



Kansas Farm and Food Conference 2015

“Roots, Shoots and Boots: Healthy Farms and Healthy People From the Ground Up”

November 13-14, 2015

at the

**Four Points Sheraton Hotel
Manhattan, Ks.**

Friday November 13, 2015

**Soil Health Forum: The Nexus Between Cover Crops,
No Till and Organic Systems**

Featuring: Dr. Bianca Moebius-Clune, USDA NRCS Soil Health Division Director; Klaas Martens, Certified Organic Farmer, Penn Yan, NY, Lake View Organic Grain Co.; and Jeff Moyer, Rodale Institute Executive Director

Saturday November 14, 2015

Healthy Farms, Healthy People

Featuring: David Hunt, Hunt & Associates,
“The Role and Power of Strategic Organizing to Bring about
Social Change Locally and Statewide”

See page 9-11 for complete agenda of workshops and speaker topics and a registration form.

For more information, contact info@kansasruralcenter.org or call any staff member at 866-579-5469.

Women Embrace New Ideas at Women in Farming Workshop

by Rachel Myslivy

Fifty women attended the Kansas Rural Center’s summer Women in Farming workshop in Emporia, Ks. to learn about soil health and cover crops, livestock and grass management, and specialty crop production and season extension, plus farm credit and other resources available for women farmers.

This was the final of a series of similar KRC workshops this year offering women practical how-to information and access to resources to manage risk in farming.

“Over the last thirty years, the number of women farmers has tripled,” explained KRC Executive Director, Mary Fund.

“The number of women inheriting land and farm management decisions is also increasing, so it’s really important that women learn how to make better decisions on the farm and learn the practical skills needed. We’ve had great reception to these workshops and tours. The energy and optimism at the women’s round table in Emporia also encouraged us to seek ways to facilitate more networking among women farmers.”

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Rural Papers

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

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Small Farmer Commentary

Shaping the Grassroots Narrative

by Mary Fund

You may notice a recurrent theme in several articles in this issue and in our fall conference agenda. It is not a new theme, but one that seems newly important and relevant.

Grassroots action-- whether it be organizing a local food policy council to address food access and health issues, farmers sharing cover crop how-to information and experiences, women sharing lessons learned in their farming operations, hoophouse farmers gathering to learn how to improve production, communities dealing with loss of school revenues or threats to their rural hospitals-- it all comes down to working together toward a positive change.

Identifying key issues, finding common ground, building relationships, and helping people and communities move forward with workable solutions has always been an important part of KRC's work.

Given the current social and economic challenges at the state level (i.e. continued budget shortfalls, local schools grappling with inadequate revenues, rural hospitals facing budget crises, and current and future farmers facing economic challenges), many are disillusioned about organized politics, who or what to believe, and the state of the world.

What we are not disillusioned about is our capacity to pull together and make a difference. Exploring viable alternatives, sharing information, and working together is what communities do-- whether that is a physical community or an ideas community.

KRC's conferences have always been a place for like-minded people to gather, to "roll the cobb" (an old farm phrase for farmers standing around the farmyard talking about weather, politics and of course farming.) Thus, Jill Elmers advice (page 16) to "Network! ... you don't have to reinvent the wheel. Be bold and keep pushing" is on the money. Her advice was specifically for beginning farmers, specialty crops in particular, but it is appropriate for all of us--farmers and non-farmers. Take every opportunity to learn from and work with the people around you.

Collaboration, cooperation, and building relationships themes run throughout this issue's stories on the women in farming workshop, our "ideas into action" workshops for local food systems and food access, and other educational opportunities.

Finding common issues and learning from each other was the impetus behind planning our "Soil Health: The Nexus Between Cover Crops, No Till and Organic Systems" focus of day one of our fall conference. Continuous no till farmers focusing on building soil health asked if we could facilitate a meeting with organic farmers on how they deal with weeds and pests without chemicals, and organic farmers expressed interest in using more cover crops and less tillage.

Empowering grassroots action and civic engagement is the purpose behind our choice of speakers at day two of our fall conference. It also underlies our "Kansas Voices Matter" workshop track at our fall conference that features several workshops that will offer pointers and strategies on how to organize for a particular goal.

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One of KRC's immediate issues is to remove the barriers to more local food production and access, promote healthy food, and create job and business opportunities related to food and farming. But "Kansas Voices Matter" cuts across all issues the state currently faces- budget issues, declining groundwater or silting reservoirs, inadequate school funding, health care, etc.

Recently I read an article entitled, "The Power of the False Narrative". Labeled "strategic communications" by political advisors and strategists, it has been used since the 1980's to basically "glue black hats on adversaries and white hats on allies," whatever the truth really is.

"In this age of pervasive media, the primary method of social control is through the creation of narratives delivered to the public through newspapers, TV, radio, computers, cell phones and any other gadget that can convey information. This reality has given rise to an obsession among the power elite to control as much of this messaging as possible." (Parry, 2015)

While we can try to sift through the "strategic communications" narrative we are fed in the 24/7 news cycle, the one narrative that we can perhaps control the best is the one where we meet with our neighbors and others, identify common issues and goals, and come up with workable solutions.

Join with us at our fall conference, as together we shape the grassroots narrative for Kansas farms and food and a collective vision for the future. □



Friends and colleagues gathered in late September in Manhattan, Ks. to wish good luck to Dr. Rhonda Janke and her husband, Raad Al-Ani. Rhonda is leaving after twenty years at Kansas State University where Rhonda held a joint Extension/Teaching position as Sustainable Cropping Systems Specialist. It was Rhonda's work documenting the Kaw Valley's historic vegetable and fruit production that helped launch today's local food hub activities in northeast Kansas and provided needed information for fledgling local food policy councils around the state. She developed and taught KSU's first and only sustainable agriculture and organic farming classes, and co-developed the Masters in Urban Agriculture Specialization, and founded the KSU Student Farm. She also played an advisory role in KRC's Clean Water Farms Plan and crafting of KRC's Whole Farm Planning guide, The River Friendly Farm Assessment Notebook. Rhonda and Raad are moving to Oman, where Rhonda has a three-year contract to teach the country's first organic agriculture classes at the University of Oman. We will miss her work at at KSU and in our sustainable ag and organic community. Perhaps Rhonda learning about organic and sustainable farming practices in a dry country will prove helpful to all of us here in the future! Photo by Kerri Ebert.

KRC Receives Grant to Survey Farmers on Public Soybean Varieties in Use

KRC has received a small grant from the Clif-Bar Foundation to study public soybean varieties available and in use by organic farmers and farmers using non-GMO seed in Kansas and surrounding states.

The project will survey organic farmers in Kansas as well as a small pool of identified non-GMO farmers about varieties being planted and sources. The purpose is to identify or retrieve public varieties being planted now, increase the number of acres

being planted, and ensure they are being properly handled legally.

