to receive multiples of the existing payment limit.

Also the proposed bill did not attach conservation compliance to crop insurance nor did it establish a nationwide sodbuster provision. Conservation compliance helps ensure that producers do not farm vulnerable highly erodible land and receive commodity crop payments for that land. Crop insurance has become the largest subsidy program in the Farm Bill, and as farm prices remain high, grasslands and sensitive areas are being brought into production without adequate conservation measures. □

With help from the National Sustainable Agriculture Coalition (NSAC) See more at their website [http://sustainable agriculture.net](http://sustainableagriculture.net).

Sustainable Food System News

Rethinking the Food System...

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At the heart of his concerns, however, are people and the disconnect between food production and food consumption.

He noted that global agriculture has 219,000 new mouths to feed every day in a world that is becoming increasingly urbanized. The trend toward fewer and larger farms has reduced biodiversity and dramatically shifted people out of production agriculture, Nagengast said. In the United States, he pointed out, 41 percent of the population was involved in food production in 1900. Today, only about .7 percent of Americans provide the labor to put food on the table.

“Why are so few of us engaged in providing the most basic of human needs?” he asked, explaining that the break in the production-consumption link impacts society from its employment to its ecology. Noting that Kansas once had a thriving apple industry, for example, he said few people today have an awareness of how their food is grown or even where it comes from.

Nagengast asserted that getting more people involved with food production is elemental to a more productive and sustainable system. He cited a growing public desire for locally produced food and pointed out that the number of farmer’s markets in the U.S. has risen from 1,755 in 1994 to approximately 7,175 in 2011 with an estimated \$7

billion in local food sales for the year. Encouraging and enabling more farmers to market directly to the public, he said, is a giant step toward more sustainable agriculture as local and regional food production benefits communities, farmers and consumers.

“There is a way to do it,” Nagengast said of transforming our current food production system, “and we are doing it – but it’s a struggle.”

Increasing regional and local food production is at the top of Nagengast’s answers for the “What can we do?” question. He advocated efforts to encourage everyone to have some role in the production of his or her food. Streamlining and clarifying regulations that affect direct marketing is important, he said, along with maximizing the nutrient density of foods and encouraging farming practices that promote clean air and water.

Partnering with other farmers and regional processors – as well as anyone concerned about their food – can help facilitate sustainable food production. And, he added, protecting highly productive farmland is a must.

Regionalizing food production, Nagengast said, can decrease transportation costs and unnecessary processing. Access to locally produced food, along with school-based nutritional and education programs can help improve the health of the next generation of Kansans, he said.



Dan Nagengast spoke at the KRC Sustainable Agriculture conference and challenged attendees to consider what kind of future would involve more people involved in feeding people.

Photo M. Parker

Nagengast refused, however, to lay blame at the feet of his fellow farmers who participate in a more industrialized approach to farming: “They are good, hard-working people and we can’t begrudge them their success but we have to ask if the current system is sustainable?”

“Embedded in our current system is enormous waste and that’s not just the food system,” he told the crowd, adding that runaway waste is inherent in energy, health care and other segments of society. An IBM study, he said, found potential for a 25-30 percent increase in food production and water use efficiency. Arable land, water, fossil fuels, fertilizer and other important resources are either in limited or waning supply while technology and human labor resources are increasing. *Contd. on page 7*

Our Local Food News

Our Local Food Chapters



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SE Chapter Hosts Farmers Market Workshop



David Coltrain of the KSU River Valley Extension District spoke on season extension and on improving market profitability. Photo by T. Graham

Twenty-three people gathered in Iola for Southeast Region Farmers Market Workshop on Saturday, December 3.

Morning sessions included “Production Techniques to Lengthen the Garden Season” with David Coltrain (KSRE River Valley District) and “Market Customers Eat With Their Eyes” with Katherine Kelly (Cultivate Kansas City). Debbie Bearden (Allen County Farm Bureau) prepared morning snacks and a splendid meal using local foods, including chili and chicken noodle soup, salad and veggie tray, plus homemade pies.

