

Spring/Summer 2022

RURAL PAPERS

Reporting with commentary on agricultural and rural issues



A Message from the Executive Director • Farm to School • Integrated Voter Engagement
Board Member Spotlight • Emerging Young Farmers • Kansas Farm and Food Coalition

KRC
KANSAS RURAL CENTER



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.

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CONTACT US

Kansas Rural Center
PO Box 781057
Wichita, KS 67278
866-579-5469
info@kansasruralcenter.org

Kansasruralcenter.org

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KRC Staff Members

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 & ADMINISTRATIVE MANAGER - Ryan Goertzen-Regier

Ryan grew up and continues to work part-time on a 5th generation Kansas farm in Marion County that grows row crops and raises hogs and cattle. He graduated from Bethel College (North Newton, KS) with a BS in Social Work and a certificate in Conflict Management, before spending several years working with refugee resettlement in South Dakota and returning to Kansas.

He currently serves as the Vice President of the Kansas Farmers Union, and in the leadership of the Central Kansas Young Farmers Coalition.



COMMUNICATIONS COORDINATOR - Charlotte French

Charlotte grew up in Rossville, Kansas, where she learned firsthand that small towns and rural lifestyles are the backbone of America. While her early years may signal a conventional farm and ranch upbringing, Charlotte considers herself an environmentalist.

Before coming to KRC, Charlotte expanded her knowledge of communications with Ogden Publications and Farming Unlimited and by volunteering with her local Sierra Club and Junior League chapters.



PROGRAM COORDINATOR - Jackie Keller

While living in California, Jackie toured many different types of farms and worked with diverse cultures. She volunteered for the San Francisco League of Urban Gardeners (SLUG) which involved planting garlic/beans for low- income housing residents and weeding the Cesar Chavez grade school raised beds. Jackie has served on the FSA County Committee since 2011, three lobbying trips to D.C., testifying at the KS State Capital and numerous conferences- KS Farmer’s Union, Women in Agriculture, Women for Kansas, Kansas Governor’s Summit on Agricultural Growth.



As the new Executive Director of the Kansas Rural Center, the last few months have certainly been educational for me. The year started off with a flurry of activity at the Kansas Statehouse, which was a new experience for me. KRC, as an organization, embarked on a new effort toward making policy change at the state level this year, by joining the Kansas Food and Farm Coalition (FFC). The Food and Farm Coalition is a partnership formed with KC Healthy Kids, the Kansas Food Action Network, and Harvesters, working together with lobbying firm Little Government Relations to push for positive change around food and farming systems in Kansas. Our coalition's top priority this session was food sales tax relief, so we can celebrate a victory on that. Last month, Food and Farm Coalition members were invited to the bill signing to "axe the food sales tax," and it felt good to be there and mark that positive step for Kansans. There were certainly some losses for KRC too, as the legislature did not act to protect water and soil health in several bills that were brought up this session. Beyond those issues, the FFC spent time laying the groundwork and building connections for future efforts and hopes to continue progress in coming sessions. The Food and Farm Coalition was able to present to the House Agriculture Committee on two occasions,

presented at a meeting for the Rural Caucus, and met with a number of key legislators. Next year, we plan to continue pushing for a sales tax exemption for farm products sold at farmers markets, and a quicker path to zero on the food sales tax, among other issues.

As the Legislative session has wound down, I've spent much time learning and trying my best to keep up with the many different opportunities that are present each day for supporting the health of the land and its people. While on my farm it is asparagus season, at KRC we are in the midst of what I call grant season, as many of the USDA grants that offer us opportunities for continued work in the coming years are due over the next few weeks. In the wake of COVID-19, the Federal government has allocated lots of additional funding to food and farming systems, and I hope that Kansas can capitalize on that opportunity to make some great strides in the coming years. In this process, first and foremost, KRC is working to be collaborative. KRC has long been a leader in the state but has also been a good partner for other organizations around the state and that is a legacy I hope to continue. We've sought to develop projects that strengthen partnerships that KRC has had for years, and we're also working to engage new partners with those

whose mission aligns with ours.

Since our last Rural Papers, KRC also has added several new staff members, including our Communications Coordinator, Charlotte French, and our new Program Coordinator, Jackie Keller. Ryan Goertzen-Regier, Administrative and Office Manager, continues to do great work as our most senior employee in charge of our Beginning Farmer and Rancher Programming.