Increasing interest in non-GMO soybean seed and inquiries from farmers to KRC and the Kansas Organic Producers led to the project. Some older public varieties well adapted to the region were nearly lost as they must be planted to keep them viable. Organic farmers must plant non-GMO seed so they are most likely to have retained seed sources. The survey will be conducted this winter. □

Women in Farming News

Women in Farming....

Continued from page 1



Lynette Miller talked to the crowd about her sheep operation, above left. At right, Lyon County District Conservationist Terry Karcher, NRCS's Candy Thomas and Alex Miller, demonstrated soil properties and rainfall's impact on soils.

Fund was referring to the informal panel discussion and round table held Friday evening prior to the workshop, which attracted 25 women to learn about things other women were doing on the farm. KRC selected seven successful women farmers and ag professionals to share their stories. These mentors talked about ideas, successes, and failures along the way.

Conversations at the roundtable reflected the diversity of modern-day agriculture. Many are coming into farming with fresh new ideas and excitement, but often with little technical agricultural training. Informal networking events help to break down barriers and open doors to new relationships between women farmers at different stages and locations throughout the state.

"Women farmers are very interested in specialty crops and small livestock or poultry production as a way of diversifying operations and income, in addition to their interest in overall farm management issues," stated

Fund. "It became clear that size and scale don't really matter on women's farms, it's the intensification and the diversity that is key," reflected Fund. "We all share the desire to feed ourselves, our families, and our communities."

The full day workshop began with demonstrations and presentations about soil health, diversity, and agroecosystems by NRCS staff Candy Thomas, Alex Miller and Terry Karcher, giving an overview of ways to positively impact soil health using and demonstrations, including a slake test and a desktop rainfall simulator. "In the past, we've seen diversity as kind of an adversary. Over the centuries, we've taken a lot out of the soil," Miller explained. "The main goal is to bring life back to the soil."

Rancher and rangeland specialist Dale Kirkham encouraged a systematic approach to grazing management, asking, "how do we harvest a whole pasture?" Grazing plans should focus on the things you can control. For instance, you can move mineral, but

you can't easily move water. Farm Service Agency representatives, Eric Guenther and Kurt Schweinler, explained Loan Programs and Resources of Special Interest to Women Farmers, including financial assistance, micro-loans, and help putting together farm plans, and budgets.

While the FSA representatives got the participants thinking about creative financing, KRC staff, Dan Phelps, gave some ideas for ways to extend the growing season. "From a fruit and vegetable perspective, Kansas is an untapped market," he said.

"We have the opportunity to start growing some of the things we're importing from California." High tunnels help bridge the gaps between growing seasons while also providing new income streams. Phelps described many options for high tunnels, from expensive and permanent to temporary and do-it-yourself.

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Women in Farming News

Women in Farming...

Continued from page 4

Clearly outlining both the challenges and opportunities with high tunnels, he encouraged participants to think outside of the box with season extension, but “do your homework and realize what you’re investing in.”

In the final formal presentation, Gail Fuller, Emporia farmer and tour host, insisted that regardless of the operation, soil health should be a primary focus. “Our whole emphasis is soil first. Chickens, corn, wheat, pigs, it doesn’t matter. What matters is how will it affect your soil today, tomorrow, next week, next year or in 50 years?”

Fuller and Lynnette Miller work together in a diversified no-till operation, incorporating cover crops, grains, livestock, bees, and direct marketing. Fuller cautioned that there are often more failures than successes, but with a diversified system and healthy soils, there are many great opportunities.

Participants found the presentations encouraging, and for at least one participant, they served as a catalyst. Lynette Petty reported, “I came away with a sense of urgency. I knew that we wanted to rehab our land and nurture it back to health. After the workshop, I now feel that we need to act sooner and not let the traditional practices of the past continue to stifle our soil and environment.”

While the presentations contained technical and specific information, the content was accessible to a broader audience. Lynn Stephan from Wichita commented, “being a ‘city girl,’ I’ve been unaware of the wealth of research and information that now



FSA representatives fielded lot of questions about loans and credit options at the workshop.

guides farming decisions. The cover crops and soil health presentations were eye-openers. I am so impressed.” Presentations are available on the KRC website and on You Tube for broader audiences on the Women in Farming page.

The day ended with a tour at Fuller Family Farm just outside of Emporia, where Gail Fuller and Lynnette Miller demonstrated the benefits of stacking enterprises. The tour started with a discussion of breed characteristics of Katahdin sheep, including fencing, water, and care.

Fuller and Miller rotationally graze their herd using portable electric fencing. The next stop was the egg-mobile, a converted stock trailer used to move laying hens behind grazing cattle on pasture. The egg-mobile makes it easy to move the chickens around to graze. Participants learned about cover crops while witnessing the practical methods used at the Fuller farm.

Additionally, a fencing demonstration included how to use solar gate latching systems, step-in posts, polywire, and solar chargers. Although heavy rains the night before removed some of the planned stops for the tour, the day ended with a pasture walk on a native prairie led by Dale Kirkham who identified plants,

noted indicators of health, and answered questions about grazing systems overall.

Farm tours provide a unique learning experience that positively supplements a traditional workshop. Regardless of experience level, seeing practices in action makes fast impressions. Risa Kern explained: “Some of the examples left me feeling wary and with a sense that I would do things differently and others were exciting or opened my mind to trying things I had previously rejected, like sheep.”

While many of the tour attendees picked up new ideas to implement on their farms, Lynn Stephan saw things differently. “I left the day impressed with how incredibly hard farm women work, how physically demanding their work is, and how devoted they are to producing positive outcomes. I left feeling I had met and rubbed shoulders with true American heroines.”

The women on the tour got a good sense of the value of diversity for both soil health and resilience but also for the farm resilience economically. Diversifying the farm enterprises benefits soil and water, but also diversifies and spreads out the cash flow. *Continued on page 16*

KRC “Ideas Into Action” Workshops Reveal Perspectives and Strategies for Farm and Food Systems in Kansas

Nearly 200 individuals attended the “Feeding Kansas: Ideas Into Action” workshop series held by KRC in four regions of Kansas this summer. The workshops were aimed at activating and empowering individuals and communities to improve public health outcomes via civic engagement in public policy related to food and farming.

Though the overarching focus of and agenda for each workshop was the same, each event was uniquely tailored to address regional issues and unique interests of workshop participants.

These “custom tailored” events emphasized the importance of collaboration and connection right from the start. Each day started with introductions, providing time for each participant to share their name and one key issue they were concerned about or working on. From there, presentations and large group discussion unfolded related to local food initiatives, food access challenges, and policies that help or hinder community health. During this process, KRC introduced the recommendations outlined in **Feeding Kansas: A Statewide Farm and Food System Assessment and Plan for Public Action** and asked participants to commit to three or more “Action Goals” to help advance the report’s recommendations.

