Comments Needed To Protect Farms & Ensure a Safe Food Supply
by Cole Cottin

Farmers, food processors, and consumers across the nation are mobilizing to respond to a U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) call for feedback on two proposed federal food safety rules that many fear could threaten small farm viability, and local and sustainable food systems as a whole. One might wonder: what is there not to love about promoting a safer food supply? Are these rules really all that threatening? If implemented, would they have a positive or negative impact on Kansas agriculture and food systems?

No one knows the answers better than farmers, food producers and consumers themselves – which is why the Kansas Rural Center and other farm advocacy groups across the country urge the public to respond to the “Preventative Controls” and “Produce Safety” rules before the Friday, November 15 deadline.

Continued on page 5

Diversity Equals Stable Profits Says Iowa Study

“It’s long been assumed that diversifying a crop rotation came with a major Achilles’ heel: it lowered yields of the main cash crops, resulting in lower farm income. But recent research out of Iowa is questioning the conventional wisdom that more diversity equals lower yields, and thus less profit. From 2003-2011 researchers compared three cropping systems on the Marsden Farm, an experimental operation in central Iowa....The study, which was published on the peer-reviewed PLoS ONE website last fall, found some significant energy/environmental benefits from the longer rotations. Synthetic nitrogen use in the diverse rotations dropped 80 to 86 percent compared to the conventional system.”

Read the full story on the benefits of a diversified crop rotation with small grains like oats and barley and forages like alfalfa and clovers on page 11.

Continued on page 11
Small Farmer Commentary

Feeding the World: Another Perspective
by Mary Fund

At a hearing before one of the state legislative agriculture committees a few years ago, one of the conferees used the term “industrial agriculture”. They were making a point comparing the differing impact of a proposed policy on small to mid-sized farms and larger industrial farms.

The committee chair stopped the individual and pointedly chided the use of the term. “We refer to it as simply ‘agriculture’”, he lectured. No clarity, criticisms, comparisons, or innuendos allowed by using the term “industrial”. Therein lies the problem.

All too often we allow ourselves to be guided by blind assumptions. In the above policy maker’s mind, there is only one agriculture to be considered—the highly capital intensive, fossil fuel reliant, high tech dependent farm and food system that is the “real” agriculture that feeds the world. Proponents argue that those of us who explore alternatives fill a special “niche”, but cannot possibly supply the world with enough food.

“We have to feed the world” is the mantra of industrial agriculture. It is also the trump card thrown down when some of us ask questions or express doubt about the collateral damage the industrial model inflicts on the environment and our communities.

The way we farm, we are told, is inevitable. We must embrace these technologies (i.e. genetically modified seeds and crops, new synthetic herbicides, drones for improving our management, as well as concentration of markets and input suppliers as they simply makes business more efficient), in order to increase production to feed the 9 billion people expected to be on the planet by 2050.

But an increasing number of voices are saying that ain't so-- and to rely on the industrial, capital intensive vision may spell disaster.

Indeed, they are saying that we need to “wake up before it is too late”. Researchers, scientists and hunger activists are challenging the assumptions about who and what kind of agriculture is feeding the world. They are also saying it is no longer just hunger we must address, but what kind of farming will provide the resilience needed to adapt to climate change?

Today nearly a billion people on the planet go hungry with a couple billion more not eating well. The ETC Group (Erosion. Technology and Concentration Group, a research organization in Canada) asserts that peasant or smallholder agriculture now provides food for most of the world. Industrial agriculture, they say, provides 30% of all food consumed, but uses 70 to 80 percent of the resources to do it. Conversely, they assert that peasant/smallholder agriculture provides 70% of the food consumed and uses 20 to 30 percent of the resources.

Food and hunger activists have long claimed that the planet produces enough food to feed every woman, man and child. The problem is not production, they argue, but power and distribution of resources. People lack the access to resources (land, water and energy) because of political decisions that remove them from the land.

Continued on page 3
replace food crops with export crops, and replace indigenous knowledge with expensive purchased inputs. The world’s hungry are often displaced farmers or rural dwellers who end up in urban slums because of political unrest or outside investment in local agriculture that pushed them off the land.

It is hard for our technology driven culture to understand how “peasant or smallholder agriculture” can be seen as a viable counter to an industrial model. Visions of back breaking labor get in the way. But solutions to our food future are not black or white. In reality, smallholder agriculture moves back and forth between technologies—being neither completely industrial or “peasant”.