Amid all this transition on the horizon, we have a couple of key opportunities for you to engage with our work. We are starting a five-year review of our strategic plan. We'd love to get your input about what we should be focusing on for the next five years, so if you have a chance, please share any thoughts you have with me (tom@kansaruralcenter.org) about where we should be going and what kind of work we should be doing. Next, we plan to bring back our Food and Farm Conference as a real life, in person meeting in 2022. The details are not ready to share just yet, so please stay tuned, and we'll update you as soon as we can. Thanks for following our work and we look forward to, hopefully, seeing many of you in person this fall.

Tom



As soon as I could stand, I toddled through Anna and Per's garden gate. Old time Swedes, who'd moved to town from the farm, welcomed me into their world. They taught me to poke potato eyes into the earth, get dirty, and enjoy cookies and milk on the stoop when we were done.

In 1956 we moved from Lindsborg to Chicago, living on the margin of what rural life remained. That first spring Dad and I went to the corner store. The spinning rack of seed mesmerized me. We bought corn, radish, and beans and planted them in an empty lot next to our house. I checked daily to catch the hands of corn emerge. It took forever, then boom. As the ears began to form, I kept pulling the husk and silk back to check for progress. A big lesson: let things ripen without tampering.

New houses rose quickly. I roamed the diminishing fields, picked wild strawberries, greeted my friend the great horned owl. The last farm became Parkway Bank, a bowling alley, a big box store, and endless parking lots. No more tadpoles. When the pear orchard was bulldozed to build apartments, my



stomach ached. The development of the empty lots where dad and I gardened, kids ran wild with fire flies, played ringolevio, and skated on our communal ice-skating rink angered me.

The cement foundations looked like tombs. Once the masons began to lay the brick walls and after they departed, I shoved them down. Hallelujah soared through

"If you want Michael to live, you must move to the country."

my nine-year-old body. Mrs. Koberecki caught me and said to stop or she'd tell mother. Defeated I fantasized that Dr. Amberson, after an examination would plead with mom, "If you want Michael to live, you must move to the

country."

Eventually we bought a small farm in Kansas where we cultivated a huge vegetable garden with fruit trees, berries, raising the beef and pork we ate. One perfect August evening after digging potatoes Dad bit into a ripe peach. Juice sliding down his chin he said, "Nothing better than a warm, fresh picked peach." He handed me one. I took a bite into a perfect balance between sweet and tart, firm and luscious. Paradise.

Fast forward 35 years. My partner Charles and I purchased an abandoned stone homestead accomplishing our dream of living in the Flint Hills. The limestone buildings were almost unsalvageable. Walls gave way

The rooves caving. Hundreds of oaks circled us. Many of them centenarians, some approaching two hundred years, inspired us. Grandmother Oak, a survivor of flooding and multiple lightning strikes chided us to keep going.

None of the stone buildings line up. They sit cattywampus making the place look like a medieval village. We renovated, put in geothermal, 20,000 gallons of water catchment, solar panels...planted an orchard with an understory of medicinal plants, wild columbine, berry plants that buzzes with life from early spring into fall. A garden surrounds the house. We grow shitake, oyster, blewits, and wine-cap mushrooms. Chickens turn kitchen scrap into gardener's gold. Clearing the homestead pasture of cedars allowed us to start a herd of Scottish Highland cows. We raise heritage hogs supplementing their organic feed and what they root with acorns. Added goats to our mix. They



Molly, the Highland cow.

were impossible. Then tried sheep. Putting sheep with cows improves grazing efficiency, but requires frequent rotation or the grasses get munched to nothing. That was more than I could handle on our rocky hillsides with a bad back.

Learning to live with wildlife is a primary goal. The loss of habitat, birds, pollinators, diversity, and family run farms invokes despair. When the opportunity to buy 160 acres from a neighbor occurred, we bought it. My desire for knowledge of sustainable, regenerative, radical agriculture intensified. Ed Reznicek, involved early on with the Kansas Rural Center, mentioned KRC when I bought organic chicken feed from him. A strong connection began with KRC when I attended a fall conference which linked me to others sharing my vision of encouraging optimal health in the eco-systems we live in.

Many neighbors thought my effort to farm so idealistically was stupid, unable to understand why I wanted to preserve heritage breeds. Why didn't I choose Black Angus or Hereford? Highland

cows don't need much fussing. In a decade we haven't assisted in birthing or lost a calf. Their magnificent horns keep the coyotes at bay. According to some studies Highland beef has less cholesterol than chicken. The meat



14 months after replanting native prairie and forbes.

is top notch.