Participants and area experts also engaged in small group round-table sessions covering topics ranging from strategy mapping to communications planning, building strength and momentum by mobilizing coalitions, and communicating with legislators and other policy makers.

Events were attended by a wide range of regional and community leaders, health workers, local food system organizers, farmers and ranchers, advocates, and others.

In Colby, located in far Northwest Kansas, most participants came looking for ways to advance their existing work at the epicenter of a thriving regional food system. Northwest Kansas is home to a multi-state food cooperative, an active wellness council, a vibrant farmers’ market, and a number of citizens committed to creating viable, sustainable rural economies and communities.

In Dodge City meeting focused on food insecurity, health and poverty, local foods’ initiatives, and pesticide drift. Bertha Mendoza, KSU Research and Extension Agent pointed to a prevalence of chronic health conditions, including diabetes, cancer and heart disease in the region. She cited a lack of information about health and healthy foods and limited time and money as contributors to these problems. She also pointed out that many people, particularly in the Hispanic communities have traditions that feature food as the highlight of their celebrations. This could present a good opportunity for communication and education on changes that increase healthy food choices.

Sister Janice Thome, Dominican Sisters of Peace and Parents as Teachers Educator in Garden City, spoke on policy issues that create specific challenges. There is a lot of food insecurity in the region, she told the group, especially with the recent downturn in the oil industry. She told poignant stories of people hit hard by job loss, poverty, and food insecurity.

In El Dorado and Manhattan, the focus was on what is happening and what is working in the central and south central region of the state. Jennifer Cook, El Dorado spoke about the city purchase of a former lumber yard building to include a year-round farmers market, and place to host other community events. Lauren Scislowski, Legacy Garden Works Program of Wichita, described a community garden project in a low income neighborhood working with at risk youth. Misty Lechner, Kansas Alliance for Wellness, described the surge of local food policy councils across the state, which provide different models for local organizing. Not all such efforts are without controversy or bumps in the road, but people are learning how to work as teams to present proposals to local governments and to win support.

The meetings also featured local farmers. Andi and Kurt Dale, Protection, Ks. in Southwest Kansas, talked about the realities of farming far from the urban centers of the state, where demand is greater for fresh local food. They were quick to point out the things they feel policy can improve, but they were also quick to point out that it is possible to make a living on a smaller family farm in the far reaches of the state. The Dales raise grass-finished beef, pastured pork, and poultry in southwest Kansas, and regularly travel across the state to deliver their product in addition to selling locally.

In Manhattan, Loren Swenson emphasized that the farmer has to make money with his or her local or specialty crop production. Swenson has a 2000-acre farm with typical grain

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Feeding Kansas News

Ideas into Action....

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A broad range of stakeholders in a local/regional food system participated in the Manhattan meeting. About 200 people attended the four meetings held across the state in August and Sept.



KRC staffer Cole Cottin addresses the El Dorado crowd.

crops but also raises vegetables and operates a retail market. He made connections to soil health and practices; he uses no herbicides or chemicals on his produce, and is trying to reduce on the rest of his farm to build a healthier soil. Scale, he said, is an issue. We need to learn not only how to produce on small parcels but how to best scale up produce production to larger more profitable operations.

Legislators and media experts provided information on how to relay ideas and needs to policymakers as well as the general public. Kevin Bottrel, editor of the Goodland Star News, cited tone as one of the most important aspects of a successful communications strategy. A positive tone will have a greater impact than a negative tone across all levels of communication, from reaching out to reporters and editors, to inspiring others with your story or op-ed.

Senator Tom Hawk, D- Manhattan, emphasized the importance of making connections, both in terms of utilizing existing personal connections and in

working to create connections with those in power. "Make contact with your legislator," he said, "Connect early, before the vote. Build a rapport."

Hawk, an adhoc member of the statewide Local Farm and Food Task Force charged with drafting recommendations to the State Legislators, said it is important to find specific parts of whatever you are working to change that will appeal to legislators—those parts that will help the legislator push forward what you are asking. Focus on finding common ground that creates an opening for conversation and discussion.

Rep. Adam Lusker- D- Frontenac, also serving on the state LFF Task Force, talked about building relationships with legislators. You will need to make your point to the hard sells, he cautioned, not just to those who agree with you. That applies to whatever issue you have—education funding, local food, health care, etc. He noted that the State Water Vision Plan took a localized approach to bring as many people into the

discussion as possible for their input. Asked about what do legislators respond to the most, he said that face to face meetings are the best and the more the better; e-mails and letters can easily be ignored. But start early building that connection.

KRC's annual conference on November 13-14 will offer a keynote speaker and several workshops sessions on grassroots organizing and civic engagement to further the development of skills and strategies needed to move forward with community local food programs and a statewide effort to produce and make accessible healthy food.

For more information on KRC's Community Food Solutions Program, contact Natalie Fullerton at nfullerton@kansaruralcenter.org. □

KRC staff Joanna Voigt, Cole Cottin, and Mary Fund contributed to this article.

Local Food and Farming News

State Task Force Drafting Recommendations for 2016 Legislature

by Natalie Fullerton

The Local Food and Farm Task Force held its eighth meeting on Monday, August 31, 2015, at the Kansas Department of Agriculture in Manhattan. The day focused on an updates from Kansas Department of Agriculture (KDA) on food regulations; a briefing from College of Agriculture Dean John Floros on specialty crop focus at Kansas State University College of Agriculture and Research and Extension; a look at Farm Bureau's revised policy on supporting food systems from Nancy Brown; and a presentation on cold storage opportunities and obstacles from Dr. Cary Rivard, K-State Research and Extension Horticulture Specialist.

Steve Moris, opened the meeting with an overview of the Cottage Food Rules and Regulations at KDA. Moris explained what foods can be sold with and without proper licensing, labeling requirements, where types of food can be sold, and where it can be produced. Many of the rules and regulations Moris outlined can be found in the "Food Safety for Kansas Farmers Market Vendors: Rules and Best Practices" guide developed by KDA and K-State Research and Extension (KSRE).

For example, fresh uncut fruits and vegetables can be sold direct to consumers and business without a license, however certain canned products must have a licenses and processed in a licensed kitchen to sell to businesses. Moris requested feedback and recommendations from the Task Force on changes they would

suggest to these rules and regulations. Moris provided a few examples. He explained, "In lieu of having each product labeled, each vendor could have written information on hand should a customer ask for the information. This could be in for form of a book or pamphlet." Moris went on to suggest that labels could also include statements such as "this product is produced in a home kitchen" or "This product is not regularly inspected by KDA" to avoid some licensing requirements.

Moris emphasized that currently it is illegal to sell canned goods, for example, to retail outlets to resell without proper licensing but you can sell direct to consumers as an exemption policy by KDA. Chairman Brown wondered if it is legal for chefs to purchase those foods (canned foods) from farmers at the farmers markets to use in their restaurants. Moris explained that this was not legal. Senator Kerschen suggested that perhaps some policies could be changed or added to accommodate some of those smaller retail exchanges and interactions.