What is perhaps easier to discuss and understand is the need to move toward more diversity, and a more biologically based farm and food system if we are to address the growing threat of climate change. A recently released report lays out the case that the solution for food security under climate change is a radical transformation of agriculture and the food system that would at the same time address poverty, gender inequality, hunger and malnutrition.

The September 2013 report, “Wake Up Before It is Too Late: Make Agriculture Truly Sustainable Now for Food Security in a Changing Climate”, argues that we need a shift toward farming models that promote a move “away from the current industrial agriculture and a globalized food system to a conglomerate of small, biodiverse, ecological farms around the world and a localized food system that promotes consumption of local/regional produce.”

The report, released by the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development, points to the successes of agro-ecological farms around the globe in healing land abuse and misuse and providing necessary food production. It also highlights the importance of enhancing plant diversity and increasing complexity in farming systems to increase resilience and reduce vulnerability to climate events.

In short, the research highlights diverse cropping systems around the world based on complex rotations and multiple crops that provide nutrients and pest management, that use little if any purchased synthetic fertilizers or herbicides, relying instead on biological or ecological place-based knowledge, and that provides for local/regional food production. It appears to be people based, not necessarily profit-based for multi-national companies.

These more diverse systems are more adaptive than the fossil fuel based industrial model based on mono or duoculture cropping systems that seriously compromise biodiversity and largely feed investor bank accounts the same way they feed mega-confined livestock feeding operations.

In the context of a world with limited resources (fresh water and healthy soil) or resources that come at too great a price (continued intensive reliance on fossil fuels for energy adding to already high CO2 levels) exploring the alternatives offered by more diverse, more localized farming and food systems is increasingly good common sense. So, yes there is industrial agriculture and then there is the “other” agriculture, one based in ecological principles, not just one agriculture, as our committee chair friend decreed at that hearing years ago. The signs of it are all around us. Here at home we see the other agriculture manifesting itself in farmer/rancher adoption of cover crops, more diverse crop rotations, minimum or no-till systems, forage based livestock systems, agroforestry, and mixing multiple enterprises (grains, livestock and specialty crops), and the growth of market garden farms geared at fruit and vegetable production for local markets, and small scale livestock production.

Perhaps, instead of being so audacious as to ask “how do we feed the world?” we should talk about – and help other countries talk about- “how do we feed ourselves in a changing world?”

The September 2013 report, “Wake Up Before It is Too Late: Make Agriculture Truly Sustainable Now for Food Security in a Changing Climate”, argues that we need a shift toward farming models that promote a move “away from the current industrial agriculture and a globalized food system to a conglomerate of small, biodiverse, ecological farms around the world and a localized food system that promotes consumption of local/regional produce.”

KRC News

Thank you and Good Luck!

KRC reluctantly bids adieu to Paul Ingle, who now has the record for shortest term as president of the KRC board. In August, Paul turned west to relocate in the San Francisco, CA area. Paul, who joined the KRC board several years ago and has been a collaborator on our clean water project work even longer, took the helm of president just last March. But life happens, circumstances change, and Kansas’ loss is California’s gain. We wish you good luck, Paul, and we’ll keep the porch light turned on for you!

At the September board meeting, Joy Lominska, Lawrence, was elected Board president.
Continuing Resolution, Debt Ceiling, and Deadlines: Where Does the Farm Bill Fit In?  
by Mary Fund

“Well, that was ugly!” began one of the many post government shut down/ debt crisis stories following the last minute deal that ended sixteen days of government shut-down and avoided a default on U.S. debt.

The deal reached at the 11th hour of the last day included the continuing resolution to fund the government until January 15, an increase to the nation’s debt ceiling until February, and an agreement for Congress to negotiate the FY 2014 budget by December 13.

Both House and Senate have now appointed budget conference committee members, and negotiations are set to begin the week of October 28.

The same is true for the Farm Bill conference committee which will also begin meetings that week. The fate of Farm Bill is intimately linked to the broader budget negotiations.

After months of delay and posturing, finally in late September the House passed a version of the farm bill (after reattaching the nutrition programs it had made a great show of stripping from the Farm Bill last summer). In early October the House appointed members to the joint House/Senate conference committee that will negotiate the fate of the 5-year farm bill.

However, the nutrition program budgets remain the major sticking point. The House still wants $39 billion in cuts, and the Senate has called for $4 billion.

According to the National Sustainable Agriculture Coalition (NSAC), given the gap between the two amounts, and the recent defeat of House Speaker Boehner and the Tea Party over repealing or delaying Obamacare in exchange for short-term government funding and a debt limit increase, getting a stand alone Farm Bill with nutrition program cuts close to the Senate figure, will be very difficult. Many expect that the only way to move a five-year farm bill forward will be linked to the broader budget deal.