Since 2007 we've eliminated ten thousand cedar trees, thinned the woods so that the oaks, sycamores, hickory, walnut trees, keystone species could gain more ground, providing a better home for wildlife. The beavers are now thriving that we ask neighbors not to kill them. With 50 acres of good bottom ground, farmed

with herbicides and pesticides since WWII we returned 30 acres to native prairie, and planted 20 acres in oats and cowpeas--- helping the soil to restore organic material and encourage micro-organisms to thrive. After bailing we planted a cover crop mix of red ripper cow peas, mung beans, crimson clover, sunn hemp, vetch, sorghum-sedan, pearl millet, grazing corn, collards, purple top turnip, buckwheat, sunflowers, gourds, and okra which we also bailed. This crazy, wonderful mix really got people talking. The pollinators celebrated.

The last two years we've planted sorghum-sudangrass and got a tremendous yield. The cows love it. We didn't heed local advice to use herbicides to manage weeds to

increase yield. It wasn't necessary. Cutting back the weeds the first year in a few sections of the newly planted native prairie is the only active weed control we've used on farm ground. Drilling the seed keeps the weeds down. After bailing the 20 acres the cows forage on the stubble, aerate the soil, and fertilize. This is a satisfying cycle.

Our KRC friends make this journey less lonely. The way we farm has begun to influence our neighbors. We've built good relationships, and understand the value of helping one another. This year we're partnering with an original homesteading family to plant and harvest organic sorghum-sedan. It turns out their Black Angus love it. Another neighbor has bought Highland

heifers from us. Slowly things change for the better.

I'm often aware of the Indigenous people who were forcibly removed from these hills as I walk the land. Sometimes I find an artifact and am transported back. This elicits grief and more despair. There is definitely more to figure out, to help generate true equilibrium. Starting this adventure as we moved into our elder years, even with all of our blunders, gratifies a deep yearning for real intersection with the life below, above, all around, flying, metamorphizing, creeping, leaping... It's humbling, as it exhausts and rejuvenates, transforming despair into a drive to do more that heals and celebrates this small patch of paradise.



The beautiful upper meadow after clearing out the overgrowth of red cedars.



Here is 20 acres of bottom land planted in sorghum-sudangrass. Michael stopped using pesticides 3 years ago.

After countless hours contemplating our food systems while working my farm, I find myself asking why we haven't confronted existing food disparities by subsidizing local food production. As our food safety nets exist, we only subsidize the consumption of food for the 40 million people – 12 million children included – who lack sufficient sustenance. Though programs like SNAP are currently necessary, I question its systemic effectiveness. After all, the USDA has documented that our food insecure population has remained between 10-14% for the past 30 years.

As a fruit and veggie farmer in Douglas

County who wants to help end food apartheid, statistics even worse than the national average surround me. I further question who ultimately benefits from the arrangements of our food systems. The answers are not often those who are actually growing the food.

People need something drastically different, and I believe in

establishing Food as a Public Work (FPW). What society funds is a direct reflection of its values. Unanswered and unchallenged inequities in one of the richest countries in the world are, as well. By realizing FPW we can localize food production while providing living wages and benefits to farmers.



Photo Credit: Connie Fiorella Fitzpatrick

By enacting this idea with an equity approach we can also begin to reconcile some of the racial inequities in agriculture.

In the working plan, 16 farmers would operate across vegetable, orchard, and animal production, as well as food logistics. The department could run on a \$1 million operating budget and

provide around \$5 million in produce and prepared food services annually in return. With small processing infrastructure included, the site could provide below market rate use of facilities that small farmers in our area so desperately need for animal and value-added processing. Further details of how

FPW could be structured are open-sourced on [my website\(www.masefarm.org\)](http://www.masefarm.org).

Federally speaking, the money is there. Annual Ag spending proves this every year. The US spent \$120 billion on agriculture in 2020

alone. Just 4.3% of that spending could set up 52 FPW Farm Endowments to the tune of \$100 million each. This amount would be enough for 50+ acres of endangered Ag-land acquisition, \$20 million in small processing facilities, \$10 million for equipment, and 50+ years of operating budget. Carry that out over the span of a 5-8 year farm bill (260-416, \$100 million

farm endowments), and we may have something systems altering on our hands. 400 of these realizes \$2 billion dollars in direct food resources annually while localizing more food, building equity in agriculture, protecting precious agriculturally rich soil resources, and providing 6400 farmers with dignified careers.