In the afternoon, attendees followed one of two tracks. Market growers and vendors enjoyed sessions entitled “Consider Marketing at Farmers Markets a Business, Not a Hobby” with David Coltrain, and “Post Harvest Handling” with Laura Christensen (Growing Growers Apprenticeship Program). Market managers, board

members, and organizers benefited from the experiences relayed in “Confessions of a Small Town Market Manager” – working with vendors, volunteers and the community, with Eileen Nichols (Webb City, MO Farmers Market Manager), “Electronic Bank Transfer at the Market and Rapid Market Assessment” with Tracey Graham (Chapter Coordinator for Our Local Food - Twin Rivers).

Workshop partners include Allen County Farm Bureau, the Kansas Rural Center and the Our Local Food program with funding from Kansas Farm Bureau, Kansas Center for Sustainable Agriculture and Alternative Crops, and the USDA Specialty Crop Grant Program, through a sub-grant from the Kansas Department of Agriculture. □

Sustainable Food System News

Rethinking the Food System...

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Developing a food production system that considers those factors is a challenge that faces producers and consumers alike.

“There are things we can do every day,” Nagengast suggested. “We don’t have to petition the government to do it. ... We can design a system that increases participation as well as productivity.”

The Kansas Sustainable Agriculture Conference’s theme this year was “Options, Opportunities and Optimism: Cultivating Our Food and Farm Future. About 120 people attended the event held at Flint Hills Technical College in Emporia. Co-sponsors included the Kansas Center for Sustainable Agriculture and Alternative Crops, Kansas SARE, the Kansas Farmers Union, Kansas Wildlife Federation, Kansas Sierra club, and the Community Mercantile. The conference also received partial funding from the USDA Risk Management Agency for its workshops. □

Check KRC’s website for presentations from some of the KRC Sustainable Agriculture conference sessions.

www.kansasruralcenter.org

Conference Panel Takes Aim at Food System

by Mark Parker



A panel discussion followed the keynote at the sustainable ag conference in mid-November. Above Mike Callicrate urged conference goers to “go home and build your communities.”

When it comes to making the American food system more diversified, sustainable and family farm friendly, “Happy talk doesn’t get it done,” according to Mike Callicrate, an independent cattleman, entrepreneur and political activist who was part of a panel discussion following the keynote speaker at the Kansas Rural Center’s recent Sustainable Agriculture Conference in Emporia. About 120 people attended the conference. The theme was “Options, Opportunities and Optimism: Cultivating our Farm and Food Future”.

“Never before has there been so much money in agriculture – you just don’t get it,” he told a large group of farmers, growers and others gathered for the event sponsored by the Kansas Rural Center.

Citing an industrialized agricultural system that stifles diversity as well as the economic potential of independent producers, Callicrate said there’s no doubt that the system is broken. “Caring about your country and caring about the community you live in – that’s how to fix it,” he asserted.

Although consumer interest in locally produced food is at an all-time high, there is extreme resistance on the part of big agriculture, Callicrate said, adding that huge sums of money are being spent to promote industrial agriculture “with the family farmer’s face on it.”

Much of that money comes from farmer-fed checkoff programs that force farmers to fund their own destruction, Callicrate contended. “The battle,” he added, “is between industrial agriculture and family farm agriculture.” The nation needs a lot more family farms and a lot more diversification on those farms, said Callicrate, who has been the lead plaintiff in two class action lawsuits against major meat packers.

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Conservation is An On-going Effort: Stuenkel Tour Highlights Multiple Practices and Projects

by Tom Parker

"I'm not sure we're going to beat the rain," Lucinda Stuenkel said. Light bled from the sky as clouds thickened into a solid gray mass. An icy wind gusted from the south as 34 visitors piled into an open-air trailer, bundled in jackets, slickers, ponchos and heavy coats. As the trailer pulled away from the yard to begin its journey through Lucinda and Sheila Stuenkel's farm on the Washington-Clay County border, the first raindrops pelted the group.