John Floros, Dean of College of Agriculture and director of K-State Research and Extension, provided the Committee information on how the college and KSRE makes decisions about priorities, funding, and the status of current and future specialty crop focus.

Floros explained that the state budget for the college and KSRE is 18 to 20 percent less then 7 or 8 years

ago. However, employees are actually expanding work rather than cutting because of their ability to secure outside funding such as grants. Money from other sources has increased over the years. Floros stated that in order for him to ask the legislature for funding, ideas must first pass through the University president and the Board of Regents.

From an economic viewpoint, Floros explained, "Priorities are set based on major economic drivers in the state." Some of these priorities include beef, dairy, and wheat. "Local food is not at the top of this list of priorities because it is not an economic driver. We need more guidance to know why that should be a priority."

However, Floros offered that the college and KSRE are putting more resources into local food systems in Kansas. New employees have been hired with this expertise and KSRE is in the process of completing a new Southeast Research and Extension Center in Parsons, KS. Floros acknowledged, "There's a lot more we can do to help support this."

Dean Floros added, "The legislature needs to say this is a priority." The legislature has to designate increased funds or tag funds to go into specialty crops otherwise it will get chopped up into all the other current priorities. "Then KSRE can change some priorities but the process is still very long."

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KRC 2015 Sustainable Farm and Food Conference

2015 Conference Set for November 13-14 in Manhattan, Kansas “Roots, Shoots, and Boots: Healthy Farms and Healthy People From the Ground Up”

Registration is open for the Kansas Rural Center’s 2015 Farm and Food Conference, “Roots, Shoot and Boots: Healthy Farms and Healthy People from the Ground Up,” to be held November 13 – 14 at the Four Points by Sheraton, in Manhattan, Kansas.

The two-day conference promises to appeal to a broad spectrum of attendees—from beginning and established farmers, organic farmers and cover crop farmers, to local food advocates, to wildlife and conservation enthusiasts and community leaders.

The first day will be devoted to a **Soil Health Forum: The Nexus Between Cover Crops, No-till and Organic Systems** with three featured speakers including **Jeff Moyer**, Executive Director of the Rodale Institute; **Klaas Martens**, certified organic farmer and owner/operator of Lakeview Organic Grain, a certified organic feed and seed business; and **Dr. Bianca Moebius-Clune**, USDA NRCS Soil Health Division Director.

Day Two shifts gears and will feature keynote speaker **David Hunt**, a nationally recognized teacher and leader in organizing for social change. In his keynote presentation, “The Role and Power of Strategic Organizing to Bring About Social Change Locally and Statewide,” Hunt will set a tone of action for strategizing and community building for a day packed with diverse sessions and speakers.

Hunt has years of experience,

teaching and practicing what he learned as one of four principal trainers at the Midwest Academy—one of the nation’s premier organizing training institutions. He founded Hunt and Associates in 1996, dedicated to citizen empowerment and community development.

**Join us at the
Four Points
Sheraton
530 Richards Drive
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near Seth Child)
for the
2015 KRC Farm
and Food
Conference
November 13-14,
2015**

Day one’s soil health emphasis focuses on organic systems and opportunities, cover crops, and commonalities among no till, cover crops and organic. **Jeff Moyer** Executive Director of Rodale Institute, is a world renowned authority in organic agriculture. His expertise includes organic crop production systems with a focus on weed management, cover crops, crop rotations, equipment modification and use, and facilities design. Jeff is

perhaps most well-known for conceptualizing and popularizing the No Till Roller Crimper for use in organic agriculture. In 2011, he wrote *Organic No-Till Farming*, a publication that has become a resource for farmers throughout the world.

Klaas Martens began his farming career as a conventional grower in the 1970s. He and his partner, Mary-Howell, began to transition their farm in the early 1990s. With their son, they now farm 1,400 acres of certified organic crops and operate Lakeview Organic Grain, a certified organic feed and seed business. Klaas is involved in numerous national organizations and advisory committees including the Organic Farming Research Foundation Board and the Farm Foundation’s Soil Renaissance. Organic research is a strong component of their farming operation.

Dr. Bianca Moebius-Clune joined USDA NRCS as Soil Health Division Director in late 2014. Prior to that she was Senior Extension Associate in the Department of Crop and Soil Sciences at Cornell University. She coordinated the Cornell Soil Health Team’s research and extension activities, and a number of projects on Precision Nitrogen Management.

Moebius-Clune has conducted research on agricultural management impacts on soil quality and N dynamics in the Northeast and Midwest, as well as in Kenya.

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KRC 2015 Sustainable Farm and Food Conference

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“Roots, Shoots and Boots:

Healthy Farms and Healthy People From the Ground Up”

November 13-14, 2015 at the Four Points Sheraton Hotel Manhattan, Ks.

Agenda Friday November 13, 2015

Soil Health Forum: The Nexus Between Cover Crops, No Till and Organic Systems

- 8:00 a.m. Conference opens, Registration
- 9:00 a.m. Welcome and Introduction Mary Fund, Executive Director, Kansas Rural Center
- 9:10 a.m. **The Science of Soil Health: Opportunities and Challenges on Our Farms**
Dr. Bianca Moebius-Clune, USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS)
Soil Health Division Director
- 10:15 a.m. Networking, Exhibits Open
- 10:30 a.m. **Soil Health and Organic Farming: “We all do better when we all do better”**
Klaas Martens, Certified organic farmer, Penn Yan, New York, and owner Lakeview Organic Grain, an organic grain, seed, and supply company
- 11:45 a.m. Lunch
- 1:00 p.m. **Organic No-Till and Opportunities in Organic: Soil Health is the Foundation**
Jeff Moyer, Rodale Research Institute Interim Executive Director
- 2:15 p.m. Networking, Exhibits Open
Snacks Available
- 2:30 p.m. **Concurrent sessions**
A. Public Seed Varieties: Availability, Regulations and Research
Vernon Schafer, Ks. Foundation Seed,; Steve Schuler, Ks. Crop Improvement Association;
& Bill Schapaugh, KSU Soybean Researcher
B. Incorporating cover crops into specialty crop production to build soil health-
Cary Rivard, KSU Horticulture Department
C. Soil Health Principles (& Rainfall Simulator Demo)- Candy Thomas, NRCS
- 3:45 p.m.
to 5:15 p.m. Farmer Panel “Working Farms and Real World Implementation”
A panel of cover crop, no till, and organic farmers Kansas farmers and leaders share their experiences and challenges in building soil health and successful farms. Farmers panelists so far include Gail Fuller, Emporia, Ks., Ed Reznicek, Goff, Ks., Jack Geiger, Robinson, Ks., Josh Loyd, Clay Center, Ks.(Tentative);
- 5:15 p.m. Closing of Day One.
- 6 to 8 p.m. **KRC Social Hour. Join us at the hotel for conversation and refreshments (Including locally brewed beer)**