We must collectively begin campaigning our leaders for FPW. If you want to make your voice heard, Maseualkualli Farms

will be launching a letter writing campaign soon. On Saturday June 11th at 3:00 PM, I will be part of a panel at the Lawrence Public Library titled Native Plants and the Human Connection. At 4:00 PM, I will be hosting a letter writing workshop to help folks collectively speak their truths to power. To make this campaign more accessible, I will provide the workshop materials and action steps on the farm's [Instagram page](#) and on the [farm's website: https://www.masefarm.org](https://www.masefarm.org).

Our political leaders already understand jobs programs and public works projects; statistics on hunger, disparities, and inequities; the declared human right to food; and the fact that the pursuit of happiness cannot happen on an empty stomach. Feeding people in need shouldn't be a brave political act, and I intend on presenting these plans to leaders who aspire to realize stronger food systems and a better fed, more just future.



KANAS RURAL CENTER PRESENTS:

Sunflower Stories, Soil Health Practices, the Farm Bill and more...

★★★★★

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The new Integrated Voter Engagement (IVE) program, Sunflower Stories, will specifically focus on advocating for and amplifying the stories of farmers and their foodshed communities in rural and underserved regions of Kansas who influence the growth of diverse food production and strengthen regional food system resilience. These goals will be accomplished by 1) engaging with one urban and three rural communities through Community Conversations/Meals and Farm Tours 2) working with community stakeholders to develop policy informational toolkits 3) produce a series of short films, a mini-podcast, written articles for the KRC Rural Papers publication and utilizing the KRC web site as a story sharing platform. Sunflower Stories builds upon KRC's previous IVE work connecting the importance of voting and civic engagement with long-term individual and community health.

For a proposed urban project, I have developed a relationship with the Central Topeka Grocery Oasis (CTGO), a well-established nonprofit working to get a store

to serve approximately 13,000 residents in a community of nine neighborhoods which is now a federally designated food desert (see Policy Watch article No.13, April 1). In 2020, CTGO utilized an awarded \$12,500 grant through the Kansas Health Foundation to complete a market study to be used to attract potential grocers. Since then, the CTGO has met with and engaged area residents, City of Topeka policy makers, Joint Economic Development Organization (JEDO), the Shawnee County

entities to achieve its mission. The CTGO is committed to a full-service grocery store, not a pop-up kiosk that wouldn't offer a full compliment of healthy foods and might not respect the low-to moderate-income individuals and families that inhabit the city center through not accepting WIC and SNAP.

I recently met in-person with the CTGO Board Chair and Treasurer, where I introduced them to an underserved produce grower who grew up in Central Topeka and



Two of the zip codes affected by losing the grocery store in central Topeka have the county's highest rate of people struggling to stock their pantries — nearly a third of the population.

Health Department, local and state nonprofits, Washburn University Small Business Dept. (including students who have presented via PowerPoint to the CTGO board) and other individuals and

currently vends within CTGO community boundaries at a farmer's market. This farmer has been included in conversations about the project, including the possibility of supplying produce

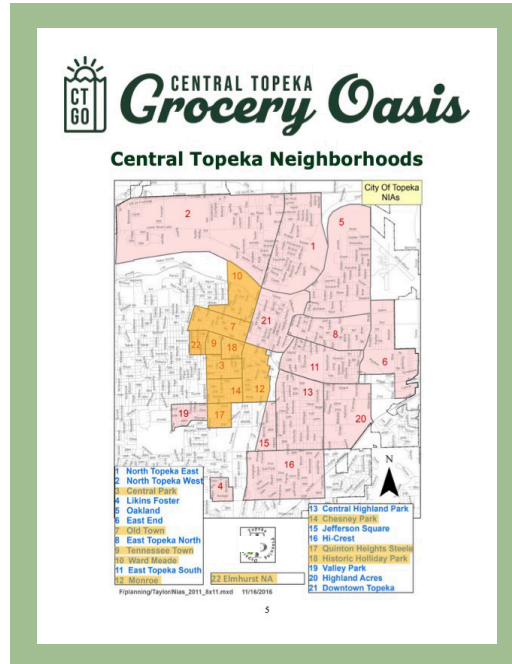
Program Updates

Jackie Keller
Sunflower Stories Update

for Community Meals (s) and ultimately the planned future store. Last evening, I attended one of the bi-weekly, nine-member CTGO board meetings when discussion included future Community Conversation/Meal events and dissemination of the Washburn student's PowerPoint presentation.