Agricultural appropriations (the annual budget appropriation to all USDA and other related programs) for 2014 are also tied up in this negotiation process.

So while the government is back to work, no one can say that anything is resolved- and because the Farm Bill is being considered at the same time as these huge overarching issues, it will be subject to a decision making process very different than the historical process.

In a normal farm bill reauthorization year (which occurs about every five years), hearings, testimony and debate - all with opportunities for public input- are held early in the year. Each house passes their version. Then the agriculture committee leaders come together in a conference committee to hammer out differences, and a comprehensive bill emerges that both houses agree on. The appropriations process provides funds for programs, and people get down to work.

That did not happen last year. Nor did it happen this year. And with each delay, public input into the content of the programs is further removed from the process. (Last year in the build up to the final fiscal cliff deal, it was just the House and Senate Ag leadership cutting deals on the content of the Farm Bill and funding; and even that was lost in the final extension deal.)

Can we have good legislation or good planning under such circumstances? Will we simply see more of the status quo, instead of serious consideration of the kind of farm and food policy system needed to meet the challenges of bringing in a new generation of beginning farmers, adapting to the increasingly volatile vagaries of climate, and providing a safe and healthy food product for the nation’s citizens?

By December 13, we will either have a broad budget deal that includes a Farm Bill or not. And if not, we are in for a third year of no focused Farm Bill program, and another version of “kicking the can down the road.”
Food Safety Rules and Regulations Comments Needed...

Continued from page 1

A bit of background. The Food Safety Modernization Act (FSMA) is a federal law, passed by Congress in 2011, that directs the FDA to draft and implement the most sweeping reform of United States food safety legislation in more than 70 years. FSMA aims to shift the focus of federal food safety laws from responding to food contamination to preventing it. It addresses food safety risks from microbial pathogen contamination, but does not address possible food safety risks posed by genetically engineered crops or antibiotic resistance.

FSMA includes provisions requiring that the resulting “rules” be scale-appropriate, conservation-friendly, and accessible to certified organic and value-added food producers. But many who have studied the proposed rules fear these provisions will not be adequately met. Commenters are tasked with advising FDA to ensure the rules do comply with these provisions.

The FDA proposed rules, numbering over 1,600 pages, offer guidance on best practices that food businesses arguably ought to pursue even if they are not required - such as assessing potential food safety hazards on one’s farm, undergoing preventative food safety training specific to one’s field of work, and maintaining specific records that help ensure food traceability and safety.

However, among these proactive requirements designed to support and inform a safer food supply, groups like the National Sustainable Agriculture Coalition (NSAC) have identified a number of requirements that could seriously threaten the viability of farm and food operations.

How could this be? As Londa Nwadike, State Extension Consumer Food Safety Specialist for both Kansas and Missouri explains: while FSMA has implications across our entire food system, the FDA cannot possibly know the unique context and challenges of every farm and food situation in our nation. “They need to understand the realities of different farming systems,” Nwadike stresses, “The FDA must hear from small scale, diversified farms.”

What are some of the issues?

According to NSAC’s “Top 10 Problems with the FDA’s Proposed Food Safety Regulations” (available at http://sustainableagriculture.net/):

1) As written, the rules “could cost farmers over half of their profits” and keep beginners from entering into the field of agriculture and food production.

2) The rules grant FDA the authority to revoke small farmers’ protections without science-based evidence of a public health threat. NSAC and others argue that the rules treat small farms unfairly.

3) As they stand, the rules threaten to close many existing food hubs / local food distributors, and prevent the launch of new food businesses - resulting in reduced access to fresh, healthful foods.

4) The rules deny grain, dairy, and livestock farmers access to emerging local food markets, making it harder for farms to diversify.

5) The rules would consider farmers markets, roadside stands, food hubs, and community-supported agriculture programs “manufacturing facilities” subject to additional regulation.

6) The rules treat some low-risk processing items as dangerous substances.

7) The rules indirectly push farmers to use chemicals instead of natural fertilizers by advancing restrictions that “make it nearly impossible to use fertilizers like manure and compost.”

8) Farmers using water from streams and lakes would be required to pay for weekly water tests regardless of risk or cost.

9) They do not protect ecological and conservation practices. NSAC voices concern that the rules as written would harm wildlife and degrade soil and water, giving inspectors “free reign to require farmers to tear (native plant buffers) out regardless of any proof of a problem.”