By the time the group jounced through a pasture to park beside a small creek, rain had begun falling in earnest. If anything, though, it accentuated the measures the Stuenkels had taken to mitigate runoff and erosion on the farm's draws and creeks though check dams, sediment basins and rock chutes, as well as other ongoing measures for more efficient cattle and pasture management. It wasn't just about conservation, it was about making the land work to its utmost efficiency and being the best stewards possible.

The visitors were there to see how Stuenkel and her sister-in-law, Sheila, (and, before their deaths in a collision one year ago, their husbands, Daryl and Kevin, respectively) had tapped into resources from various agencies and organizations to create what one visitor would afterward claim to be "pure genius."

Joining the Stuenkel's were Will Boyer, K-State Watershed Specialist, Dale Strickler, a cover crop expert from

Star Seed, Inc., and Thad Rhodes, Kansas Forest Service. All were instrumental in what Stuenkel admitted was an ongoing effort. The tour, held Monday, November 7, was sponsored by the Tuttle Creek Watershed Restoration and Protection Strategies (WRAPS), River Valley Extension District, Washington and Clay Counties NRCS and Conservation Districts, and the Kansas Rural Center - Clean Water Farms/WRAPS Project.

After watching valuable topsoil sluice off the fields in heavy rains, Stuenkel contacted NRCS District Conservationist, Dee Minge, who suggested the Environmental Quality Incentives Program and State Conservation grants. NRCS Engineers Lee Wilson and Andy Broxterman designed a rock armor where the creek first entered the property. Beneath the rock was laid a thick liner of geotextile fabric.

"There are two different reasons for using the fabric," Boyer said. "The first is to create a separation between the rock and the mud to keep traffic from pushing the rock down into the mud, and, along the banks and upper slopes it keeps water from undermining the rock." A series of NRCS-designed check dams at inlets to the creek slows the force of the water and allows sediment to build to level out the incline, Boyer said.

Another method of reducing topsoil depletion was the use of cover crops. The pasture was lush with a tillage



Lucinda Stuenkel points to a series of stone check dams that slow the force of water sluicing off the fields and prevent erosion in the creek. Lucinda and Sheila Stuenkel claim their conservation work is an on-going effort, and has become a memorial tribute to their late husbands.

radish whose foliage remained green and leafy. Besides reducing weed growth and retaining soil moisture, its taproot extended through the hardpan for up to three feet. Cattle love the greens and, later in the season, the taproot. "You'll see cattle with a lump in their cheek like a farmer chewing tobacco," Stuenkel said.

"More than just food, though, the cover crop keeps the soil pliable. We have hard clay here, and in summer it turns to brick. The sun also kills micronutrients, so we have to keep the soil covered at all times to preserve the fertility."

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Clean Water Farming News

Conservation Tour...

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Many farmers complain that the use of cover crops robs moisture from tilled crops, Strickler said. "They do use a small amount of moisture," he said. "But so does evaporation." When combined with no-till planting, roots have ready holes through the hardpan to sink deep into the soil, he said. Another benefit is added nitrogen to the soil through the use of legume cover crops such as chicory vetch, which the cattle like to graze as well.

The use of cover crops isn't new, Strickler said, but dates back at least to Pliny the Elder in the 1st century who wrote a book on the subject. "What is new," he said, "is marrying no-till to cover crops. We're still finding out how well it works, but it goes back to the old saying that no matter what kind of problem you have with the soil, the answer is always organic matter."

Blending modern technological methods with time-proven techniques extended beyond the use of cover crops. Stuenkel divided the farm into nine paddocks combining native prairie, expired CRP land, and crop ground. Each paddock contains its own watering station, some of which are insulated tanks regulated by float valves. Cattle are rotated between the paddocks depending on season and climate.

"By moving the cattle every three to five days through nine paddocks," she said, "we were able to get two to three times as much grass utilization as we had by letting them roam freely." One of the tricks was to rotate them to pastures with shade when temperatures reached triple digits. "We learned



Over 30 people braved a cold rain at the November 7 conservation tour at the Stuenkel farms.

to listen to what the cows were telling us," she said. "Another benefit was that the cattle were healthier because they weren't laying down on old manure packs."

