

Spring 2023

RURAL PAPERS

Reporting with commentary on agricultural and rural issues



Rural Cinema • Growing Under Cover • Community Snapshots
Board Member Spotlight • Emerging Farmers • Food Hub Update
Sunflower Stories • Wildfire Planning and Prevention • Rural Grocery



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WHAT WE DO

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

OUR MISSION

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

OUR VISION

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

RURAL PAPERS

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

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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. He also holds a seat on the Harvey County Food and Farm council.



PROGRAM COORDINATOR - Jackie Keller

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



COMMUNICATIONS AND EVENT COORDINATOR - Charlotte French-Allen

Charlotte grew up in Rossville, Kansas, where she learned firsthand that small towns and rural lifestyles are the 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, wildlife rehab, and Junior League chapters.



Greetings from Tom Buller

Spring is getting going across Kansas and for the Kansas Rural Center that means a transition in the work we do. Over the winter we try to focus on farmer education as that is a down time for many farmers, but now things are things starting to get busier in the fields and pastures across the state. This winter we hosted online Farm to School trainings, as well as the first year of our Farm Beginnings program. We've continued to make connections in communities across the state, and worked on developing our Sunflower Stories work and released our first podcast on that work, an interview with Arkenberg Farms near Topeka.

As the weather warms, we look forward to getting out more and visiting with farmers across the state at farmers markets and on farms. As spring progresses our policy focus changes as well. The Kansas

Legislative session approaches First Adjournment on April 6 working furiously to pass bills for this session. At this point the bright spot seems to be that tax bills that are currently in play will bring an earlier end to the state sales tax on groceries and food ingredients. One proposes ending the state sales tax on groceries and food ingredients as early as July 1, 2023. That would be a great relief to Kansas families. There is also promise that the legislature will take some long-needed action on the water problems facing Kansas. There are a couple of bills addressing these issues that look to become law in some form. Neither will solve the state's water issues, but finally having some action is good news. While that looks promising, there are so many other pieces moving it is hard to know what things will look like when the dust finally settles later this spring. On the

federal level this is appropriations season for next year's spending and once that wraps up we will return our focus to the work continuing on the next Farm Bill. There are currently great opportunities for the next farm bill to strengthen local food systems, especially meat processing, and support increased farm conservation to make sure that all farmers can benefit from the Federal farm programs.

This year we are hoping to expand our outreach efforts across the state and we're looking for interested folks to help with that process. If you are interested in learning more about the work KRC does and how you can share that with your community reach out to our Communications Coordinator Charlotte French-Allen, (charlotte@kansasruralcenter.org).

Rural Cinema Partnership with Prairie Band Potawatomi Nation



We are pleased to announce that Kansas Rural Center and Prairie Band Potawatomi Nation have been selected as recipients of Rural Cinema 2023 for Environmental Justice Leaders to host community film series. Food Sovereignty and Water Quality will be featured topics.

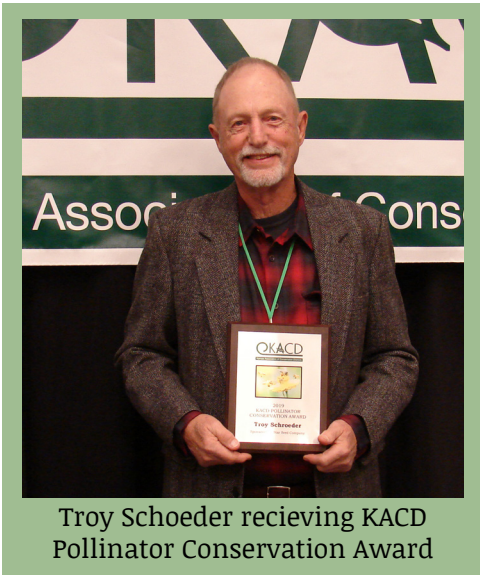
The Rural Cinema Project is a training institute and community engagement program aimed at supporting community leaders located in rural areas and small towns across the United States to utilize documentary films to advance their local efforts to move people to action on critical issues facing their area.

This year's cohort will participate in Rural Cinema's virtual training institute covering Working Films' Eight Elements of Putting Films to Work, a curriculum focused on best practices for using documentary film for change. At the end of the training and through individualized consultation, community leaders will organize multiple screening events over the course of the year.

Meet Mikayla "MK" Kerron the Lead Partner to KRC on this project. She has been working closely with Jackie Keller, KRC's Sunflower Stories Program Coordinator, to apply for, and now implement this grant. Mikayla is an Environmental/GIS Technician for the Prairie Band Potawatomi Nation where she coordinates the Clean Water Act 319 Nonpoint Source Pollution, Wetlands, and GIS Programs. She holds a B.A. in Indigenous and American Indian Studies from Haskell Indian Nations University where she focused her studies on climate change in Indigenous communities and Traditional Ecological Knowledge.



Long-Time KRC Supporter Prepares to Pass Torch



Troy Schoeder receiving KACD Pollinator Conservation Award

I grew up on a small conventional farm near Albert, KS (15 mi west of Great Bend). We had a two-cylinder John Deere D, an 8N Ford, and small tillage equipment. My first test of manhood was when I was able to start the D by turning the flywheel. I enjoyed working on the farm. We had a small cow herd, raised chickens for food and eggs, and milked a cow for our milk. My mother worked on the farm, and my dad had to get an off-farm job in the oil field to supplement the farm income. That still sounds familiar to a lot of small farms today.

I graduated from Otis High School and attended Fort Hays State University. After a couple of years in the Army, including one in Vietnam, I went back to school at FHSU and got an MS in biology. I've always had an interest in wildlife and was fortunate enough to get a job with the then "Forestry Fish and Game Commission." I started as a fisheries biologist stationed at Council Grove Reservoir, where I learned to love native grass and the Flint Hills. After ten years, I was promoted to a Regional Fisheries Supervisor position in Hays, where I had responsibility for fisheries management in the western half of the state.

Although my responsibilities changed at the discretion of leadership, I

remained in Hays until retirement. This gave me an opportunity to help with the family farm as my dad's health was failing. The last few years of my career was spent as Ag Liaison/ Farm Bill Coordinator working to expand conservation and make the USDA farm bill more wildlife friendly. It was rewarding working in both the national and state arenas. Along with help from other state coordinators nationwide and NGOs like the National Wildlife Federation, we had much success.

In 2002 my son became a partner in the family farm. We sold all tillage equipment and went no-till cold turkey. That allowed us to run the farm in spite of both having full-time jobs. We participated in many of the USDA conservation programs. We enrolled marginal land in CRP, used EQIP to buy our first no-till drill, and used continuous CRP to put field borders around most of our crop fields. These borders were a mix of grasses and wildflowers and served as a kind of signature, although most neighbors thought we were crazy. I managed Schroeder Family Farms for ten years and still live on the farmstead built by my grandfather with my wife Mandy and two red setters. My son took over farm operations in 2017, and my grandson now does much of the hands-on farm work. I feel good about the farm started by my great grandfather staying in family hands.