KRC Sustainable Farm and Food Conference

Agenda Saturday November 14, 2015

Healthy Farms, Healthy People: From the Ground Up

- 8:00 a.m. Conference opens, Registration
- 8:50 a.m. Welcome and Introduction Mary Fund, Executive Director, Kansas Rural Center
- 9:00 a.m. **The Role and Power of Strategic Organizing to Bring about Social Change Locally & Statewide**
David Hunt, Founder, David Hunt & Associates, Silver Spring, Maryland
- 10:30 a.m. Break: Networking, Exhibits Open

10:45 a.m. to 12:15 p.m. Concurrent Workshops, Session I

Programs & Resources for Farmers and Ranchers. *Hear about programs that offer cost-share, credit, grants & other opportunities for farmers & ranchers including beginning and minority farmers. Presenters are Reps. from KDA, FSA, KCSAAC, NRCS and USDA Rural Development*

Production Strategies for Winter Squash. *An in-depth look into production of winter squash, a high value specialty crop. Learn from farmers who have scaled up their production. Presenters: Scott Thellman, Dan Kuhn*

Native Pollinator Response to Rangeland Management Practices. *Learn about native pollinator responses to various rangeland management practices in the Flint Hills ecoregion. Presenter: Shelly Wiggam, KSU*

Kansas Voices Matter: Storytelling as Power. *In this interactive session, learn how story telling can be used to recruit & organize people, raise money, and create public policy. Led by David Hunt.*

Understanding Ks. Revenue and Budget Issues. *Learn the latest on the state of the ailing Kansas budget and revenue situation, and future of school finance. Bernie Koch, Kansas For Economic Progress Council and Mark Tallman, Kansas Association of School Boards, and two State Legislators.*

12:15 p.m. to 1 p.m. Lunch from Locally Sourced Foods

1:15 p.m. to 2:45 p.m. Concurrent Workshops, Session II

Opportunities to Make a Career on a Small Scale, Diverse farm. *Learn about opportunities for direct market farming & what you need to know about production & management. Stu Shafer, Kathryn Kelly, Kirk Cusick, and John Crisp*

Lessons Learned: Stories of Challenges and Successes. *Hear how challenges can be turned into opportunities, how limited budgets can be overcome and how to tap into resources. Panel of farmers.*

Getting Started in Beekeeping. *Learn beekeeping basics and get the resources you need to make a start in beekeeping and learn about a unique training farm being created for veterans. Presenter: Gary LaGrange, Golden Prairie Honey Farm & retired Lt. Col. Fort Riley*

Pesticide Drift. *How to mitigate your risk, what you should know and can do if your crops are affected. Presenters: Ks. Department of Agriculture, and farmers TBA*

Kansas Voices Matter- Stories on Reshaping Local Food Systems. *How to address healthy food needs and boost production in your region? Panelists share their local experiences. Missty Lechner, Andrea Knighton, & others TBA.*

2:45 p.m. Break

3 p.m. to 4:30 p.m. Concurrent Workshops, Session III. Conference Ends at 4:30 p.m.

Building Effective Communication in Farm Families. *Find your voice & communicate in the family and off the farm; Learn how to manage crucial conversations. Presenter: Charlie Griffin; Farmer Daniel King; others TBA*

Marketing 101. *Strategic marketing for livestock & specialty crop producers. Learn how to build relationships with customers- wholesale, retail & direct. Presenters: Jay Sleichter, Kendra Horst, KDA & others TBA.*

Why Trees Matter? How to Manage Forests in Kansas. *Learn the multiple benefits of forests & trees; & management practices - cost-share programs that benefit the farmer & the environment; Presenter: Larry Biles, Ks. Forest Service*

2016 State Political Landscape, What to Know & What to Do. *Panelists will provide an overview of environmental, energy, water, local food & budget issues. Paul Johnson, Rachel Myslivy, Marlene Bosworth, & two State Legislators*

Kansas Voices Matter: Create an Action Plan . *Participants will learn how to set goals & make an action plan. For example, to strengthen your local food system or support Ks. farms. Presenters: Elina Alterman and Cole Cottin.*

2015 Sustainable Farm and Food Conference

Conference... Continued from pg. 9
She co-authored the Cornell Soil Health Assessment Training Manual that is widely used by growers and agricultural service providers in the Northeastern United States and elsewhere.

The Soil Health Forum on Friday will also include a roundtable of cover crop, no-till and organic farmers to discuss real world experiences and challenges, and identify common issues as they build soil on their farms.

Workshop sessions will include local food systems and economic opportunities, farm transitions and beginning farmer opportunities, marketing strategies, pollinators and conservation, the value of forestry in Kansas, public seed varieties, state food and environmental policy, and grassroots organizing how-to's. (See agenda on page 10-11.)

Each day will feature a locally-

sourced lunch and offer time for networking and visiting exhibitor booths in order to connect with and learn more about the great people and exciting things happening in farming, food production, and the environment, in Kansas and beyond.

The conference would not be possible without the generous support of sponsors. To date, sponsors include: Kansas Center for Sustainable Agriculture and Alternative Crops; Kansas Agricultural Mediation Services; Kansas Forest Service; Kansas Alliance for Wetlands and Streams; Kansas Farmers Union; Kansas Association of Conservation Districts; Mother Earth News; Kansas Organic Producers; Eastern Ks. Organic Crop Improvement Association; OFARM (Organic Farming Association of Relationship Marketing); The Land Institute, Cromwell Solar, Kaufman Seeds, Green Covers, The Nature Conservancy, and Ks.

Wildlife Federation. Scholarship sponsors include No Till on The Plains and Kansas Center for Agriculture, Resources and the Environment, and The Land Institute. For information on sponsoring, contact Mary Fund at 866-579-5469.

Registration is \$120 for both days, or \$65 for a single day, and covers lunch and snacks each day. Conference registration deadline is November 9. KRC has a block of rooms at the Four Points Sheraton at a group discount of \$94/night. Register there by Oct. 22 by calling 785-532-5311 and ask for the KRC Food and Farm Conference rate. Other Manhattan hotels are also available.

For general questions about the conference, please contact Natalie Fullerton or Mary Fund at 866-579-5469; or visit www.kansasruralcenter.org/conference-2015/. □

KRC 2015 Farm and Food Conference November 13-14, 2015

Registration Form~ Deadline Monday, November 9, 2015

Thank you for your interest in attending our conference. Full Conference information and online registration can be found at: www.kansasruralcenter.org/conference-2015/

Please select which days you plan to attend:

- ___ \$65 Conference Friday November 13, 2015
- ___ \$65 Conference, Saturday November 14, 2015
- ___ \$120 Both Days Friday/Saturday Nov. 13-14
- ___ Total Payment Enclosed

___ Enclosed check payable to KRC . Send to: **KRC Conference 4021 SW 10th St. #337 Topeka, Ks. 66604**

Or register Online at www.kansasruralcenter.org/conference-2015/

Contact Information:

Name(s): _____
 Company or organization if applicable: _____
 Address: _____ City: _____ State: _____ Zip: _____
 Phone: _____ E-mail : _____

No refunds after Nov. 1, 2015.