Selection of the three rural communities is also in process. I've had live face-to-face contact and subsequent communication with the organizer of the Marion County Natural Springs Tour (led by Rex Buchanan) and the Flint Hills Counterpoint event I'll be attending on Sat. June 4 in Peabody. I've zoom met with a couple who have been instrumental in the revitalization of Humboldt in Allen County. They own several small businesses, serve

on the City Council and are well-connected to food system workers including a local butcher and those associated with school/community gardens, a farmer's market/csa and restaurants. They're planning to give



me a tour of relevant community projects while I'm in neighboring

Iola for the Southeast KS Hunger Summit on June 6- topics include Food Pantry Inclusivity, Community Work, Transportation in Rural Kansas, SNAP and Farmers Markets/Participation and Rural Policy Barriers to Food Accessibility.

I've connected with contacts in Elk, Marshall and Wallace counties and researched farms in Reno and Rush counties. Research has also included regenerative agriculture training, residential agriculture experience/education for urban school children, community accomplishments in Arma aided by Live Well Crawford County, SNAP/DUFB, county health rankings, food and farm councils and food desserts.

Program Updates

Jackie Keller
WFAN Conservation Innovation Grant (CIG)

The Women Food and Ag Network/CIG meeting on May 9 explained summer training for (three) Learning Circles that I will host, where Stewardship Ambassadors describe conservation practices they've adopted on their land, including their relationship with their operator(s). I have met with a neighboring landowner who required her tenant farmer to plant fifty acres of oats/cow peas. She has agreed to be Ambassador for learning circle (s), so that other women landowners may learn from her experience. Another landowner in Shawnee county has agreed to be a participant to learn what she might be able to incorporate into her family operation.

As we look to the future, Kansas Rural Center (KRC) understands the importance of looking to our youth, and Farm to Plate programs is not lost on KRC. We tirelessly work to uplift the farmers and educators that work to bring fresh local foods to our community members. One of these programs is the Farm to Plate program hosted by the Kansas Department of Education (KSDE), which works toward the goal of more local foods being served in Child Nutrition

Programs by educating farmers, schools, and childcare providers on

how to connect. In this article, I am reflecting on a conversation with Barb Depew, KSDE, Farm to Plate Director, to identify barriers to Farm to Plate programs, as well as recommendations for overcoming those barriers

When the KSDE Child Nutrition & Wellness program under the leadership of Barb Depew, Farm to Plate Project Director established a Farm to Plate workgroup, one

of the first tasks was to define barriers that may prevent successful unions between farmers and child nutrition programs. Where do they find farmers to fulfill orders? What is the guarantee that participating farmers will have enough of a product to supply the needs of a Child Nutrition Program? There is some hesitancy on the part of the meal programs to incorporate freshly farmed foods because they see it as more work, particularly if it is going to be from-scratch products. What are the added

costs? Does this mean extra work for the staff? What food is considered local?

How do Child Nutrition Programs get fresh local foods into their children's meal plans? It involves the offsite producers and any gardening program may be doing, on-site ag projects that they have on their school properties, or ag programs that they can connect with. Knowing that milk is already

local, KSDE began educating about milk as a local food. The next step was to promote all other local foods to showcase their availability. Local farmers can contract seasonally or year-round, depending on their product and the Program's needs. Being the wheat state, KSDE encourages local grains to be incorporated with from-scratch baking using local flours. KSDE's focus on getting local grains in schools is an exciting avenue for specialty crop grain producers. Any way to add those products, help

for everybody.

If a farmer is interested in getting their products into the Child Nutrition Programs, Depew suggests presenting their intentions to the administrators and the school board. She recalls that in her experience, that farmers backed by the administration have had the most success and longevity. The school district's Food Service Director will be the

them to market, and to let the students, staff, and community know where they come from will be a win

“let the students as well as the staff and community know, so that it will be a win for everybody. “ -Barb Depew

farmer’s point of contact, as they are required to know the details of their district’s child nutrition programs and can offer guidance as a new farmer finds their place in the program. Together they, the farmer and authorized representative, make a plan that includes where the products fit into the menu, what amount the farmer can supply to the schools, and how it will be delivered and picked up. It is important to note that these items cannot come to the school processed. Unprocessed agricultural products that retain their inherent character can be sold to Child Nutrition Programs. Items such as fresh fruits and vegetables can be minimally processed, such as chopped or frozen. Canned fruits and vegetables, jams, jellies, and honey can NOT be purchased independently through local sources. Local agricultural products such as eggs, meat, poultry and milk cannot be purchased by schools unless they come from a licensed facility and have been inspected.