In recent years I have become more interested in wildflowers used by monarchs and other pollinators. First, I planted my yard, then other small public and private areas. We enrolled in CSP, which allowed us to take 60+ acres out of production and plant to monarch-beneficial plants. It has been enjoyable to watch these fields mature. One 10-acre field turned out great, and I refer to that as my "feel-good spot." I have received a few awards for my pollinator efforts.

After retirement from KDWP in 2006, I served as president of the Kansas Wildlife Federation and worked part-time for Kansas Rural Center in the clean water farms program. I had been a huge fan of KRC for many years, and it was a pleasure working with folks that I admired, like Mary Fund. Soon after the program ended, I was elected to the KRC board and have served several terms. I represented some areas that were lacking, such as conventional farming, wildlife, and western Kansas.

Although I enjoyed my time on the board, especially working with other board members and staff, I plan to retire at the end of my present term. I will continue to support KRC in any way I can. I am particularly impressed with the current board and staff and am confident we will do even greater things in the future.



Troy's Pollinator-Friendly Yard



Field Border Along Troy's Driveway

Introduction From Growing Under Cover

High tunnels are plastic covered structures that allow the farmer additional control over the environmental conditions faced by his/her crops. Sometimes these structures are called hoop houses and the terms can be used interchangeably. These structures are distinct from related types of poly-covered structures in the following way- they are different from so-called low tunnels in that they are built of a size that allows growers to access the crops inside while standing up and the primary distinction between high tunnels and greenhouses is the lack of permanent supplemental heating in a high tunnel. Some growers will add a bit of heat to a high tunnel to prevent loss of a sensitive crop on an exceptionally cold night, but investments in permanent area wide heaters is usually when a structure crosses over to being considered a greenhouse.

The most obvious use for these structures is season extension but the ability to add environmental control, not just of temperature but also of moisture levels has shown to improve crop quality and can provide higher yields of certain crops if managed correctly. On farms utilizing high tunnels, they are usually the most valuable growing space available, short of a heated greenhouse, but they are not a cure-all. As stated by a grower in the first volume of Growing Under Cover "High Tunnels are a great tool, but they are just a tool. If you are doing a poor job raising produce now, putting up a tunnel will not fix that." High tunnels can be a tool that effectively functions as a profitable enterprise on its own, or to help make existing farm enterprises more profitable, if managed correctly.

This second volume of Kansas Rural Center's Growing Under Cover series provides information to help Kansas farmers who have decided to use high tunnels think about the options available. The first volume, as it is

subtitled, is a "Guide to Polytunnel Options for Kansas Growers", so it focuses mostly on the structural options- what kind of tunnel to build, how to build it, and so on. This volume focuses more on the use of the tunnel, and help to figure out what to grow inside and how to grow it. This guide is for farmers who are looking to add high tunnels, to help them envision the ways a high tunnel could fit into their farm operation, but hopefully it can serve as a valuable resource for those who already have a high tunnel and are seeking to optimize its use. On almost any farm, without year-round heated greenhouses, the ground under a high tunnel becomes the most valuable and expensive growing space with good reason, it can be the most profitable through careful planning and management. This work will provide a foundation for growers seeking to understand the management practices and needs of various crops within a high tunnel, and provide case studies of Kansas growers who have figured out how to manage their high tunnels effectively in our state.

In order to ground this work for Kansas growers, this volume will begin by exploring five case studies of growers from around the state of Kansas who are successfully using high tunnels. Brice Wiswell of Gieringer's Orchard, Jill Elmers of Moon on the Meadow, Jay Schleicter of Jay's Jams and Jellies, and Todd Griggs of Griggs Brothers Farms and Christi and Chis Jansen of C and C High Tunnels, are all using high tunnels very successfully on their farms across the state of Kansas.

All of these five farms use high tunnels expertly but they use them in a variety of different ways that are best suited to their overall farming operations and production goals. Both Gieringer's and Griggs Brothers use high tunnels mostly to grow tomatoes. The other three farms also grow tomatoes in their tunnels, but in more mixed

patterns, so they use different growing systems. Three of the case studies have their primary production in cities and towns (Moon on the Meadow in Lawrence, Griggs Brothers in Augusta, and C and C in Scandia) and two are more rural. This is somewhat unique to high tunnels as the high value of the yield can make them viable for intensive use in more expensive urban spaces. All of these growers have found tunnels to be a successful enough feature of their production systems to expand the number over time, so they each have from 5 to 8 tunnels in production or under construction.

A note should be made about Kansas geography. There are great differences in climatic conditions from the west to east, and it is no coincidence that most of the stories found in these pages are from the eastern half of the state. While the entire state of Kansas is a challenging environment to grow fruits and vegetables, the Western half is particularly foreboding, and the challenges there can make high tunnels more useful and more fraught. The wind especially can be challenging, but it seems that a well-constructed tunnel intensively cultivated could help manage many of the other challenges in the region- temperature extremes and water scarcity. The five operations chosen as examples are by no means the only successful high tunnel users in the state, but they do offer a variety of different styles that we hope will be instructive.

After exploring the successful examples of high tunnel operation in Kansas, the focus will turn to specific information on using high tunnels. First, we will explore an overview of general management concerns facing high tunnel users, and then more specific growing information on 8 different groups of crops, including some analysis of the economic potential of each. We will look at

tomatoes, spinach, cucumbers, baby leaf salad mix, peppers, leafy greens, roots, head lettuce. This list was taken from a survey of high tunnel growers conducted by the Kansas Rural Center in 2013 of the most commonly grown crops in high tunnels in Kansas but is by no means definitive of crops that high tunnels can be used for.

Where possible we have included an analysis of the economic potential of the various crops as information was available. The economic information has come from a variety of sources from across the country, but we have developed information from Kansas growers where we could, because the growing and profit potential of a crop in one environment do not always transfer to other regions and biomes. That being said, even the information developed from Kansas data are meant for informational purpose only, as different farms have vastly different production costs, sales channels and pricing potential, so the best way to figure out the enterprise potential on your farm is to tailor the budgets to your situation, to explore local prices and market opportunities and at the end of the day tracking your own information.

One thing to note, while several crops, tomatoes, spinach, baby leaf salad mix, have impressive per square foot profit potentials, many do not seem to have the same potential. Growers should still consider growing these as part of an overall marketing/tunnel management strategy if they find a benefit in producing those crops, or if they can manage production costs more closely, perhaps grow those crops very profitably. As an example of how this can be achieved, Iowa State has produced an enterprise budget for a mixed use tunnel that shows multiple crops being grown in a tunnel. The overall per square foot revenue of the tunnel is quite good (see Appendix). Their Decisionmaker tool also allows a grower to consider multiple crops when figuring out how to allocate a tunnel. While some growers do use the entire tunnel for one crop per season, as our case studies show a number of Kansas growers, grow multiple crops simultaneously or multiple crops over the course of a year. This diversity might make the picture look dramatically different, if say a root crop is grown prior to tomatoes in the spring and followed by spinach in the fall. These types of decisions depend

on what markets a farmer is seeing and the farms ability to grow different crops. While tomatoes and baby leaf salad mix can be quite profitable, if the local markets for those crops is already saturated, growers should explore alternatives. For growers at farmer’s markets CSA subscriptions or serving smaller wholesale markets, there is often a great value in having a wide diversity of products, rather than just lots of tomatoes or salad mix. Another way to improve the profitability of all high tunnel crops is through managing the fixed costs. Especially in light of NRCS funding in recent years, these costs can be lower than is shown in the budgets.