Registration for each day covers lunch and snacks.
 Special Student Rate and Scholarships Available. Contact Natalie Fullerton at nfullerton@kansasruralcenter.org

Local Food and Farming News

Local Farm & Food Task Force...

Continued from page 8

“Ag is changing and local food is a national movement in the food system, not just a Kansas thing. Many new people want to grow food but don’t have the knowledge or extension resources,” said Chairman Ron Brown. Committee member David Coltrain added, “K-State needs to play a role in leading changes around food production.”

Nancy Brown, Kansas Farm Bureau Assistant Director of Commodities explained the revisions Kansas Farm Bureau membership has made to a specific policy in their “Local Food Systems” 2015 Resolutions. In December 2014, Brown presented to the Committee KFB’s policy that states the Farm Bureau opposes “Any program or subsidy that gives local foods unfair advantage over traditional food production.” Task force members had suggested KFB consider revising this statement.

At the August meeting, Brown emphasized that they are in the middle of their annual policy development phase and still working on changes. She shared their proposed revised policy, which states, “We oppose programs that favor one food system over another.”

Task Force members again expressed concern about the policy. Committee members offered the example that commodity check-off programs, that Farm Bureau supports, favor commodities, and do not favor fruit

and vegetable production; thus it could be said that check-off programs provide an unfair advantage over other production; therefore their policy is contradictory.

Brown took the committee’s comments under advisement. She noted that KFB is not hearing from their members on the local food/specialty crop issues. She suggested that any KFB members on the Task Force or other Farm Bureau members attend KFB Listening Post Meetings to provide input on these policies.

Dr. Cary Rivard, K-State Assistant Professor, Extension Specialist & Director of K-State Research & Extension Center, Olathe, and member of the Local Farm and Food Task Force, presented information about cold storage opportunities and obstacles for Kansas producers. Rivard expressed that in order for Kansas to scale up production of specialty crops, proper cold storage is critical for operations.

Rivard shared the science behind what happens when produce is picked and how post-harvest handling practices affect the quality of produce. For example, different crops require storage in different temperatures to maintain optimum quality and longevity. Some crops are also sensitive to ethylene gas, the gas naturally expelled by certain fruits and vegetables.

“If you want to scale up into a whole sale market especially, you have to have

adequate cooling facilities,” Cary said. However, he also offered that there is huge potential for storage crops that grow well in Kansas such as sweet potatoes, cabbage, and onions. These crops can be stored without cooling systems.

The Task Force will develop recommendations at the next couple of meetings. Members of the public are invited and encouraged to attend. Information about upcoming meetings can be found at <http://agriculture.ks.gov/>.

Task force members are: farmer and Chairman Ron Brown, David Coltrain of Seward County Community College, Dr. Cary Rivard of K-State Research & Extension - Olathe, Loren Swenson a farmer and owner of Prairie Produce in Concordia, Annarose White of the Wellington Area Chamber of Commerce, Julie Roller, representing KDA, and legislative appointees Rep. Adam Lusker, Frontenac, and Sen. Dan Kerschen, Garden Plain.

Reports on previous meetings which have featured KRC’s Feeding Kansas can be found on our website at <http://kansaruralcenter.org/feeding-kansas/>. □

Farmer Profile

Demand Is There: “We Need More Farmers Raising Food”

by Jean Stramel

Jill Elmers is now well into her second career - as a farmer raising food for the growing local food market in the Kansas City and Lawrence area - after 21 years as an acoustical consultant. Demand is high for her produce, and she is doing her best to keep up with it.

Jill has owned and operated Moon on the Meadow farm near Lawrence since 2003. She came to Lawrence in 1994, and worked as an engineer. Then in 2000 she took a sabbatical to try her hand at farming, working at Wakarusa Valley farm.

She was good at it and was asked to lease some land and try her hand at raising vegetables on her own. She went back to work part-time, and for many years split her engineering work with raising vegetables. In 2006 she bought her current house and 3 acres of land.

In 2013, she left her engineering career with the intention of jumping in full speed ahead. The local food markets were taking off and she didn't want to be left behind. There has been no looking back.

“We cannot keep up with the demand. The demand outweighs my management capabilities, of what we can produce from this land - it's incredible”.

Jill raises 30-40 different kinds of vegetables, small fruits and herbs on her Moon on the Meadow farm. Lawrence has a good labor supply, and she employs up to 5 people during the season and one year-round, all part time.



Jill Elmers has been producing vegetables on her farm on the edge of Lawrence for 13 years.

Photo by Jean Stramel.

In 2010, she and another couple, Tom and Jenny Buller, bought a 34 acre property down the road. The Buller's were looking for land and Jill wanted to expand but neither could afford the land prices on their own. So they joined forces and now Buller Family Farms and Moon on the Meadow Farm market as Common Harvest Farms, sharing administrative tasks. They both keep some individual enterprises as well as joint projects.

Wheat is now grown on 7 to 9 acres of this jointly owned land. Thom Leonard of then Wheatfields Bakery was looking for farmers to grow Turkey Red winter wheat, so they got seed from him and expanded into small grain production on 1.5 acres the first year. This endeavor required the

purchase of not one but two combines, one to do the work and one for parts. The farm had an old seeder already.

The wheat is fresh ground into flour by a stone mill also located at the farm. The wheat is sold retail and wholesale to the 1900 Barker Bakery in Lawrence, a fairly new venture specializing in bread, desserts, and coffee.

All land is certified organic through the Oklahoma Department of Agriculture, whom she says is “great to work with”. The soil is sandy river bottom ground, so even in wet years, is well drained and productive. She has two hoop houses, one of which was funded under the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) “High Tunnel Initiative”, allowing staff to be employed through the winter growing spinach.

The organic certification process was tedious and sometimes frustrating, as was the experience with USDA programs. NRCS office employees often do not understand organic production and “we had to teach them”, Jill remembers. But in the end, it worked out well.

She states that labor is not a problem for her, other than the frustration of wanting to pay a living wage. But to do that means “I'm paying more than I am making, and that is hard”. She has been part of the “Growing Growers” apprenticeship program since 2005, run by K-State, and sponsored in the past by the Kansas Rural Center. She does not have lodging facilities so does not use farm stay internship programs.

Continued on page 15

Women in Farming News

Farmer Profile...

Continued from page 14



Above left are succession plantings of fall greens at Elmers' farm. Above right, one of two high tunnels in production on her farm. Photo J. Stramel.

Tillage equipment on the farm is a 40 HP John Deere, with all the attachments. Common Harvest Farms has a one-row potato digger, but most vegetable harvesting is done by hand.