10) NSAC praises the FDA for “taking an integrated, not a ‘commodity-specific’ approach” - meaning farmers would not face a litany of different rules for each item they produce. Contd. on page 6
Food Safety Rules....
Continued from page 5

The proposed rules do include a number of exemptions for different scales and types of production, but all farms and food producers should expect to be impacted to some degree. For example, there are requirements that no farm is exempt from - such as the requirement that all produce will now require labeling, including the name and complete business address of the farm(s) where the produce was grown. There are also many exemptions to the rules’ exemptions.

“We’re concerned that farmers are putting way too much emphasis on the idea that these so-called exemptions will shield them,” says Brian Snyder, Executive Director of the Pennsylvania Association for Sustainable Agriculture (PASA).

Having read through the hundreds of pages of the rules, Snyder believes that the FDA does not really want to exempt any farms, whatever their size or description. He argues that, if implemented the proposed rules would force some farmers to quit farming, prevent new farmers from getting started, and inhibit traditional farms from diversifying, all while doing little actually evidenced to increase food safety.

Not everyone shares this perspective though. Dr. Fadi Aramouni, a Professor and Extension Specialist with Kansas State University’s Department of Animal Sciences and Industry and a member of the Food Science Institute, has watched the food safety debate ensue. Aramouni too is concerned about supporting small farms but explains, “I think there are easy ways to transition for small farms.”

The more important question, argues Aramouni, is what resources the government will provide to aid in that transition – such as grants to support compliance with the new regulations.

The Kansas Department of Agriculture (KDA), who would be tasked with helping farms and food businesses interpret and implement the FDA rules in Kansas, asserts that they do not wish to see these rules cause undue burden for any farm.

“It is important for people to know their businesses and the level of risk they may be taking on, because no one want to make anyone sick,” comments Adam Inman, KDA Food Safety and Lodging Inspection and Training Supervisor, “but we want these rules to be ‘just enough’, and not more than that.”

The rules offer staggered compliance dates stretching across two to four years depending on scale of operation, to aid in the legal transition. However, several east coast farmers have already experienced surprise inspections from the FDA since FSMA was enacted. This behavior has made some producers nervous about what the future could hold, but Inman assures, “Except in emergency situations, farms should not fear someone showing up to close down their business.”

Still, advocates like Snyder hope a critical mass of public comments will help the FDA understand that “when it comes to food safety, local and sustainable food systems are part of the solution, not the problem.”

Lynn Byczynski, a national leader in market farming and editor and publisher of Growing for Market, advises commenters to speak in “very specific terms about how you would be affected. Even more important, suggest ways the rules could change so they would not be damaging to farms.” She adds, “Frankly, no farmer wants to be responsible for the illness or death of anyone. It’s incumbent on all of us to be open to more education and working more thoughtfully and diligently to keep our food safe.”

How to Comment. The FDA will accept comments in any of the following formats:
• Via postal mail, typed or hand written, to the following address: Division of Dockets Management (HFA-305); Food and Drug Administration; 5630 Fishers Lane, Room 1061; Rockville, MD 20852
• Via e-mail through: oira_submission@omb.eop.gov,
• Via fax: please send to the Office of Information and Regulatory Affairs, OMB; Attn: FDA Desk Officer; FAX: 202-395-7285,

All submissions received must include the following:
• Your Name
• Your Organization (if any)
• The appropriate docket number:
  For the Preventive Controls Rule: FDA-2011-N-0920 and RIN 0910-AG36
  For the Produce Rule: FDA-2011-N-0921, and RIN 0910-AG35

To comment on both rules, you can e-mail/fax them together but must label them separately.
Local Food News

Beginning Farmer Teleconference Calls Focus on Challenge and Needs
by Natalie Fullerton

KRC held two teleconference calls for beginning farmers in August and September to gather information on needs, challenges, and ways KRC and others can help beginning farmers. Each call focused on a specific topic that was determined based on information needs identified in a survey distributed to beginning farmers last June and July.

The first call focused on access to credit and capital for beginning farmers. Roseanna Bauman, farm manager of Cedar Valley Farms, Duane Hund with KSU’s Farm Analyst Program, Rebecca Floyd with the Kansas Development Finance Authority, and Shelley Wolf with USDA FSA joined the call to discuss the beginning farmer opportunities they have available within their organizations and advice for preparing and applying for credit.