This work is intended as a brief introduction for those interested in seriously using high tunnels and it is informed by a rich body of research on high tunnel usage from around the United States. The appendix will provide some tools and resources for those looking to push their knowledge further.

The work to research and write this booklet has been funded by the Kansas Department of Agriculture through the Specialty Crop Block Grant.

Read the full Growing Under Cover

To access your copy of Growing Under Cover please visit bit.ly/growingundercover or email us at info@kansusruralcenter to have a physical copy sent to you.



Growing Under Cover
A Kansas Grower’s Guide

KansasRuralCenter.org



Arkenberg Farm and the Central Topeka Grocery Oasis

Keith and Briana Arkenberg sat down with Jackie and I to record a podcast discussing their work in Topeka and how they have grown into Arkenberg Farms. Here is a summary of our conversation, which you can listen to in podcast form on our website and most podcast apps.

In their early years of marriage, Keith and Brianna lived in an area now defined as Central Topeka, a food desert. This tight-knit neighborhood in Topeka that recently lost its grocery store, is working with the Central Topeka Grocery Oasis to bring food availability back to the community. When the couple realized they were expecting, Keith immediately knew that he wanted their future child to have an upbringing close to nature and connected to their food system.

What started as family land rented to other farmers and a small garden quickly evolved into a business plan after Keith experienced a Mother Earth News Fair in 2015 and began reading the works of Elliot Coleman and Jean-Martin Fortier. He was inspired. When Keith has an idea, he becomes a force. He knew that this was something he could plan, build and manage. Briana agreed to handle the business and sales side of this mission. She prepared for her side of the farming mission by taking a small business class through the city of Topeka. Her class included a stall at the Topeka Farmers Market.

The Farmers Market proved to be a successful avenue for finding customers. Briana wanted to keep their shoppers engaged and decided to explore a CSA model. She began with a punch card to see what people were interested in buying and to ensure steady sales.

The following year The Arkenbergs began the CSA membership model the next season, with 10 members receiving weekly vegetables. As that has become successful, they have decided to tweak the model to an a la cart style to prevent the food waste woes that some members had experienced.

Keith reminds us that he loves the Market Gardening Model because you can scale up and down from season to season. As they continued to expand, they started adding hoop houses to extend their growing season and a processing facility to improve efficiency. Due to their care for their soil over their six growing seasons, they have earned bragging rights on their tasty vegetables and the prolonged shelf life of their products.

Keith's passion goes beyond growing produce and caring for the land. His Youtube channel has hundreds of instructional videos and farm hacks, created so anyone can farm as he does. Many of these videos emphasize do-it-yourself projects that can increase efficiency without incurring high additional costs. He jokes that anyone can put him out of business by following these videos, but maybe the world would be a better place.

Expanding beyond YouTube, Briana dreams of starting an on-site classroom where people of all ages can visit, learn about the farm and develop their skills. They have a you-pick sunflower field and participate in farm tours, including the Kaw Valley Farm Tour.

You can find Arkenberg Farms at the Topeka Farmers Market, Monday Mornings at the Topeka Library Farmers Market, through their CSA program, and at on-site events.



Listen to Keith and Briana's podcast episode here:
<https://bit.ly/sunflowerstories1>

Arkenberg Farms:
arkenbergfarms.com
Facebook: <https://bit.ly/arkarmsfb>
Instagram: <https://bit.ly/arkfarmsinsta>



Briana's CSA Savings Card helped to keep customers coming back.



Popular items at the Arkenberg Farms farmers market booth.



Keith continues to expand the farm and experiment with new produce varieties.

The Co-opportunity of Rural Grocery in Kansas

Background

Since 2007, the Rural Grocery Initiative (RGI) has strived to sustain locally-owned rural grocery stores to enhance community vitality and improve access to healthy food. RGI achieves this mission in a variety of ways: through one-on-one technical assistance, conducting research on relevant rural food access and grocery topics, hosting programs and events like the National Rural Grocery Summit and recent webinar series on business transition planning, and serving as a partner organization with the Kansas Healthy Food Initiative, a program that offers technical assistance and financing to healthy food retail projects in Kansas.



Rial Carver - RGI Program Leader

Table 1. Top Challenges from 2008 and 2021 Rural Grocery Survey

Challenges	2008 Rank	2021 Rank
Competing with large chain grocery stores	1	2
Competing with dollar stores	n/a	1
High operating costs	2	6
Labor availability	3	3
Narrow margins	4	5

In 2008, one of the first projects the newly established Rural Grocery Initiative conducted was the Kansas Rural Grocery Survey. This survey queried rural grocers in Kansas towns of 2,500 or less. The survey results illustrated characteristics, experiences, and top challenges of operating a rural grocery store in Kansas. In 2021, the

Rural Grocery Initiative conducted another Kansas Rural Grocery Survey with a particular interest in seeing how these characteristics had changed since the 2008 survey. The results showed that many of the top rural grocery challenges remain.

In both the 2008 and 2021 surveys, competition was listed as the top challenge for rural grocers. Notably, competition with dollar stores was ranked as #1 in 2021 but was not even an option in the 2008 survey, illustrating how quickly the dollar store has entered and imprinted on the rural food retail scene. In addition to competition, high operating costs (ranked 2nd in 2008 and 6th in 2021), narrow margins (ranked 4th in 2008 and 5th in 2021) and labor availability (ranked 3rd in both surveys) remained top challenges between 2008 and 2021.

The persistence of these rural grocery challenges illustrates the need to think creatively to even the playing field on competition, lower operating costs, and increase profit margins and labor availability to ensure small town grocery stores stay around and thrive.

A Purchasing Cooperative in Southeast Kansas?

In June 2022, the Rural Grocery Initiative held the 7th biennial National Rural Grocery Summit in Wichita, KS. At the closing keynote, four representatives from the Rural Access Distribution (RAD) Co-op in Walsh County, North Dakota shared about an innovative group purchasing strategy to lower costs, increase profit margins and increase competitiveness. The RAD Co-op is comprised of three grocery stores and services two additional communities through a locker system.

The idea left many in the room at the Summit thinking, why can't we do that, right here, in Kansas?



Representatives from the RAD Co-op present at the National Rural Grocery Summit in Wichita in June 2022. Photo Credit: WSU Conference Services

After the Summit, several rural grocers in southeast Kansas began to meet, with the convening support of the Kansas Rural Center, to consider the potential of a group purchasing model, like the one implemented by the RAD Co-op. Meanwhile, the Rural Grocery Initiative applied and received a Rural Cooperative Development Grant from USDA Rural Development. This grant includes four main activities, one of which focuses on exploring the feasibility of a purchasing cooperative in Kansas like the RAD Co-op in Walsh County, ND. Having learned of the potential interest to explore this model in southeast Kansas, RGI held an interest session to see whether this group would consider being our 'test case' for the feasibility study of a purchasing cooperative in rural Kansas.