The use of paddocks also facilitates the Sandhills calving method of separating newborn calves from older calves (older calves are disease magnifiers according to K-State veterinarian Dr. Hollis) and pregnant cows to reduce the risk of scours. Stuenkel is now working with Rhodes to create windbreaks to shelter cattle in wintertime—a long-term project, but then, none of the improvements happened overnight.

"It all started with Mary Howell and a notebook," Stuenkel said. The notebook was a checklist and scorecard entitled "Clean Water Farms—River Friendly Farm Environmental Assessment" from the Kansas Rural Center. Stuenkel found the notebook at a Kansas Graziers Association meeting in January, 2006. She immediately recognized its merit. "We were already doing many of the things the notebook advocated," she said, "but it helped bring it all together. It clarified everything."

Besides that, the program paid her to fill out the survey. She and her husband became passionately involved in reworking their farm into a model of efficiency, sometimes completing five-year projects in a single year.

After losing her husband a year ago, Stuenkel's goal hasn't changed. If anything, there's a stronger bond to the land and the memories it holds. "This has become a memorial tribute to my wonderful husband," Stuenkel said. "I'm going to continue to carry out his dreams and aspirations."

For more information on the Clean Water Farms—River Friendly Farm Environment Assessment from the KRC, contact Mary Howell at 785-562-8726 or e-mail her at marshallcofair@gmail.com. For more information on the Tuttle Creek WRAPS Program contact Barbara Donovan at DonovanMN@aol.com or 651-247-8292. □

Sustainable Food System News

Conference Panel...

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Changing the current system will not be easy, he added. It must begin in local communities and with getting involved in making them better places to live. Callicrate urged producers to get engaged in changing food and rural policies. "We need to make it easier to do the right thing and harder to do the wrong thing," he said.

Other members of the panel discussed a wide range of challenges and opportunities facing advocates of a more sustainable food production system.

Eileen Horn, director of the Douglas County Food Policy Council, emphasized that the key to encouraging local, sustainable food production is working with other interested organizations and individuals. "Food is a consensus issue for a lot of groups and people so we can really build alliances," she observed.

Formed in 2009, the Douglas County Food Policy Council is made up of growers, food retailers and other stakeholders. After assessing the local food system, the Council's first recommendation was a program adopted by the Douglas County that leases vacant and under-utilized county land to local growers for a dollar per acre. The program especially helps young growers get a start and it has reduced the county's investment in upkeep of previously unused ground.

"The good news is that these folks are accessible," Horn said of public officials. She suggested that people contact their own local officials to let them know that local food systems are important.

Chris Wilson, who serves as deputy secretary of the Kansas Department of Agriculture, outlined some of the issues facing agriculture in the state. Protecting and extending the utility of the Ogallala Aquifer remains a priority to the Department, she said. Wilson also emphasized the importance of investing in research and technological development to solve the problems of both producers and consumers. Efforts at both the University of Kansas and Kansas State University to develop renewable fuel from biomass are examples of such research, she noted.

"Changing the current system... must begin in local communities and with getting involved in making them better places to live."

Wilson cited several challenges facing the state, including the difficulty of recruiting farm labor and doing a better job of connecting producers and consumers.

David Coltraine, Kansas State University Research and Extension agent in the River Valley Extension District, discussed his experiences in growing and marketing vegetables. Coltraine, who had as much as 60 acres of vegetable crops in southeast Kansas, also talked about a north central Kansas specialty crop project that encourages direct marketing of food crops. He noted that there has been an increase in both locally grown food production and farmer's markets in the region. Meeting the increasing demand for locally grown food requires skills in both production and

marketing, he said, adding that there are opportunities for innovative producers.

Coltraine said that the tools being used to facilitate the connection between local growers and local consumers are effective but should be intensified: "We need to do a lot more of what we're doing now. The potential to grow is amazing," he asserted.

State Senator Marci Francisco of Lawrence told the crowd that it is important to recognize the importance of agriculture to Kansas. Citing a focus on increasing the quantitative production of farm commodities, she suggested that it's time to focus on food production with an eye on limited resources in the future.