A challenge frequently faced by beginning farmers on the call is preparing for credit applications and knowing where to find the right resources. Hund explained the importance of the five “C’s” of credit. The five “C’s” - character, collateral, capacity, capital, and circumstances - readily define how loans are assigned. All are equally important in establishing a viable loan. The five “C’s” along with a good relationship with the lender will enhance the applicant’s ability to acquire loans in the future.

The second call, which was moderated by Julie Mettenburg, KRC Executive Director, focused on pricing and selling in local food markets. Experienced producers joining this call included Cherie Schenker, founder of Schenker Family Farms; David Coltrain, Agriculture and Natural Resource Extension Agent in Finney County; Melissa Reed, Marketing Director at Hildebrand Farms Dairy; Tonia Rupe, founder of Lucky Star Farm; and Cole Cottin, Local Foods Coordinator at the Kansas Rural Center and founder of MAD Farm.

KRC Receives Specialty Crop Grant for a “From Tunnel to Table” Project

The Kansas Rural Center has been awarded a grant to promote the state’s specialty crop sector. KRC will receive $34,130 from the Kansas Department of Agriculture (KDA) via USDA to increase producer knowledge of options and decision making criteria into selecting polytunnel technologies on their farms.

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) awarded $239,566 to the Kansas Department of Agriculture through the Specialty Crop Block Grant program. The program is designed to improve the Kansas specialty crop industry, which includes various horticulture products, including fruits and vegetables, turf grass, tree nuts, dried fruits, nursery crops and flowers.

KRC’s project will produce a researched polytunnel comparison and resource guide, farm decision-making tool, and a series of regional on-the-ground workshops that demonstrate the different polytunnel options available.

The purpose of the Specialty Crop Block Grant program is to promote and increase opportunities for specialty crops. The program is part of USDA’s integrated approach to programs and policies that stimulate food- and agriculturally-based community economic development.

A strong challenge faced by beginning farmers when it comes to pricing and selling in local food markets is competitor pricing. Many beginning farmers on the call expressed their savvy knowledge for pricing their products; however, many find competition from products of

Continued on page 12
The Aquifer is drying up. The depletion of the High Plains Aquifer has been much in the news lately. A recent study by Kansas State University showed that some 30% of the western Kansas portion of the High Plains Aquifer, also referred to as the Ogallala Aquifer, has already been pumped out, and another 39% will be depleted over the next 50 years at current rates.

Saving water and extending the life of the aquifer has been one of Gov. Brownback's major themes, and the legislature has passed laws toward this end. But what do the Governor and KDA Secretary of Agriculture, Dale Rodman, also have in mind? Bring in the Animal Factories!

In an Aug. 9, 2013 article by Tim Carpenter of the Topeka Capitol-Journal, Governor Brownback said he wants farmers to switch to hot weather crops like milo and cotton that require less irrigation. Then he wants to expand the livestock industry, "transferring water consumption to animals and away from corn. We want to get as much economic value out of it (as we can) if we're going to mine the resource."

That's standard economic theory on maximizing return. You know, the kind of thinking that ignores externalities like pollution, health costs and loss of property value, and that crashes the economy every decade or so.

What stands in his way? The citizens of western Kansas. They've heard this kind of thing before. A Kansas law on corporate farming gives counties the option to keep out corporate-owned hog factories and dairies. In the late 1990's eighteen counties voted to do so with respect to hogs. That's what Secretary Rodman was referring to in the July 18, 2012 Greeley County Republican when he said, "This is an issue we have to quit fighting. The place to feed the world is here."

He was attending an appreciation lunch and tour of Seaboard Food's new Ladder Creek hog feeding complex touting a capacity of 132,000 mature hogs or 264,000 "nursery" pigs. The complex, the largest in Kansas, features 10 wastewater impoundments from 8 to 11 acres each in size. Seaboard recently filed plans to increase the capacity of the Ladder Creek complex by 50%. Mr. Rodman visited the site before it was stocked with hogs.

Assault on the Kansas Corporate Farming Law. So in the 2013 legislature, the KDA introduced a bill to change the corporate farming law, which has been in place for 80 years and has served the state well. At the committee hearing KDA failed to mention that the bill would take away the county option to keep out corporate hog factories.

But opponents, including the Sierra Club, Kansas Farmers Union and the Kansas Rural Center did point out that little detail. That got the committee's attention, and the bill was placed on hold for further study. But the Governor and supporters of the change, will not easily give up.