Having a farmer visit the school or childcare center or bringing the kids to the farm is the best way to

solidify this relationship between the farmer and school district by creating loyal consumers out of the kids. There are many other avenues to creating a familiarity that overlaps with the classroom with projects around food, such as vegetable tastings, garden clubs, farm tours, cooking classes, biology classes, and working with shop classes to build appropriate agricultural infrastructure. By getting the students involved through the aforementioned programs, fresh food becomes less mysterious and more inviting when presented in the lunch line.

Once the schools or childcare centers receive the fresh produce, particularly leafy greens, they must clean it. The school or childcare center may have to purchase some equipment like salad spinners to clean then the produce. That means there is some extra labor involved. Sourcing local beef may have to buy burger presses if they don’t want to pay more for patties. Even though it may cost more initially, the advantages of local food are worth it. The school lunch will have increased quality, more nutritional benefits, and longer shelf life.

Depew recommended that Community Foundations may be promising avenues for additional financial support for these projects.

Community members that would like to support farm to plate can contact their administrator or food service director or can even volunteer to join the School Wellness Committee which can often be an avenue to increase Farm to Plate.

Stay tuned for the audio of this conversation with Barb Depew to be released on Kansas Rural Center’s podcast.
Data Central:
<https://bit.ly/3MJLc4B>
Beef to School Example - Lincoln USD 298:
<https://bit.ly/3LJLrLO>
Farm to Plate Progress Article from Kansas Farmer magazine
<https://bit.ly/3sYUPVI>
Reach Barb Depew, KSDE, Farm to Plate Director, @ bdepew@ksde.org
Reach Charlotte French @ charlotte@kansasaruralcenter.org

USD 497 Farm to School Success

Megan Gladbach, the Megan Gladbach, Experiential Learning Director of USD 497 in Lawrence Kansas, took time to meet with me and describe the many successes in incorporating agriculture into the classrooms throughout the district.

The elementary students use the mystery science curriculum which educates students about pollinators, seed dispersal, food webs, nutritional energy, water cycles and the muscular skeletal system; all of which directly tie into the way we feed ourselves.

The middle schoolers get more hands-on in the garden and produce food as part of their FACTS class. Most of the produce is donated to food insecure families while some is kept for their pizza and salsa making projects.

The high school students garden on a larger scale, which can include experimenting with perennial food forest projects, raised bed planting, and the stewardship of native prairie.

They are then able to sell their produce at the Lawrence Farmers Market, which is one of the many rewards for participating in these programs. In addition to the classic farm to school curriculum there are also many cross over opportunities like working with the shop classes to build permanent infrastructure. The high schoolers put their cooking skills to the test by creating recipes with their homegrown foods and performing demonstrations for their younger schoolmates.

Outside of the produce that the students proudly grow, USD 497 is excited to be welcoming back the local farmers they partnered with pre-covid. All local farmers come from within a 75-mile radius. If you are interested in participating in USD 497's food program or would like to view and model their successes, visit their website @ <https://www.usd497.org/Page/7076>



Above: Students working their raised bed gardens.



Kids enjoy their goulash made with garden fresh tomatoes.



Photos courtesy of USD 497, with parent permission.

2022 is the second year that the KRC has secured funding from the National Healthy Soils Policy Network to work on legislation in Kansas that helps to promote, incentivize, and make it easier for farmers to adopt more and better soil health practices. As part of the project this year KRC gathered four farmers to critique recent legislation introduced in the Kansas State House (HB2310), offer suggestions for how to improve it, and communicate those ideas directly to lawmakers. Farmers Brice Custer, Lucinda Stuenkel, Jack Geiger, and Jennifer Simmelink hail from across Kansas and utilize a variety of production models that emphasize different soil health practices ranging from cover crops and grazing more diverse crop rotations or transitioning to no-till.

On February 4th KRC Board President Zack Pistora, myself, and the farmer cohort met to discuss the bill and state government support for healthy soils, then met with lawmakers for the second half of the event to discuss improvements with them and answer questions. Attendees were pleased to have to the opportunity to dialog with the HB2310's sponsor Representative

Rui Xu, as well as Representative Christina Haswood and Senator Marci Francisco. Some suggestions offered by the farmers included:

- Incentivize the planting of “trap crop strips” like pollinator strips on the edges of fields, which will attract beneficial insects to combat pest pressure as well as helping to mitigate field runoff.

- Kansas’s agriculture education institutions need to do more research and testing on cover crops, inter-seeding cover crops with cash crops, integrating livestock into cover crops, carbon sequestration, and more conservation practices currently not receiving enough attention and funding.