She is looking into growing more storage crops, to spread income over more months. Spreadsheets to track rotations and field layouts are used, but one area needing improvement is keeping track of harvest amounts for each crop. They have made an attempt to track Cost of Production on around 10 crops, having employees keep a small pocket booklet to keep track of time on task.

The farm is participating in a Kansas Rural Center project which helps track cost of production in Hoop Houses. Moon on the Meadow farm grosses between \$75,000 and \$85,000 from vegetables on 6 acres, which Jill knows is not optimal. She has plenty of land, but she feels it is all she can manage at this time.

Chemical drift from neighbors has been an issue, but it helps that the farm grows many different crops so

everything is not vulnerable at once. Jill finds it disturbing that some of her neighbors do not appear to pay attention to wind speed or direction when they spray.

**Jill's advice to beginning farmers-
"Network! You don't have to reinvent the wheel.... and be bold and keep pushing!"**

A crop rotation of 3-5 years, and scouting seems to be enough to manage pests. Cover crops are used including cow peas, field peas, rye, wheat, oats, vetch and "green fix" mix. Certified organic cover crop seed, which is also quite pricey, is hard to find and usually comes out of Iowa.

Certified organic compost is also not readily available, and she sees these two things as niche market

opportunities waiting to be filled in her area. Soil testing usually determines why pests are a problem and is done often. Growing many different crops allows some wiggle room in marketing, and this year an onion crop failure was made up for by having other crops ready to sell. A beekeeper brings hives to the farm, but Jill does not manage them.

The Moon on the Meadow farm sells to the Community Mercantile grocery and Farmers Market in Lawrence, nine restaurants, and collaborates with other farmers to provide 265 CSA shares. She wants to sell things fairly and wants all income levels to have access to good food. This year their wholesale market is ahead of the farmers market. It was 8% and is now up to 26% of sales. "The Farmers Market is the one thing that wears me out ... I get home at noon, and have already put in an 8 hour day!"

Jill is chair of the Douglas County Food Policy Council, which has a "Common Grounds" program, where city land that is not being used is matched with residents who want to grow food. *Continued on page 16*

Women in Farming...

Continued from page 5

Diversified agricultural systems also build community, as demonstrated by the reciprocal relationships Fuller worked out with his neighbors. Utilizing small patches of neighboring pastures to rotationally graze sheep increased available grazing land while also cleaning up brushier areas for the neighbors. Mary Fund commented, "Community relationships grow along with the variety of crops and small livestock."

Connecting women farmers across the state, the four workshops have reached over 150 women with diverse operations and backgrounds. Gearing programming towards women has the potential to change the course of agriculture in Kansas. "Projections show that 70% of farmland is expected to change hands over the next 15-20 years. Much of that will end up under the management of women," Mary Fund explained.

Workshop co-sponsor was the Kansas Center for Sustainable Agriculture and Alternative Crops. KRC's Women in Farming Project is funded by a grant from the USDA Risk Management Agency Risk Management Education Program. Lunch for the Emporia meeting was donated by Subway of Emporia. □

Rachel Myslivy is a freelance writer who prepared this article for the Kansas Rural Center.

Farmer Profile - Jill Elmer

Continued from page 15

Additionally, city land in north Lawrence near Teepee Junction, has small farmers growing there. The Food Policy Council would like to expand to find private landowners who could be matched with small growers. "Access to land is a big issue for people wanting to farm. We need more farmers growing food", Jill says.

Jill's advice to beginning farmers is to network. "It is so incredibly valuable. You don't have to reinvent the wheel". Also be bold and keep pushing. "I was kind of lucky - for 20 years I was in a man's world of engineering, visiting job sites as the only woman in a giant building It would be hard for someone who is timid". She recently learned that K-State has an Urban Agriculture concentration, so she sees more educational opportunities now.

Jill is also involved in a joint attempt between Kansas City and Douglas County to create a Food Hub. Each had done a feasibility study - KC in a 250-mile radius, Douglas County in a 16 county area - and agreed that the region could not support two food hubs, so they joined efforts. Everyone agreed it needed to be farmer owned, so a call was put out to find interested farmers. There were initially eight farms interested but only four are still involved, including Jill. "It takes a lot of work to start a business. I think more will join once it is established" Jill says.

"It is very exciting. This is why I quit my job - so I could be involved in this. But ultimately I have to be a farmer. I am not getting paid for all this organizing!" □

Jean Stramel is a free lance writer living in Lucas, Ks. She is retired from the USDA NRCS.

Bill Introduced to Designate Farming as Public Service

In June, a bill was introduced in Congress that would add farmers to the Public Service Loan Forgiveness Program (PSLF). This would place farming with certain teachers, nurses, and law enforcement professionals. Through PSLF, professionals who make 10 years of income-driven student loan payments while serving in a qualifying public service career, have the balance of their loans forgiven. Producing food, supporters state, is serving your community at the highest level.

The National Young Farmer Coalition, a driving force behind was a driving force behind the introduction of the Young Farmer Success Act (H.R. 2590) recently released a report, "Farming is a Public Service: A Case for Adding Farmers to the Public Service Loan and Forgiveness Program."

The report included data from a survey of young farmers. 30% responded that student loans were delaying or preventing them from farming. 28% said student loan pressure had prevented them from growing their business; 20% reported being unable to obtain credit because of their student loans.

"Farming is a capital-intensive career with slim margins," said NYFC executive director and cofounder, Lindsey Lusher Shute. "Faced with student loan debt, many young people decide they can't afford to farm."

With thousands of American farmers nearing retirement (the average age of farmers is now 58), the U.S. needs at least 100,000 new farmers over the next two decades. See the entire NYFC report at <http://www.youngfarmers.org/policy/>.

Over 100 Groups Deliver Letter to Congress Opposing Conservation Cuts

In mid-September, more than 100 organizations from around the country delivered a letter urging the House and Senate Appropriations Committees to “protect mandatory funding for farm bill conservation programs, support robust discretionary funding for Conservation Technical Assistance, and reject any attempt to undermine highly erodible land and wetland conservation compliance” in fiscal year (FY) 2016 appropriations legislation.

A broad range of groups joined the National Sustainable Agriculture Coalition (NSAC) to send the letter, including the National Farmers Union, National Wildlife Federation, Kansas Rural Center, Chesapeake Bay Foundation, League of Women Voters, and many others.

Congressional appropriators are negotiating final appropriations legislation for FY 2016. In previous years, appropriators have used a budget gimmick called “Changes in Mandatory Program Spending” (CHIMPS) to cut farm bill direct spending, which is under the jurisdiction of the Agriculture Committees, not the Appropriations Committees. For example, the FY 2015 Appropriations Act cut the 2014 Farm Bill’s funding for conservation by over \$650 million.