Assessing the Governor's Vision. So, aside from taking away citizens' rights to protect their quality of life, Continued on page 9
What else is wrong with this picture? The concentrated animal feeding operation (CAFO) model for hogs is to cram as many animals as you can into some buildings and sluice the high-strength manure into massive impoundments, called lagoons. Cattle feedlots are out in the open, but still require impoundments to contain precipitation runoff. After the waste putrefies in the absence of air for some months the operator sprays it over fields to grow crops.

Both the Governor and KDA Secretary Rodman think that semi-arid and thinly populated western Kansas is an ideal place for animal factories. After years of combing through hog CAFO permit files at KDHE, I have found quite a different picture (My friends tell me I should get a life).

The Reality. We now have lengthy experience with Seaboard Food’s massive complex of hog factories that were put in place from 1995 to 2001. The capacity of Seaboard’s system in Kansas is about 1.5 million head at any point in time with a turnover of about 2 times per year. They have numerous other operations just over the border in the Oklahoma panhandle and a huge slaughterhouse in Guymon.

There are serious problems with raising animals in close confinement in a semi-arid region subject to drought and heat waves that will only get worse with climate change. USDA scientists and others warn that the hotter it gets, the less efficient the production of animals will become, and that the hotter summers will reduce production more than warming winters will help.

Kansas’s beef industry will get hit as well. Pity the poor cows standing in 110 degree F. heat in July without shade. Operators can help by spraying, uh, lots of water to keep the animals cooler and to keep the dust down in feedlots.

“There are serious problems with raising animals in close confinement in a semi-arid region subject to drought and heat waves that will only get worse with climate change.”

Hot weather doesn’t do much for the manure disposal model either. Due to persistent drought and very high evaporation rates, Seaboard has given up spraying wastewater onto fields at many of its sites for the time being. The salinity of the wastewater in some lagoons is now in the range of seawater.

This wastewater can still be used on crops, but it must be diluted with huge amounts of, oops, irrigation water. At one of their large breeding complexes Seaboard gave up on wastewater application and built an evaporation pond to hold the waste indefinitely. KDHE has never specified what can be done with this nasty material after 25 years of baking in the sun. Evaporation ponds have been built at other sites as well.

Soil tests at many wastewater application fields show a buildup of residual nitrogen that prevents the addition of more wastewater. Apparently this is the result of the poor quality of the effluent, poor growing conditions, and insufficient use of clean irrigation water. The only practical way to retrieve these fields is to plant corn, which is hungry for nitrogen, and then apply a bunch of clean water. But say, isn’t that what the Governor wants to avoid?

The soil pollution would be even worse if it were not for the fact that over 80% of the nitrogen in the waste is emitted to the atmosphere as ammonia which causes environmental damage hundreds of miles downwind.

Who Wins and Who Loses with CAFOS? Seaboard Foods wins, especially executives in their cushy suites in a Kansas City suburb or Smithfield executives in Virginia or their new owners in China. The Governor will tout the new investment he brought into the state. He will try to tout the jobs, but the massive complex Seaboard built in Greeley County has so far earned the area a grand total of 14 permanent jobs. His figures will, of course, not include the losses to hundreds of family farms that could be raising hogs.

The people who sell their land and water rights to Seaboard or Smithfield will make out, but the neighbors get thrown under the bus. The only protection they have from the flies, odors and other noxious gases is the statutory separation distance of 5000 feet between the hog CAFO and their home. But that distance is the same whether the site holds 9400 hogs or the soon-to-be 200,000 hogs at
Sustainable Farming News

Ogallala and Hogs...
Continued from page 9

Seaboard Ladder Creek. If you work in fields adjacent to the hogs you get the full force of the nuisance without recourse. As is currently the case in Greeley County, inadequate water supply will make the odor worse.

The host county may collect some taxes, but they have to build and maintain roads to accommodate the heavy trucks that deliver feed and animals to stock the site and that return later to pick up the 280-pound hogs for their long ride to slaughter. Then there’s the almost daily traffic of rendering trucks that pick up the large number of animals who die in these operations.

Environmental Injustice. You’ve probably heard about injustice to low income people who live near industrial polluters in big cities? EPA even has a program for it. We are focusing here on the rural counterpart to environmental injustice that gets little notice from regulators or from the news media.

Big Ag, "Feed-the-world" proponents may say that residents of western Kansas aren’t complaining that much. That’s probably true at this point, and my review of those permit files tells us why.