On January 31, 2023, 11 grocers came together in Iola, KS, to do just that.

Continued ->

Cont. The Co-opportunity of Rural Grocery in Kansas

Researchers from K-State's Department of Agricultural Economics, with expertise in cooperative development, participated in this meeting alongside KRC's Jackie Keller and the Rural Grocery Initiative team. The group talked through the basic characteristics of a purchasing cooperative, shared reflections on the group purchasing model and identified individual strengths and common challenges among stores in the room.



Southeast KS Grocers Interest Session on Jan. 31, 2023



Next, this group will meet with representatives from the RAD Co-op to dig into their recent experience establishing a rural grocery purchasing cooperative. The K-State Agricultural Economics team will collect information from interested grocers and conduct a feasibility study to apply numbers to the concept of a purchasing cooperative. By the end of 2023, the grocers in Southeast Kansas will have valuable information to consider that will aid them in deciding how to move forward and whether the purchasing cooperative model could, in fact, address the persistent challenges facing rural grocery in Kansas.

Wildland Fire Risks and Prevention Strategies

In the past 7 years, Kansans have experienced several destructive wildfires. Prior to 2016, devastation from wildfires was minimal and not often reported. The smoke impacts from fires in Kansas were the more serious issue.



Why are Kansans seeing more frequent large wildfires?

Kansas has faced prolonged drought, elevated temperatures in the summer and warmer winters. Brief intense rain showers have little effect on the deeper soil moisture. The fuel or vegetation moisture is not affected by this type of precipitation, making plants more susceptible to wildfire. The drought combined with the warmer temperatures and the Kansas wind has made it where wildfires that would have normally been caught during initial attack are becoming exceptionally large or even mega-fires. These fires are intense and expand quickly forcing firefighters to fall back into point protection (protecting values at risk and not actively suppressing the fire). Other means of fighting fires, such as aviation are effective in some situations, however, when the wind reaches certain velocities, aircraft is grounded for safety of the pilots and firefighters on the ground.

Most of Kansas's landscape is fire dependent, meaning it needs fire to be healthy and productive. The lack of prescribed fire on the rangelands has allowed woody species to

encroach upon historically native grasslands. The largest contributor to this encroachment is the Eastern Red Cedar (ERC). ERC is the only evergreen species native to Kansas and provides effective shelterbelts and windbreaks. However, if not responsibly managed it can become fuel for wildfires. ERC contains volatile oils which are released during fires that make it hard to suppress due to the energy they produce.

New farming practices also provide more fuel for wildfires. No-till farming is great for both soil and water management, though no-till practice leaves residual plant material on the landscape where previously there was bare soil. Historically firefighters could rely on disked fields to stop wildfires, now these fields, which were once fuel breaks, aid in the spread of fires across the landscape.

Lastly, more Kansans are enjoying the outdoors and moving to suburban areas. This increases the amount of people recreating or working on the landscape. Over 90 percent of all of Kansas's wildfires are human caused. Many of these fires are near urban areas, where people mismanage the use of fires in the form of campfires or debris burning. The Wildland Urban Interface fires can be significantly smaller in size but have bigger consequences due to the values at risk and their proximity to urban populations. These fires are growing in Kansas and pose a real threat.

What strategies can Kansas landowners employ to better prepare for wildfires?

Fuel breaks are a great way for landowners to provide a defensible space and to lower fire intensity. An effective fuel break can be a variety of things; mowed strip, plowed or disked rows, bottom woodlands that stay moist. Mowed strips are the easiest recommendation, the grass

is still in places but different vertical arrangement, which can slow the fire and give firefighters an opportunity for successful suppression tactics. Within the mowed strip, haying or raking the grass to the side and allowing the strip to green up will increase the effectiveness of a mowed fuel break. Green live crops could provide a fuel break if there is no dry residual vegetation for the fire to consume and spread. In grass fuels, the fuel break width changes with the height of the adjacent grass. An effective fuel break needs to be 2.5 times the height of adjacent fuels. When planning fuel breaks place them on the windward side of the predominant wind during peak fire conditions. Normally, the south, west and north side. Additional planning considerations are slope, erosion maintenance, fences, and

access for fire resources.

Landowners should also manage their shelterbelts and windbreaks. Utilize mechanical, chemical, or prescribed fire to manage the vegetation on your property to ensure that no woody encroachment has crept into adjacent pastures. Around homes remove leaves from gutters and flowerbeds and keep the grass short and watered. Trim trees and thin out woody debris up to 100 feet from your home.

Prior to fire season:

- Contact your local fire department and communicate with them where access points on your property are located. This will reduce damage to fences and save the first responder's time.

- Contact neighbors and or absent landowners in the area to ensure they are aware of the risks of woody encroachment. Wildfires do not stop at property boundaries and the more landowners prepare their land the more resilient the landscape will become.

- Pay close attention to the local weather conditions. Take caution and be prepared if a fire does start.

- Consider joining your local volunteer fire department. Volunteers are decreasing across the US, and these ladies and gentlemen are the initial attack resource for the majority of wildfires across the state.



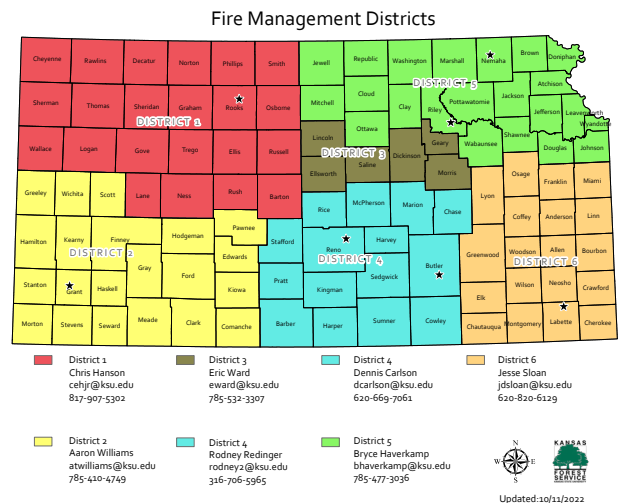
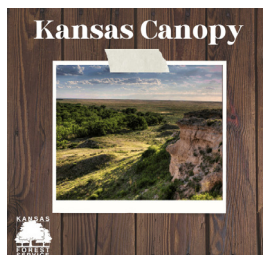
Mark Neely is the Fire Management Officer for the Kansas Forest Service (KFS), and he has been with KFS since 2018. Previously, Mark managed the wildland fire program for DOD on the Fort Riley Military Reservation, along with serving in multiple positions to include agronomist, fish and wildlife biological technician and forester. He has over 20 years of wildfire experience in the state as well as traveling all over the country helping with wildland fires as an engine boss/Taskforce leader and on Incident Management Teams. Mark has also been the burn boss for prescribe fires in Florida, Texas, Kansas, Minnesota, Missouri, Oklahoma, Hawaii, and Washington.