Francisco also emphasized that the state needs to encourage farming practices that protect the state's reservoirs as well as rural development. She said locally grown food production and food processing could be sources of employment in areas where the development of manufacturing is unlikely due to inadequate infrastructure, resources or work force.

Francisco, who is the Ranking Democrat on the Senate Agriculture Committee, also noted that there are several school lunch programs around the state that are helping connect children with food production.

Conference co-sponsors included the Kansas Center for Sustainable Agriculture and Alternative Crops, Kansas SARE, the Kansas Farmers Union, Kansas Wildlife Federation, Kansas Sierra club, and the Community Mercantile. The conference also received partial funding from the USDA Risk Management Agency. □

Sustainable Farming News

Managing Drought Conference Jan. 21...

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"The workshop will address both the natural resource concerns and the financial and business planning end of drought," said Tonya Haigh, Drought Center researcher. "The goal is to come through the drought with both your finances and resource base intact, as much as possible."

Speakers will include Barry Dunn, Ranch Management Specialist and Dean of Agriculture and Biological Sciences at South Dakota State University; Jerry Volesky, professor and range and forage systems specialist at the West Central Research and Extension Center in North Platte, Neb.; Ted Alexander, a Kansas rancher who operates according to a detailed management plan; David Kraft and Dwayne Rice, Kansas-based USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service Range Management Specialists; Amy Roeder, USDA RMA Risk Management Specialist in Kansas City; Charles Griffin, director of the Kansas Rural Family Helpline and research assistant professor in the School of Family Studies and Human Services at Kansas State University; and Mary Knapp, Kansas State Climatologist. Speakers are provided through a grant by the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Risk Management Agency.

Participants will receive a copy of a Managing Drought Risk on the Ranch handbook with worksheets. The materials will also be freely available on the web. The information is condensed from a comprehensive drought management website, online at <http://drought.unl.edu/ranchplan>, which was also made possible by the USDA RMA.

Other sponsors for the conference are Kansas Rural Center, Kansas Farmers Union, Kansas Center for Sustainable Ag and Alternative Crops in addition to KGA, KGLC and RMA.

Registration is \$25 for the main registrant per family/ranch and \$15 for each additional person. Students are being offered a reduced registration rate of \$10. Lunch is included. To register, please visit <http://www.kansasruralcenter.org> for information and a printable mail-in registration form. For more information or questions call Mary Howell, Kansas Graziers Association at 785-562-8726. □

Buy From Me

Buy this apple, these tomatoes,
This corn and wheat,
This pasta and bread,
These beans and meat.

Take a chance and buy from me~
Build a tunnel under the food
industry.

The dollar you spend will wend its way
Through a community I invest in every
day.

Go out of your way and skip the store,
Even pay a little more.
Store your trust in a human face,
Not a logo from a far off place.

The connection between
Your food and my land
Is a promise of quality
From my own hand.

My work and commitment,
My life and my word,
Are more honest and real
Than any ad you've heard.

Your food will be clean
With a flavor that's truer,
And raised in a way that will
Keep our land pure.

A truly radical act I know~
To buy from the ones
Who made it grow.

Annie Wilson
November 4, 1997
Elmdale, Ks.
Printed with permission

Why I Work for KRC...

Continued from page 3

it is", that these changes not only were inevitable but an improvement because we could produce so much cheap food. Only I could never quite square that with the my own experiences.

In recent years, I have found that I couldn't give up on our family farm legacy so easily, and besides, those "higher value" jobs are in decline too. I now suspect that "the way it is" is not so certain, and we are seeing the devastating effects of industrialized food. With the benefit of my years spent in marketing, communications and small business, I believe we can rebuild the small-business sector of American agriculture in a more ecological, sustainable model that's more economically viable too, and our rural communities along with it.

I now actively work on and manage the family farms with my parents and my siblings. A few years ago, we decided to try grass-finishing some of the steers from my parents' herd. This has been revelatory for our family, rejuvenating not just our soils, but also our spirits and our bottom line. The Stockman Grass Farmer newspaper has become a new family bible, our zeal nearly like those Methodist abolitionists so many years ago.