Here’s how it works. A neighbor calls KDHE and complains about the stink. KDHE dutifully makes out a complaint form, and a technician shows up in a day or two—after the wind has shifted. He will report that the odor is not that bad, or that the odor is no worse than at the site he visited the previous week. He may call the operator who says he was spraying wastewater a couple days ago. KDHE personnel almost never go into the barns to check the sanitary conditions due to "biosecurity" concerns, or check how often the pits under the animals are flushed (in water-short areas, it can be two weeks). The technician checks a box on the form and goes home.

Nothing is done because Kansas has no analytical standard for odor or flies, and even if they did, it would be prohibitive to regularly measure it. So the neighbors are stuck, and they know it. Pretty soon they give up, and get by as best they can.

The nuisance is inherent in the intensive confinement of large numbers of hogs, and regulators have accommodated this bizarre technology in favor of the producers. Actually, if the Governor gets his way with the corporate farming law, there’s nothing to stop some big corporation from setting up shop in central or eastern Kansas.

I’d hate to be in a legislator’s shoes when Seaboard or Smithfield comes in with a proposal to fill his district with hogs, and then his constituents find out that their right to vote has been taken away.

The full article first appeared in “Planet Kansan”, the Ks. Chapter of the Sierra Club’s newsletter. This excerpt is reprinted with permission of the author.

Complaint Filed Against Seaboard’s Ladder Creek Hog Facility

On August 22, the Kansas Chapter of the Sierra Club filed a complaint against the Kansas Department of Health and Environment (KDHE) for not enforcing the odor control provision of the Ladder Creek hog facility in Greeley County.

Seaboard Food Inc.’s Ladder Creek hog feeding operation in northeast Greeley County is the largest in Kansas and one of the largest in the United States. Its current capacity is 132,000 mature hogs. In order to limit the odor potential of this massive facility, Seaboard’s permit contains a condition that the ten waste lagoons, must be filled to a level of 10 feet to allow mixing of clean water with the hog manure to facilitate treatment.

The first barns were stocked on July 17, 2012 and the Kansas Chapter filed a complaint on August 22, 2013 noting that water levels in 3 of the first 5 impoundments to be placed into operation were still significantly below the 10-foot standard for odor control. The Sierra Club asserts that KDHE granted Seaboard an exception to the permit condition cutting the requirement to as little as 5 and a half feet, relying on incomplete calculations provided by Seaboard, and without checking current hog stocking levels.

Interested in keeping up with corporate farming and other important news from the 2014 Kansas legislative session?
KRC’s Legislative & Policy Watch Program provides weekly updates from Topeka. Contact the KRC office for more information!
Sustainable Farming News

Diverse Crop Rotations Good for Land, Good for Profits

The Land Stewardship Project, a sister organization in Minnesota, publishes a series in their newsletter, “Myth Busters”. The article below, reprinted with permission from The Land Stewardship Letter, takes on the myth that “diverse crop rotations may be a boon for the land, but are a bust when it comes to farmers’ bank accounts.” It just ain’t so when you look at the research evidence. Read on to see how adding diversity “balances productivity, profitability and environmental health.” M. Fund, Editor

It is no big surprise that cropping systems more diverse than the typical corn one year, soybeans the next, routine are friendlier to the environment. Breaking up this monotonous cycle by throwing small grains like oats and forages like alfalfa into the mix has proven to not only reduce the need for chemicals that can make their way into our water, but is an effective soil erosion deterrent.

However it’s long been assumed that diversifying a crop rotation came with a major Achilles’ heel: it lowered yields of the main cash crops, resulting in lower farm income.

But recent research out of Iowa is questioning the conventional wisdom that more diversity equals lower yields, and thus less profit. From 2003-2011 researchers compared three cropping systems on the Marsden Farm, an experimental operation in central Iowa. One system was typical corn one year, soybeans the next duo-culture. It was then compared to two diversified systems. One involved a rotation where during the third year instead of corn or soybeans a small grain such as triticale or oats was grown in conjunction with red clover. The other was a four-year rotation: corn, soybeans, small grains and alfalfa.

Chemical fertilizers and herbicides were used in the more diverse rotations, but at lower rates than the two-crop systems (composted cattle manure as well as clover and alfalfa residues were used to replace some petroleum-based fertilizers in the more diverse systems).

The study, which was published on the peer-reviewed PLoS ONE website last fall, found some significant energy/environmental benefits from the longer rotations. Synthetic nitrogen use in the diverse rotations dropped 80 to 86 percent compared to the conventional system.

After several years, good weed control was possible in the more diverse systems even though their herbicide use was on average six to 10 times lower. This meant potential herbicide-related freshwater toxicity was 200 times lower during the last six years of the study. Diverse rotations also used around half the amount of energy per-acre, per-year.