The Kansas Forest Service has over 100 years of wildland fire experience through our wildland fire program. We have staff that are experts on prescribed burning, aviation operations, handcrew and engine operations, and wildfire management. One of the staff's main focus is sharing their knowledge and expertise with fire departments and officials through year-round training opportunities across the state.

We have many publications and resources available on our website to assist landowners prepare for wildfire season. For more information, contact your District Fire Management Officer. Kansas has a DFMO in your area, find out who your DFMO is on the map to the right:

Kansas Forest Service: <https://www.kansasforests.org>
 Facebook: @kansasforests-service
 Instagram: @kansasforests-service
 Twitter: @KSForestService
 Youtube: @KansasForestService
 Podcast: <https://bit.ly/kscanopypod>

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 785.532.3300



Farming is a Journey - What's Your Plan?

I was raised in the city, living many years in apartments or houses with no designated space to garden. House plants were about the extent of my experience. As a teenager, I tried to grow a vegetable garden but failed miserably. With no rake, no hoe, and no YouTube, I had no understanding of how to plant, cultivate and keep things alive. Most importantly, I lacked mentors. The following spring, I tried again and failed again.

Years later, with the experience forgotten, I was dating a handsome school teacher. He had grown up on a farm and yearned to dig in the dirt and I lived in a city house with a small backyard. One day he shyly approached me and asked me if he could put a vegetable garden in my backyard. Sure, why not?



RJ and Angela Dake, a few years ago.

RJ grew an amazing variety, tending his garden with care. He always knew exactly what the plants needed and when. He made it look so easy. He showered me with an abundance of tomatoes, cucumbers, and zucchini. I was in love, and I jokingly tell people that I knew I would never starve if I married this man.

In 1993 we tied the knot and then harvested the tomatoes. We established an urban farm! I made up for what I lacked in experience and knowledge with enthusiasm and a head for business. People were amazed at the volume of food coming out of our garden. RJ was

the talk of the neighborhood! It was an enchanting time, and after a few years, we began to talk about growing more and started our search for a larger piece of land. In 2007, we found a 10-acre plot outside Topeka, ready to purchase. After we made the move to Kansas, the owner decided he couldn't bear to part with his land. We kept looking.

We moved into a small city house in Topeka, weathering the economic crisis of 2008. We hung on by the skin of our teeth, postponing the search for a farm and using our down payment to survive. We continued teaching school and raising our two kids. In 2011 we finally moved to a 3-acre country home in Auburn, thinking this would be the closest we would get to a farm, end of story. There is a lot that can be grown on 3 acres, though. We bought a flock of laying hens, planted some fruit trees, and got a vegetable garden going. This journey in farming was about to take us on a wild ride.

We got to know our next-door neighbors, they had been trying off and on for 8 years to sell their farm, but they were being pinched by the same economic crunch as the rest of the country. In 2015 RJ toured their property and came home very excited. "Honey! I think this is our dream farm. You should see this! It has grazing pastures and a big pond."

The farm had been owned by a loving 4H family and was full of their memories and experiences. Their children had grown, and the farm had fallen asleep. It was overgrown with poison ivy, scrubby trees, and mass quantities of noxious weeds. The place called out to be loved again. The sellers were thrilled that we were going to make it come alive. However, the owners refused to split the land from the 2500-square-foot house on the property. My husband confidently reassured me, "Honey, I know you can turn this into something special..." He

made my lack of gardening skills seem less painful. We finally purchased 80 acres and named it Hidden Hill Farms.

I once was lost, but now I am found.

This 80 acres was 4 times the size I thought our homestead farm would be. This space would feed a lot more than our family. We would be able to feed the world one tomato at a time! It was clear, we needed a strategic plan and an order of operations. The farm would need to become a BUSINESS. Having taught school all my life, I wouldn't dare teach a class without a plan, or take a trip without having a destination. The same is true for a farm.

We set our plan in motion by working backwards. We had to make some decisions. We used a big whiteboard as our brainstorming center, and the ideas came rolling out: What was already in place that we could profit from? What did we want the farm to become? What goods and services did we want to produce and sell? What could our farm produce? Who would be our customers?



First, we defined our mission and purpose:

1. To grow healthy food to sell to our community, provide a place of rest and relaxation, offer an opportunity for people to gain an appreciation for agriculture, to know how their food is grown, and depend on us for their supply.

2. Develop agritourism: create a Farm Stay experience, give tours, educate people, and develop the next generation of farmers and ranchers.

Next, we would evaluate the land, water resources, and existing structures. What was already in place? What are our skill sets? Who do we know that can help us? What should we tackle first? How much will it cost, and can we afford to wait for the return on investment? Each of us brought our unique skill set to the operation. It was a priority to restore the pasture for cattle and prep the garden spaces. I didn't know how to clear land, but my husband did. He and our son spent months clearing the overgrown land using loaders, chainsaws, etc. RJ also insisted we employ a team of goats to do the clearing. They helped us save money, conserve fuel, eliminate chemicals, reduce work, and improve the land. Goats are a great green team, effectively munching away the debris.

I knew how to renovate the house for the Farm Stay. The first year, we put renters in to give us some time to think and generate a steady source of income. The agritourism space would encompass a manageable 5 acres. It was the easiest thing to start with and could be divided into smaller projects. Our daughter helped us with branding and worked on refining many aspects of the Farm Stay.

Plan Time

Our family began regular planning meetings. The big whiteboard had 4 columns

The project and purpose

What are the costs and timeline for completion? Is there grant money for our project?

Who does it? What skills were needed to complete? Who will we hire /cost etc?

Permits necessary (if any)

This gave us clear direction, and we could visually check it off the list when we accomplished something. It feels great to see our progress and how much we have been able to do in a short time.

Assess Your Situation

What features does your land have? Let it speak to you. What goods and services will you be able to sell? Who is your customer? What is your endgame? This is one of the most important questions to answer. For example, you may make amazing jellies and jams from your berry patch. Do you have buyers? Would your time be better spent selling the berries instead of processing them? Do pies sell better? What turns around your profit and time the best?

I started with laying hens and selling their eggs. As I gained customers, they told me what they would buy from me. We expanded into meat chickens, and honey as a result of customer requests.

Make it Manageable

How much do you need to invest to get going? Can you break your investment into phases to start bringing in revenue? What infrastructure is already in place to support your choice? Start with the easiest thing.

Confidence to Act

Believe in yourself. You must be confident that your products are the best and that your customers need what you have. You must be able to bring in money to make a living. There is a misnomer about vegetable farmers out there that says we should give away our extra veggies for free. Your work, time, and investment are valuable. There is a difference between a hobby farm and a farm for profit. Function like a business.

Resilience

You will have failures. There are so many factors we cannot control, weather, predators, interest rates, etc. learn from them and try something different. Don't be too emotionally attached to an idea if it's not working. Let it go and invest your time and talent into something else.

Community

Mr. Rogers used to say, "Look for the helping people" He was right. Many wonderful people are out there

waiting to support local growers and businesses. Develop relationships with them and share your vision for your farm. You will be surprised at how many helping people are out there.