During this time of transition to a diversified, more holistic animal and direct marketing system, we have sought all the help and information we could find. Fortunately, we discovered the Kansas Rural Center. Dale Kirkham came to our farm and taught us about the grasses. Mercedes Taylor-Puckett hosted workshops on direct-marketing, where we learned about rules and regulations and agritourism opportunities to expand the bottom

line. I joined Mercedes in the Our Local Food program in the Kaw River Valley and learned more about the fruits and vegetables industry, a truly untapped potential for our state.

If we had worked with KRC years earlier, we might have made these transitions long before - or at least would have known there were kindred spirits out here, pursuing a different course, seeking more environmentally sustainable methods for long-term farm viability and human and ecological health.

We come together for a variety of reasons, whether a love of the natural environment of Kansas, a belief in sustainable and ecological agriculture, or a desire for a healthy local-food system, to name a few.

KRC's Role in the Future

It would be easy to say that this is all a fad or a flash in the pan. But gathering evidence indicates that the forces of history and climate change have tipped the balance, so that we face global and epic, if not catastrophic, upheaval. And not only are consumers demanding more from their food, but population explosion and political realignments are also likely to force systemic change for good.

In the midst of upheaval, tempers can flare and rhetoric becomes heated. Neighbors clash and communities become tense, like the West Virginia coal mine communities where citizens who speak out are pitted against those whose livelihoods come from the mines. We are seeing

this in Kansas.

This is where the Kansas Rural Center plays a vital role that will only become more important in the coming years. KRC takes a stand, to be sure, but at its core, KRC is about rolling up sleeves and getting to work.

We come together for a variety of reasons, whether a love of the natural environment of Kansas, a belief in sustainable and ecological agriculture, or a desire for a healthy local-food system, to name a few.

KRC works on the solutions that will heal parts of the system in very real and tangible ways for real people. We are mending streams, developing markets, teaching new farmers and new methods and much more, while helping forge a new agricultural tradition for Kansas. Because of this sensible approach, KRC tends to inspire dialogue between factions and build bridges over gaps.

My challenge in leading KRC will be to help us gain the capacity to do all of the work that will be needed, as well as in getting the message out to more people and broader audiences, to help those families like mine. I believe we have turned a corner from the days of my childhood, so that the future looks brighter for our youth and rural communities, but we have to repair what's been lost plus institute new systems not yet imagined that will be needed for a world we cannot yet fathom.

I am honored to be working in this organization that I believe is uniquely poised to meet this future, and I look forward to working with each of you. I welcome your input as we go forward. Please be in contact with me at juliemettenburg@gmail.com, or on Twitter @juliemett. □

Resources and Events

Great Plains Growers Conference Set for January 5-7 in St. Joseph, MO



The Great Plains Growers Conference will be held on January 5th, 6th and 7th, 2012 at the Fulkerson Conference Center on the Missouri Western State University Campus in St. Joseph, Missouri.

"Interesting and useful information will be presented on production and marketing of vegetables, cut flowers and fruit," said Mercedes Taylor-Puckett, Farmers Market and Local Food Coordinator for the Kansas Rural Center. "It doesn't matter if you are an experienced commercial vegetable grower or someone with just a dream about starting to grow and sell produce, there will be something for you," she said.

The conference and trade show is a collaborative effort of growers associations and extension services from Iowa, Kansas, Missouri, Nebraska, and South Dakota, and each year draws hundreds of producers from our region and beyond.

On Thursday January 5th, the conference kicks off with five day-long

workshops that you can choose from:

High Tunnels - Essential Tools for the Market Farmer Speakers: Paul & Sandy Arnold, Mike Bollinger, Matthew Kleinhenz, Paul Duffner, Bill Warner, & Dan Kuebler.

Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) Minischool Speakers: Chris McGuire, Liz Graznak, Rebecca Graff, and Tom Ruggieri.

GAP/ Food Safety Speakers: Chris Blanchard and David Markwardt.