- Risk of economic failure is the biggest barrier to entry for farmers, so adopting new conservation and soil health practices must be accomplished without a significant economic loss. “We need funding to support people who are making the transition to cover crops and soil health practices because it usually takes about three years to realize an economic benefit from the improvement from cover crops,” urged Lucinda Stuenkel, who owns

and manages Sunny Day Farms near Palmer. “If you can stretch that funding match out to five or seven years, that’s actually the best because [farmers] not only see the soil health improving but they experience a yield bump and I think that will convert more people long term than just trying it once and forgetting it.”

- Outreach to and investing in beginning farmers and ranchers and their ability to adopt healthy soils practices should be paramount.

We really appreciated the time elected officials spent with us, and I think we had a great discussion with everyone present. The many years of expertise and care for their land that the farmers brought to the meeting really enriched our conversation. As discussion around the next Farm Bill ramps up in the rest of 2022 and 2023 KRC will keep working to provide education on soil health for farmers and advocate for better support for soil health and conservation efforts at the state and federal level. Stay tuned for KRC’s upcoming podcast series on soil health and the Farm Bill!

Even in the breadbasket of America, the term “food system” inevitably causes eyes to glaze over. The invisible process by which food is (or isn’t) accessed is frequently misunderstood, even by seasoned agriculture and public health professionals. Often assumed to include only the production and processing of food, a food system describes how food travels from the field to the processor, to the grocery store, how it is purchased and prepared, and what happens to any leftover product. If any one part of the system fails to function as it should, the whole thing grinds to a halt and can trigger a tidal wave of economic and health consequences.

It’s no secret that the COVID-19 pandemic laid bare the fragility of food systems. Producers poured out milk, left produce to rot, and slaughtered livestock when school and restaurant closures disrupted the supply chain. Meanwhile, nearly half a million Kansans went hungry last year. For households with kids, the percentage who didn’t know where their next meal was coming from jumped from

13.6 to 28%. Over two years later, Kansas is still reeling from the effects.

Through it all, in more than thirty counties across the state, small but mighty groups of community leaders and stakeholders have been bailing water out of the leaking boat that is their community food system. Known as food, farm, and policy councils, these groups are appointed by their local governments (mostly counties) and tasked with bringing together stakeholders from diverse food-related sectors, examining challenges faced by their local food system, and making local policy recommendations. Food councils in Kansas advocate for policies that address food insecurity in their communities, support small food-based businesses, and support the growth and development of school and community gardens. Since 2010, more than 30 councils have been established across the state, representing 76% of Kansans. From Colby to Kansas City and from Pittsburgh to Manhattan, Sunflower states are taking control of their local food systems by changing the policies, systems,

and environment in which their community accesses food.

To support and unite their efforts, the Kansas Food Action Network (formerly known as the Kansas Alliance for Wellness) was established in 2014 through a Kansas Health Foundation Grant. Tasked with providing technical assistance to support the work of new and existing food councils in Kansas, the initiative operated under the leadership of the American Heart Association until January 2020. At that time, the torch was handed to KC Healthy Kids to expand the program and support the growing range of food policy change being undertaken by food councils in Kansas. Today, the Network provides technical assistance, coaching, peer-to-peer learning and network opportunities to support growth and development of food system leadership in Kansas.

In addition to supporting councils in the implementation of local policies, the Network facilitates a statewide advocacy agenda focused on strengthening the food system in Kansas.

Continued: Partner Spotlight

Miranda Miller-Klugesherz
Kansas Food Action Network

Legislative Priorities:

- Eliminate the state sales tax on food
- Increase SNAP enrollment among eligible Kansans
- Expand access to the WIC program
- Support increased funding for farm to school programs
- Establish a statewide Food and Farm Policy Council
- Review cottage food regulations

If you eat and live in Kansas, you are a participant in our state food system. There is no way to “opt out.” As such, access to a food system that is reliable and resilient - no matter what comes - is a right of every Kansan. Check out our website to find your local food council or reach out to our team if you want to learn more about starting one in your community.

Kansas Food Action Network
<https://bit.ly/3t9vRCG>

SNAP MATTERS by Storycorps
<https://bit.ly/3wXaBkY>

Good Food Funding Guide
<https://bit.ly/3taTnPY>

Guide to KS Farmers Markets
<https://bit.ly/38AG5oE>

Contact Miranda @
mklugesherz@kchealthykids.org

Save the Date



As we launch into our summer donation drive, regroup from the most recent legislative session, and continue marching forward with work on our many educational and outreach initiatives; the board of Kansas Rural Center couldn't help but to feel like a “thank you” was in order in the form of an event.