Remember that even though you work for your farm, ultimately, you have to make your farm work for you. It is a reflection of the amazing skills and talents you have been blessed with to be able to call yourself a farmer.

So what is your main goal for your farm? Do you want to raise vegetables? Sell them at a farmers' market? Keep bees and sell honey? You don't need a lot of land to begin turning around marketable items. Our Farm Stay, laying hen coops, meat bird pastures, vegetable high tunnels, and beehives are on only 5 acres. The rest is grazing space for our grass-fed beef. You can do a lot on a small space.



Angela Dake is the owner of Hidden Hill Farms LLC in Auburn, Kansas. She and her husband RJ run an agritourism farm which includes farm stays, farm experiences, tours, classes, farm camp, and special events. They raise cow-calf pairs and produce grass-fed beef, pastured poultry, fresh seasonal produce, eggs, and honey. RJ runs a custom haying operation and does farm consulting. Both have been presenters at conferences and teach classes on agricultural topics.

Visit their farm this Spring for the garden and homesteading workshop day, April 22. More info on their website: www.hiddenhillfarms.com
Facebook: @hiddenhillfarms
Instagram: @hiddenhillfarms
Youtube: @hiddenhillfarms7619

Local Food Promotion Program

In the last quarter of 2022, the Kansas Rural Center secured grant funding over the next three years for a Local Food Promotion Program Grant from the USDA's Agricultural Marketing Service, which is allowing us to embark on a new project we're calling "Building the Central Kansas Food Corridor: Creating a Food Hub and Delivery Network to Serve Communities Along Interstate 135 in Kansas and Increase Food Access". KRC has long been a champion for small farms and local and regional food systems, and we're excited to use this project to bolster local foods access in South-Central Kansas and more broadly across the state.

to manage). Working with a food hub can also allow farmers to utilize their time for other aspects of their lives, whether scaling up and further expanding their business or spending time with friends and family, etc. There are many Kansas businesses that operate as a food hub in a variety of capacities, but what we are envisioning is something similar to the regional nature of the High Plains Food Coop in Northwest Kansas, the Kansas City Food Hub in the KC metro area, or the Firefly Food Hub in and around Wichita.

In addition to supporting existing farmers my hope is that a new food hub can assist beginning or aspiring farmers in their dreams of starting their own farms. Beginning farmers, particularly those without generational farm heritage, face many barriers to success, so one goal I have for the project is to help reduce those barriers and make getting into farming more viable for young people and those beginning farming later in life.

For this grant project we decided to focus on twelve counties surrounding Interstate I-135 in Central Kansas, which you can see in the map below. We hope to work with interested farmers in and around this region to form a new food hub entity as a cooperative or LLC that can eventually hire staff and provide those critical marketing, sales, and delivery functions for the group. To sell through the food hub farmers don't need to grow a certain food product, but we seek to build this resource for farmers who are interested in the food they produce staying in their local communities or region without needing much processing prior to consumption.

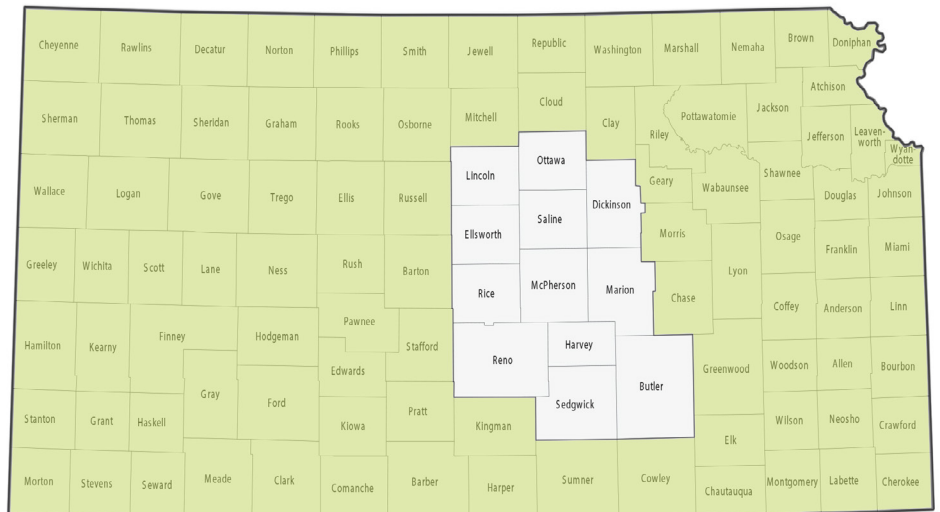
To stay up to date with the latest information about this project please visit <https://kansasruralcenter.org/foodhub>, where you can view the project FAQ and sign up for the project email list, where I'll be sending out regular updates several times a year about our progress and how you can get involved. If you have questions about our food hub project or if you know farmers in the project region or counties nearby it who you think may be interested, please let them know about us or send them my way at ryangr@kansasruralcenter.org or (866) 579-5469 ext. 704.



Ryan Goertzen-Regier

The USDA refers to a regional food hub as "a business or organization that actively manages the aggregation, distribution, and marketing of source-identified food products primarily from local and regional producers to strengthen their ability to satisfy wholesale, retail, and institutional demand." Our vision of a food hub would bring products together from multiple farmers and manage marketing, ordering, and delivery of their products to consumers for them. This can make it easier for farmers (one delivery rather than many smaller orders) and the purchasers (one order, delivery and one invoice rather than many

Central Kansas Food Corridor





FARM TO SCHOOL KANSAS

Amidst all the tension, disagreement, and drama that marks the Kansas Legislative session, one topic appears to draw positive attention from across party lines. That topic is Farm to School. In March, a group of organizations working on Farm to School across Kansas, including the Kansas Rural Center, updated the Kansas House Education Committee and the Kansas Senate Education Committee about the topic of Farm to School and the work that has been happening in Kansas. Both sessions received great feedback from legislators who were excited by the subject and interested in exploring ways to bring farms and schools together.

Barb Depew from the Kansas Department of Education (KSDE) provided an update on the great work KSDE is doing in supporting Farm to School through their "Farm to Plate" programs across the state. KSDE has helped schools increase their access to local foods through Farm to School subgrants that have supported projects from greenhouse building, tower gardens in classrooms, gardening supplies, and more in districts across the state. They have also worked to help schools utilize locally milled flour and incorporate relevant lessons about wheat in Kansas. Currently, KSDE has two staff who work on Farm to School, and they have plans to increase efforts to increase outreach through 2026 to boost educational efforts and food procurement.

I provided an overview of the work KRC has been doing over the recent past, focused primarily on educating farmers on how to provide their products to schools. Additionally, I discussed the economic impact that Farm to School could have on Kansas communities, as school nutrition dollars that are spent with local

producers have the chance to have an economic multiplier effect on local economies. Depending on the source of data, studies have documented that buying local can have an economic impact of between \$1.70 to \$2.20 for every dollar spent on local foods. By redirecting school food purchases from outside supplies to Kansas producers, there could be a significant impact on local economies.