Fruit Growers Tree Fruit Workshop I Speakers: Wayne Mitchem, Wanda Gale, Keith Yoder

New this year - The Basics of Beekeeping in the Midwest Speakers: Jim & Valerie Duever

Five concurrent sessions on Friday and Saturday January 6th and 7th will provide a total of over 50 presentations on a wealth of subjects related to organic and conventional crop production, protection, risk management and marketing. In addition to presentations on vegetable production and marketing, there will be tracks on small fruit, tree fruit, cut flowers, beginner and advanced organic, marketing, agritourism and sessions on urban horticulture and community gardens.

Registration, which includes meals and breaks, for the Thursday

Tire Tank Installation How-To Guide Available

KRC, KSU and several WRAPS watersheds have sponsored several tire tank installation demonstration workshops around the state. The tank installations provide cleaner water for livestock and give ponds a longer life, and help protect water quality in area streams and reservoirs.

KRC field staff Lyle Kohlmeier has worked up an "Illustrated Guide to Tire Tank Installation" based on KSU Watershed Specialist Herschel George's guidelines; it is now available online at KRC's website. Contact local conservation or extension district offices or KRC field staff for more information on tire tank installation, and go to www.kansasruralcenter.org for the guide. □

workshops is \$50-\$60 depending on

the workshop selected and \$35/day for Friday and Saturday sessions.

The conference will be held at the Fulkerson Conference Center on the Missouri Western State University campus in St. Joseph, MO. The headquarter hotels are the Ramada Inn, 4016 Frederick, 816-233-6192 or Stoney Creek Inn, 1201 Woodbine 816-901-9600.

A full program, registration information and updated details of the conference can be found at the conference website: <http://www.greatplainsgrowers.org> for more information about the program and a registration form, contact Katie Cook at cookkm@missouri.edu or phone (816) 279-1691. □

Resources and Events

2012 Conservation Stewardship Program Sign-Up Announced

On Friday, December 9, USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) announced that the fiscal year (FY) 2012 ranking period cutoff for the Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP) is January 13, 2012.

Interested farmers and ranchers have until January 13, 2012, to complete the initial application form to compete for a spot in the 2012 enrollment class for the program. To sign up, producers should visit their NRCS local service center.

CSP has a continuous sign-up, and producers can enroll at any time during the year. But NRCS applies a cut-off date for applications to be considered during a particular fiscal year. Once the cut-off date is past, you can still apply, but you will have to wait to the following year to have your application considered.

Because of the short turn-around (and the holiday season), it is possible that there might be an extension of the ranking cut-off date. But at this point in time, to be assured a chance to compete to enroll in the program you must submit an application by January 13. You can read more at the National Sustainable Agriculture Coalition website at <http://sustainableagriculture.net>. □ (From NSAC Information Alert Dec. 16, 2011)

NRCS Ranking Dates Announced for Organic and Seasonal High Tunnel Initiatives

At the end of November, USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) announced ranking dates for three conservation initiatives: organic, seasonal high tunnels, and on-farm energy conservation initiatives. All offer financial and technical assistance under the Environmental Quality Incentive Program (EQIP).



KRC trainings on organic farming for Ks. NRCS staff in September included information on seasonal high tunnels.

NRCS accepts applications for financial assistance on a continuous basis throughout the year, but is moving to a multiple cut-off dates to better assist producers. There will be three ranking periods for the Organic, On-Farm Energy and Seasonal High Tunnel initiatives, all ending on February 3, March 30 and June 1, 2012. At the end of a ranking period, NRCS ranks all submitted proposals for funding consideration. NRCS will notify all applicants of the results of the rankings and begin developing contracts with selected applicants.

Organic Initiative: NRCS helps certified organic growers and producers working to achieve organic certification install conservation practices for organic production.

Seasonal High Tunnel Initiative: NRCS helps producers plan and implement high tunnels, steel-framed, polyethylene-covered structures that extend growing seasons. High tunnel benefits include better plant and soil quality, fewer nutrients and pesticides in the environment, and better air quality due to fewer vehicles being needed to transport crops. More than 4,000 high tunnels have been planned and implemented nationwide through this initiative over the past two years. Unlike past years in Kansas, this initiative is no longer limited to organic or transitioning organic producers, but is open to all producers.