To all of our kind donors, please join us for an evening of music, conversation, and hors d'ouvres on Friday, June 17th 6-8pm.

This get together will be taking place at The Roost. Tom Buller, Zack Pistora and Mary Fund will speak briefly on the outlook of Kansas Rural Center. The current staff members will be present to visit and provide more information on current projects.

If you would like to bring a friend, or haven't yet donated, we simply ask that you leave a gift of gratitude at the door.

RSVP now at <https://bit.ly/3PacNak>

June

Community Calendar

S	M	T	W	T	F	S
			1	2	3	4
5	6	7	8	9	10	11
12	13	14	15	16	17	18
19	20	21	22	23	24	25
26	27	28	29	30		

Kansas Rural Center and our friends have many exciting events coming up! Visit the Community Calendar on KRC's website to stay up-to-date.

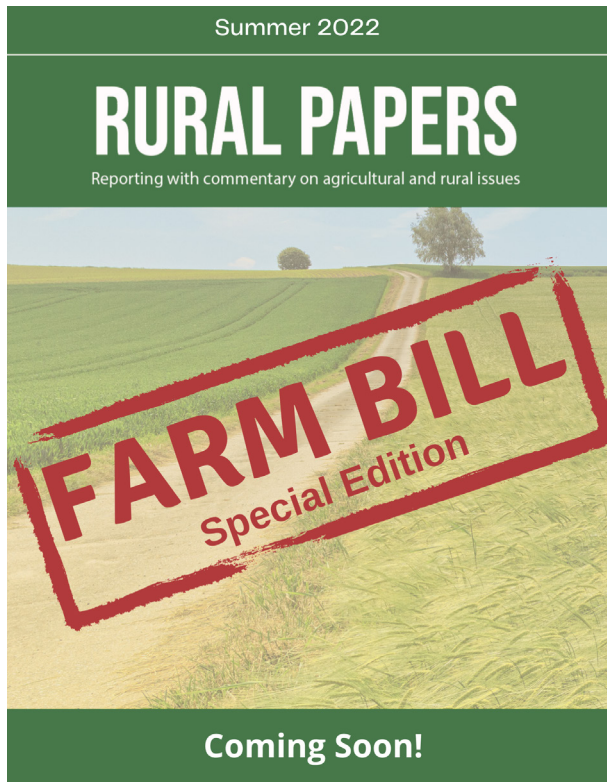
kansasruralcenter.org/community-calendar

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Seeking Women With Stories

If you have a story to share, we want to help you tell it.

Kansas Rural Center in conjunction with the Women Food & Ag Network is hosting a series of learning circles geared towards women in ag.

If you are a female landowner interested in conversing with other farmers and landowners to motivate change, please reach out to Jackie Keller.

jackie@kansasruralcenter.org

Have you noticed the weather changing a bit, both literally and figuratively? As a reader of the Rural Papers, you are already interested in Kansas Rural Center's work. As Kansans, the Rural Center's staff and board members work tirelessly to provide the most significant impact possible on our ever-changing landscapes.

Kansas Rural Center was created in 1979 in response to the looming farm crisis and environmental challenges. Throughout the years, KRC has evolved to include educational and policy work to promote sustainable agriculture, green economics, and food sovereignty. This vital work addresses the most pressing climate and sustainability issues on both a global and local scale. How good of neighbors are we? How resilient is our home? Kansas Rural Center works closely with like-minded partners to share knowledge and to support each other's work.

Current Kansas Rural Center projects include:

- Beginning farmers and rancher training.
- Soil health education.
- Farm-to-school support.
- Food system infrastructure development.
- Integrated voter engagement.
- Land acknowledgment training.
- Lobbying on behalf of their constituents.
- Developmental training for storytelling

If the subjects listed above are important to you, please consider becoming a contributor to the funding of the Kansas Rural Center and our essential work.

Your generous gifts will fund scholarships, create publications and educational materials, KRC's legislative representation, the annual conference, and the staff's time to execute their many projects effectively and provide assistance to community members.

You may contribute once, or set up a reoccurring contribution with the amount of your choice, to Kansas Rural Center by returning the back cover or Rural Papers with your contribution amount or by visiting kansasruralcenter.org/friendsofkrgrp.

Thank you for your kindness and support.



Kansas Rural Center
PO Box 781057
Wichita, KS 67278
866-579-5469

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www.kansasruralcenter.org

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