Rachael McGinnis Millsap from KC Healthy Kids presented on the organization's work with farm to school, including direct, hands-on education with Kansas City Kansas students on Splitlog Farm, their urban farm. She highlighted efforts across Kansas City to connect school food service providers with farmers and also highlighted potential policy directions forward to grow and sustain Farm to School programs in Kansas. The key opportunities for policymakers to continue supporting Farm to School lie in supporting staff positions to develop Farm to School connections, support procurement incentives for local foods, and support statewide coordination of local foods efforts through a statewide food and farm council.

Finally, Pantaleon Florez, for USD 497, spoke about work that the Lawrence School District has undertaken to promote Farm to School, both through procurement goals, but also through education. All schools in the Lawrence School district now have school gardens. The gardens play various roles, from basic garden education in elementary schools to more advanced vocational training at middle school gardens. The middle school gardens

provide business opportunities for students to sell products at local farmers markets and restaurants and get paid for their efforts. Additionally, the Lawrence School District sets procurement goals for local products and works with local producers to secure those products.

Farm to School is a fantastic opportunity for Kansas communities. Since schools across the state feed kids every day, it can provide a solid marketing opportunity for Kansas producers to access local markets. Bringing the growing process and farmers into classroom instruction creates opportunities for students to learn hands-on skills. It also opens the door for students to understand the connection between their science, mathematics, and even art lessons to the outside world. Creating connections between students and farmers and gardens not only opens up educational opportunities but can also improve health. Students are more likely to try new foods they have had a hand in growing or where they met the farmer. Sourcing locally-produced fresh fruits and vegetables can improve school access to healthful, locally-produced foods and can provide an extra freshness boost with locally-produced fruits and vegetables.

Kansas Rural Center will continue to keep you updated on Farm to School efforts across the state. In March, KRC hosted a Farm to School basic producer training on March 28 in Moran, KS. We are looking to release a video series helping fruit and vegetable growers learn more about how to sell to school districts. To keep in touch with the latest Farm to School information for Kansas, check out our resource page at: www.ksfarmtoschool.org.

Don't Harm Crop Insurance, Improve It!

“Do no harm” to crop insurance has become a common refrain in Washington DC as we gear up for a new farm bill this year. NSAC agrees that a top priority should be to not harm crop insurance as the 2023 Farm Bill debate heats up. In fact, we aim to improve it. Barriers in program design and implementation leave small to mid-sized, beginning, specialty crop, and organic farmers without access to this pivotal safety net program, and Congress has the opportunity to address these shortfalls.

Background

A federally subsidized farm safety net is a necessary tool to help protect farmers from the many risks of farming. Yet NSAC members have long supported and worked with farmers for whom crop insurance is inaccessible. Limited resource, small, beginning, diverse, and organic farmers find themselves choosing between either purchasing crop insurance each year, if a relevant policy is even available and advertised to them, or adopting on-farm conservation practices and diversifying production and markets to mitigate risk and improve long-term resilience against disasters. Almost invariably, they choose the latter.

If a farmer chooses to adopt conservation measures and diversification but then does not have enough remaining resources to be able to enroll in support of the farm safety net, it suggests that the program as it currently stands is not an effective tool that meets the needs of all farmers. No farmer should be forced to choose, and in fact, both strategies should be incentivized to help farmers manage risk.

While more than 85 percent of planted acres for commodity crops (e.g., corn, soybeans, cotton, and wheat) are insured under the federal crop

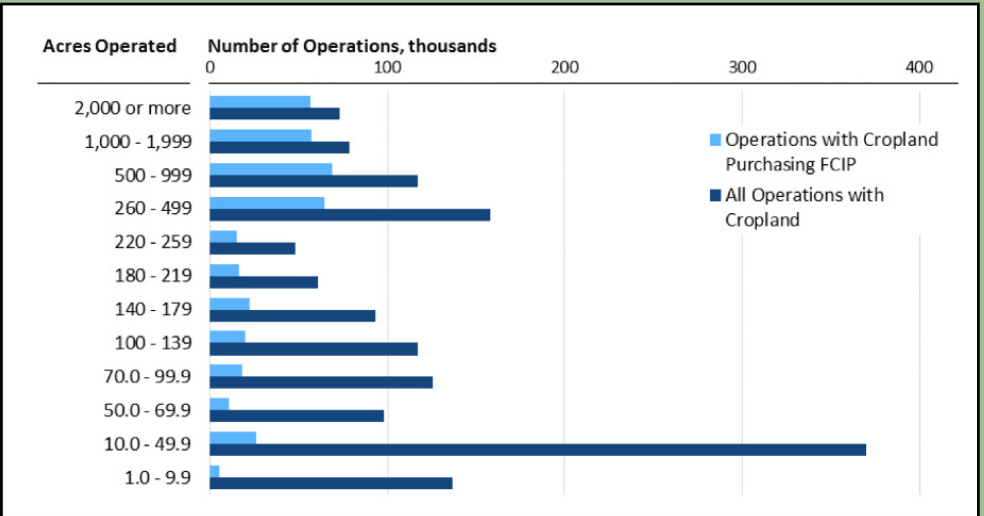
insurance program (FCIP), the chart below illustrates most farms are not served at all by the program. Most farms above 500 acres hold insurance policies, yet very few farms under 260 acres are enrolled in the FCIP relative to the total number of operations.

The reason for this disparity in access is not because these farmers do not want a safety net to protect against the once-in-a-generation weather event or market pitfall that have become regular features of the farm economy. Rather, the FCIP was not designed to meet the needs of small, beginning, specialty crop, and organic farmers.

(AIPs). USDA, specifically the Risk Management Agency (RMA), regulates the policies sold by AIPs, uses taxpayer dollars to subsidize farmer premiums (the cost of purchasing a policy), and subsidizes AIPs for the cost of selling and servicing crop insurance policies.

Farmers may file a claim to receive an indemnity payment when they experience an insurable event, either a natural peril or revenue losses (depending on the type of insurance policy purchased: yield, revenue, or area-based policies, and more). Insurable commodities vary by location and depend on whether data exists to verify the projected value of

All Farms and Farms Purchasing FCIP Policies, by Acres Operated



Source: Figure created by CRS using data from USDA, NASS, 2017 Census of Agriculture

Why is crop insurance not working for everyone?

First, because it is not accessible to farmers looking to diversify their income streams or differentiate themselves in the marketplace.

The federal crop insurance program is a public-private partnership. Farmers purchase insurance policies from private sector insurers, known as Approved Insurance Providers

a farmer's product confidently and appropriately.

This variability in whether a crop is insurable already places small, beginning, and specialty crop growers at a structural disadvantage. For example, a beginning farmer who wishes to grow strawberries in a Montana county where no other producer grows that crop will almost certainly not have the option to purchase an insurance policy that

insures strawberries. If they desire the security of a safety net, the farmer will be incentivized to instead grow a commodity that is already widely grown in the county – such as wheat – which is unlikely to unlock market opportunity and allow the beginning farmer to differentiate themselves, but for which an insurance product is readily available.

Second, because it promotes monoculture commodity production over specialty crops and on-farm conservation.