In June and July, the House and Senate Appropriations Committees passed FY 2016 agriculture appropriations bills that cut hundreds of

Publically Funded Plant Breeding’s Role in the Future of Food

The importance of public funding for plant breeding programs was the subject of recent presentations to Congressional staffers in D.C. Dr. William Tracy, University of Wisconsin, Agronomy Department, noted the severe downsizing of plant breeding programs in the country’s land grant universities over the past two decades.

Based on a survey he conducted last year, the number of researchers that focus on plant breeding at public universities has fallen more than 30 percent in the last 20 years, with estimates that public breeding capacity has diminished by as much as a half over the past 50 years. Tracy argued this loss could or will have severe implications for the U.S. seed system and the future of our food and farming system in the U.S.

Tracy explained that while private seed companies have a distinct role to play in developing new varieties of

millions of dollars from the farm bill Conservation Title, on top of the dramatic reduction in conservation spending already made by the 2014 Farm Bill and sequestration.

The proposed FY 2016 cuts would further reduce conservation enrollments by millions of acres and hamper efforts by farmers, ranchers, and foresters to conserve water, maintain their soil, and prepare for extreme weather events. □

From NSAC Sept. 2017 at <http://sustainableagriculture.net/blog/conservation-funding-letter>.

larger and more profitable crops, support for publicly funded plant breeding programs allows researchers more independence to complete longer term and riskier projects, work directly with underserved local markets and minor crops, increase food security by using exotic germplasm, and respond to emerging threats, he said.

To reverse the loss of public funds, Tracy advocated increasing formula funds to rebuild the capacity of public Land-Grant University breeding programs and increasing the portion of USDA’s Agriculture and Food Research Initiative (AFRI) dedicated to plant breeding. He also encouraged farmers to collaborate with public plant breeders through USDA’s Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education (SARE) program, which has been spurring farmer-driven research innovations for over 25 years.

A report issued in 2014 by the Seeds and Breeds Coalition, *Summit on Seeds and Breeds for 21st Century Agriculture*, published by the Rural Advancement Fund International (RAFI) at <http://rafiusa.org/issues/reinvigorating-public-plant-and-animal-breeding/>. □

From NSAC Sept. 22, 2015 at <http://sustainableagriculture.net/blog/plant-breeding-briefing/>

Study Shows Loss in U.S. Crop Diversity

According to a recent study, U.S. farmers are growing fewer types of crops today than they did 34 years ago, which could have serious implications for ecosystems and how agriculture adapts to climate change. The study was conducted by researchers at Kansas State University, North Dakota State University, and USDA.

Researchers used data from the US Census of Agriculture from 1978 through 2012 across the country. They found that crop diversity at the national level declined during those years, but that the decline was not uniform across all regions. The study is the first to study species diversity over such a long period.

“At the very simplistic level,” researcher Jonathon Aguilar, Kansas State University, said, “crop diversity is a measure of how many crops in an area could possibly work together to resist, address and adjust to potential widespread crop failures, including natural problems such as pests and diseases, weed pressures, droughts and flood events. This could also be viewed as a way to spread potential risks to a producer. Just like in the natural landscape, areas with high diversity tend to be more resilient to external pressures than are areas with low diversity. In other words, diversity provides stability in an area to assure food sustainability.”

“Biodiversity is important to the ecosystem function,” the researchers wrote. “Biodiversity in agricultural systems is linked to critical ecological processes such as nutrient and water cycling, pest and disease regulation, and degradation of toxic compounds such as pesticides. Diverse agroecosystems are more resilient to variable weather resulting from climate change and often hold the greatest potential for such benefits as natural pest control.”

“Diverse cropping systems tend to increase farmers’ chances of encountering favorable conditions while decreasing the probability of widespread crop failures,” the team wrote, citing a study based on long-term data collected in Ontario, Canada.



On August 17 the Kansas Rural Center hosted a Growing Growers workshop focused on storage crops, which attracted 30 some participants from as far away as Colby, Ks. Storage crops are a valuable technique to extending the vegetable season. Many crops can store well into the winter, even until the following spring. Pictured above: Dan Phelps, Activity Coordinator for the Kansas Rural Center, discussing sweet potato production

Aguilar explained, “The clustering and shifting demonstrates a trend toward crop diversity loss and attendant homogenization of agricultural production systems, which could have far-reaching consequences for provision of ecosystem services associated with agricultural systems as well as food system sustainability.”

The data differs by regions. The Heartland Resource Region, home to 22% of U.S. farms representing the highest value (23%) of US production, had the lowest crop diversity. This encompasses Illinois, Iowa, Indiana and parts of Ohio, Missouri, Minnesota, South Dakota, Nebraska and Kentucky. Areas along the west coast, southeast coast, and northeast showed high crop diversity.

The scientists hope to spur further studies regarding changing agricultural conditions, such as how diversity affects weed resistance to herbicides, honeybee “friendliness” of the landscape and agricultural community resilience to pressures such as climate change.

The study can be viewed at <http://journals.plos.org/plosone/article?id=10.1371/journal.pone.0136580>. □

(From KSRE- K-State News Sept. 2015)

Resources and Events

Come see KRC at our booth at the

Mother Earth News Fair

October 24-25, 2015

Kansas Expocentre

One Expocentre Drive

Topeka, Ks.

(Booth #1303)

For more information about tickets go to:
www.motherearthnewsfair.com/kansas/

Join KRC for our
Monthly Grazing
Teleconference Call
on the **second Monday**
of every month
7:30 to 9 p.m.

Hosted by Dale Kirkham, and
joined by KSU's Gary Kilgore
and Keith Harmony. These
informal discussions cover
all aspects of grazing
management.

Join the toll-free call by
entering 1-877-304-5632
and enter conference room
number: 300 346 2424#

For more information, contact
Dale Kirkham at 620-344-0202

Videos from KRC Women in Farming Workshop now online!

Sad that you had to miss the KRC Women in Farming workshop last July? Wish you could remember what that one presenter said?

Well, you are in luck! Presentations are now available on the Kansas Rural Center You Tube Channel. Simply google "Kansas Rural Center You Tube" Watch all of the great presentations! Also keynote speakers from the 2014 KRC Fall Conference are available on You Tube.



*A donation of \$60 /year provides KRC "Friend" benefits: KRC e-mail alerts, one-year of Rural Papers Newsletter, and Policy Watch E-Updates.

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You can also sign up and donate online at:

www.kansasruralcenter.org

Please remember KRC in your estate planning or will. Contact us for more information at ksrc@rainbowtel.net.

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Calendar

Monday November 9, 2015 KRC Grazing Conference Call. Hosted by Dale Kirkham. Call 1-877-304-5632; Conference Code 300 346 2424#

Friday & Saturday November 13-14, 2015 Annual Conference. Go to www.kansasruralcenter.org/conference-2015/ or call 866-579-5469.

Thursday-Friday November 19-20, 2015 Governor's Conference on the Future of Water Go to www.kwo.org for more information.

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

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