On-Farm Energy Initiative: NRCS and producers develop Agricultural Energy Management Plans (AgEMP) or farm energy audits that assess energy consumption on an operation. NRCS then uses audit data to develop energy conservation recommendations.

Contact the NRCS office near you for application information. □

KRC Legislative Weekly E-Updates Available

During 2012, KRC will offer its Legislative Weekly E-Updates during the State of Kansas Legislative session, and throughout the federal Farm Bill debates and decisions.

Paul Johnson will provide KRC with monitoring and analysis of food, farm and environmental issues in the State Legislative Session from January through May, and KRC will provide updates and alerts on critical federal farm bill actions until the farm bill is passed by Congress.

You can sign up for the 2012 Weekly E-Updates by contacting Mary Fund at ksrc@rainbowtel.net, or going to the KRC website at <http://www.kansasruralcenter.org/policy/html>. You can also view 2011 Weekly E-Updates there. KRC asks for a \$20 contribution for the Weekly E-Updates to help with costs.

Who Benefits? at Whose Cost?...

Continued from page 2

They were also deeply troubled. Lack of credit options, faulty public policy and lack of technical assistance hold them back—and like many young people in other fields, they see their options narrowing in today’s economy. The current industrial ag model appears to have no place for them, but they understand the importance of building a new model.

That new model, like the criticism we have levied at the conventional system over the years, has always been present in KRC’s work. Promoting an economic system based on fairness, need and justice—on food, shelter and meaningful work for all our citizens— seems critical not just for sustaining the food system, but democracy.

Working toward farm, food, and trade policy that treats farmers and workers with respect, protects our natural resources and the environment, and provides a

decent quality of life for people does not seem like criticism to me, but is again basic to meeting human needs.

KRC is entering the New Year with a new Executive Director, new energy, and I hope a re-commitment to a more sustainable future for all sectors of our economy and for urban and rural citizens alike.

May 2012 be the year we all learn to ask the fundamental questions: Who benefits? At whose expense? And what are the long term costs? and above all, how can we make a difference?

Best Wishes for the New Year. ☐

(In addition to her KRC work, Mary Fund and her husband Ed Reznicek own and operate a 400 acre certified organic crop and livestock farm in Nemaha County.)



Celebrating 32 Years of Support for Sustainable Agriculture --Rural Papers

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Contributors to the Kansas Rural Center’s work to promote sustainable agriculture in Kansas receive KRC’s newsletter, *Rural Papers*, 5 issues/year, and other Center special reports and information alerts. Subscriptions are available for \$25/year.

Go to www.kansasruralcenter.org for copies of back issues.



Kansas Rural Center

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Calendar

January 5-7, 2012 Great Plains Vegetables Growers Conference, Missouri Western State University, St. Joseph, Missouri. Contact Buchanan County Extension 816-279-1691, or go to www.greatplainsgrowers.org

Monday January 9, Grazing Tele-conference Call, 7:30 p.m. For more information please contact Jason Schmidt at 316-461-3243. To receive an email reminder of the call, send a request to Jason at jason_schmidt20@hotmail.com

Saturday January 21, 2012 Kansas Winter Grazing Conference, "Managing Drought Risk on the Ranch", Emporia, Ks. Contact www.kglc.org or Mary Howell at 785-562-8726.

Saturday, February 12, 2012 Kaw Valley Seeds Project Fair, Lawrence, Ks. 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. For more information, contact Jessi Asmussen, 785-856-0622, mellowfields@gmail.com.

Saturday March 10, 2012 Kansas Rural Center Board of Directors Meeting, Location to be announced. Contact Diane Dysart at 785-873-3431.

Saturday February 25, 2012 North Central Ks. Commercial Enterprises: Production, Marketing and Management Workshop, 8:30 a.m. to 4 p.m., Washington High School, 115 North D Street, Washington, Ks. Workshops sessions on vegetable and fruit production, marketing, etc. Sponsored by Kansas State University Extension, River Valley Extension, and Washington County Farm Bureau. Contact David Coltrain for information at 785-325-2121, or coltrain@ksu.edu. Or go to the KRC website for registration info.

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

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