Several rules and guidelines that determine how the FCIP is administered challenge the ability of nonconventional farmers to remain eligible for full crop insurance protections. For example, farmers must adhere to “Good Farming Practices” as defined by RMA to qualify for indemnity payments in the aftermath of an insurable event. RMA currently maintains that a practice which reduces yields may not be considered a Good Farming Practice. This is a serious deterrent against adoption of many conservation practices because temporary yield drags are common on farms transitioning to climate-friendly, regenerative, and organic systems before yields can stabilize and even rise.

Additional guidance on when and how cover crops may be terminated creates a similar disincentive. What should be a farm-specific decision is applied to a broad region wherein conditions may vary wildly from farm to farm.

Likewise, RMA determines regionally appropriate final planting dates, wherein acres planted on or before this date receive the full yield or revenue guarantee that a farmer selected when purchasing their insurance policy. Organic and conventional operations are currently held to the same final planting date, even though certified

organic farmers sometimes plant crops such as corn later than their conventional counterparts to avoid cross-contamination with neighboring genetically engineered seed. The value of a yield or revenue guarantee is reduced each day for farmers who plant after the final planting date.

This structure to incentivize monoculture commodity production over specialty crops and diverse rotations is mirrored in eligibility considerations to receive agriculture loans as well as other public and commercial resources. The Whole-Farm Revenue Protection (WFRP) program is an exception to this paradigm and the dominant insurance model where the availability of policies is determined by crop and county. WFRP is the only insurance product designed to protect a farmer’s entire operation, not just one crop, and it is available nationwide. It also includes a built-in insurance premium discount for crop and enterprise diversification that considers the inherent risk reduction impacts of diversification. However, significant red tape has made it difficult for farmers to purchase WFRP. Recent changes announced by RMA are expected to improve farmers’ ability to access the product, and additional changes can and should be made.

How can insurance be improved to expand access?

There are many reasons why small, beginning, organic, diversified, and specialty crop farmers rarely purchase crop insurance. Historical barriers include limited policy availability, bureaucratic red tape (including burdensome paperwork), and insufficient outreach and education. While Congress and USDA in recent years have taken steps to address these challenges and expand insurance coverage for nonconventional producers, additional reforms are needed.

NSAC’s 2023 Farm Bill Platform proposes recommendations that will be key to improving crop insurance access for small and diversified farmers. In summary, these needed reforms include:

- Expanding insurance options and further streamlining the WFRP program;
- Directing RMA to provide continued education to insurance agents about agronomic practices and coverage options for nonconventional producers;
- Reforming barriers to conservation practice adoption perpetuated by insurance rules, including the RMA definition of Good Farming Practices and cover crop termination guidelines; and
- Establishing a secure data service to collect, link, and analyze data on conservation practices so this information can be integrated into crop insurance actuarial tables, as proposed in the Agriculture Innovation Act of 2021.

Remember: low enrollment in federal crop insurance policies among small and diversified farms does not reflect disinterest in participation. Overwhelmingly, these farmers desire a safety net to protect themselves from the worst impacts of unpredictable weather events and market variability, just as any other farmer does. It is the responsibility of Congress to ensure these historically underserved farmers can purchase an insurance policy as easily as their conventional counterparts.

Editor’s Note: This blog post is authored by Billy Hackett, policy specialist at the National Sustainable Agriculture Coalition (NSAC). It first appeared on NSAC’s website in January 2023.

Find more from NSAC at: sustainableagriculture.net

Beginning Farmers and Ranchers

In January 2023, Kansas Rural Center offered an online training program for beginning farmers. Eighteen individuals signed up to join a series of online workshops we offered over the course of 3 weeks to discuss goal setting, farm business planning, and basic farm financial management. For those who participated in the workshops a one-on-one follow up meeting with KRC staff was encouraged to discuss the needs of individual farm operations and help participants plan their next steps for action as they grow their farm. Participants ranged from individuals who had been farming for several years to folks who were still dreaming of farming, and a mixture of production models from livestock to specialty crops. The online workshops focused heavily on discussing experiences and ideas with other beginning farmers to encourage peer support as a key tool in helping these new farmers get started.

The workshop agendas were developed as part of work that the Kansas Rural Center has undertaken in the past year to develop a long term beginning farmer and rancher training program. This work was started with support of a Beginning Farmer and Rancher Development

Program grant and has current funding support from the Kansas Center for Sustainable Agriculture and Alternative Crops. To establish the basis for our training program KRC has joined the Farm Beginnings Collaborative, which is a group of fifteen organizations who coordinate beginning farmer training in over twenty states. The Farm Beginnings Curricula is focused on being farmer led, community based and focused on sustainable agriculture.

KRC has long worked on the issue of beginning farmer training. It is a founding partner of the on-farm apprenticeship program Growing Growers in the Kansas City metropolitan area in the early 2000s. In spite of our efforts, the need to train new and beginning farmers continues to grow. In the last Census of Agriculture the average age of Kansas producers was 58.1 years. While we wait for the 2022 Census of Agriculture data to be tallied the expectation is that the average age has continued to advance over the past 5 years and that an influx of new and beginning farmers is needed to help take up the production of food and fiber for the future. While our beginning farmer training is open to all, our key target audience is those who are new to agriculture and

looking to start a farm operation or to help develop an operation they have already started. The diversified small farms that are central to Kansas Rural Center’s vision for a sustainable food and farming future in Kansas often are created by those new to agriculture, particularly those with limited access to capital who are forced to view farming in new and innovative ways to survive in a system that predominantly supports large scale, well-funded farm operations. We look forward to continuing to support beginning farmers across the state building new operations.

If you are interested in our beginning farmer work, we will be opening a more in depth 8 week beginning farmer training course in the fall of 2023, held in conjunction with partners from the Kansas Black Farmers Association. Exact dates are still to be determined. In order to reach a broad statewide audience, most of the trainings will be online, but we are working to develop at least one in person event for participants. Be sure to follow our social media and check out our online resources for beginning farmers and ranchers.

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



- Business Planning
- Capitol
- Conservation/Cover Crops
- Covid-19 REsources
- Events
- Financial and Legal Help
- Food Safety
- Land Access
- Mentorship
- Marketing and Outreach
- Physical and Mental Health
- Training and Education
- March 2022 BFR Conference Videos



Support KRC at Your Farmers Market and Beyond

We are looking for friends of KRC interested in promoting our mission in their communities. If you would like to share information about Kansas Rural Center while at your farmers market or other events please contact Charlotte for more information on our promotional kits!

CONTACT

charlotte@kansasruralcenter.org

Important Notice!

To increase efficiency and reduce our carbon footprint, KRC will soon begin sending physical copies of the Rural Papers only to our donors. However, we will continue to release a free PDF version on our website and announce the release through our newsletters.

We understand that our Rural Papers publication is important to those who, like us, want a more economically viable, ecologically sound, and socially just Kansas.

If you would like to donate but do not want to receive a physical copy in the mail, please let us know who we could send a copy to in your honor. Thank you for your continued support of our important work here at the Kansas Rural Center!

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