These results are pretty much common sense: a greater diversity of plants on the land breaks up pest cycles, helps soil build its own fertility and reduces the need for intense tillage year after year. In addition, legumes like alfalfa and clover help to provide for “free” the nitrogen so critical for growing corn.

And corn and soybean yields in the diverse rotations were slightly higher when compared to the conventional system. Other studies have shown that once established, a diversified cropping system can provide a yield boost, so this was not a major surprise either.

Diversity = Stable Profits

But what is surprising is that the diverse rotations produced similar, and in some cases slightly higher, profits compared to their conventional counterparts. This was true during both the transition years (2003 to 2005) and the years when the longer

Continued on page 12

Legumes like clovers or other cover crops are important in a diversified crop rotation.
Diversified Crop Rotations  
continued from page 11

rotations were well established (2006-2011). That’s an important piece of information for any farmers who are considering making the transition to a more diverse system, but are concerned they can’t afford even a year or two of lower profits.

This research, which was conducted by scientists from the USDA Agricultural Research Service, the University of Minnesota and Iowa State University, makes another important point about profitability: once the diverse systems were established, they were more financially stable from year to year. That’s because when a system relies less on inputs like petroleum-based fertilizer, it’s not as likely to have its bottom line jerked around by price swings in the oil and natural gas markets.

If this study shows there is more consistent profitability with diversity, why wouldn’t more farms adopt this system? Remember, corn and soybeans, which are quite lucrative these days are not grown every year when you add small gains and forage to the rotation.

That means a farmer needs a way to make something like oats or hay pay during those “off” years when there aren’t corn or soybeans available to sell. In most cases, that means having cattle and other livestock present on the farm, or at least on neighboring farms, to add economic value to those plants by using them as feed and to help provide fertility through manure cycling. In many farming communities, livestock have been removed from the land and put into specialized, large-scale concentrated animal feeding operations while crop farmers concentrate on just raising corn and soybeans.

The other issue is labor. The Marsden Farm researchers concede that the more diverse systems require a more management intensive approach, with farmers actually walking the fields, observing changes and juggling various plant growth schemes, not to mention dealing with livestock. To a specialized corn and soybean producer used to just planting, applying chemicals and harvesting, this can be a radical paradigm shift, no matter what the profit margin.

However, the Marsden study could help make a diverse farming system more attractive to conventional producers by showing that sustainability doesn’t require going cold turkey on inputs. It just may require putting chemicals in their proper place—as tools in a toolbox, not the toolbox itself. As the researchers concluded: “...more diverse cropping systems can use small amounts of synthetic agrichemical inputs as powerful tools with which to tune, rather than drive, agroecosystem performance...”.

More Information
To read the full Marsden Farm study “Increasing Cropping System Diversity Balances Productivity, Profitability and Environmental Health” on the PLoS ONE website see www.plosone.org.

See more on the Leopold Center for Sustainable Agriculture’s ongoing research into diverse crop rotations at www.leopold.iastate.edu/news/10-11-12/benefits-of-longer-rotations.

Reprinted with permission from the Land Stewardship Letter, #1 2013 www.landstewardshipproject.org

“...the diverse rotations produced similar, and in some cases slightly higher, profits compared to their conventional counterparts.”

Beginning Farmer
Teleconference Calls...

Continued from page 7

lower quality distracting their market. Competitor products priced well below the market value are also making it difficult for farmers to sell their products and earn a profit. Schenker and Rupe expressed the importance of telling your story and practicing good communication and outreach to current and potential customers.

A final call will be held October 24 which will focus on transitioning to organic production.

All notes, resources, and contact information from each call are posted on KRC’s website at kansasruralcenter.org/tag/resource-lists. The calls are part of KRC’s Beginning Farmer Project Funded by Farm Aid.
Sustainable Farming News

Hog Farm Complaint...
Continued from page 10

According to attorney Robert Eye, former General Counsel to KDHE, the permit contains no language allowing such an exception. “The 10 foot standard is unequivocal and should be enforced as written.”

“When KDHE accepted the calculations as provided by Seaboard, they not only did not follow KDHE’s own design manual, they did not adhere to ASABE engineering standards for design of anaerobic treatment lagoons,” says Kathy J. Martin, a professional engineer from Oklahoma who specializes in evaluating waste management systems of large animal feeding operations.

“The ASABE standard clearly requires a treatment depth that includes space attributable to the manure volume and sludge buildup, which were ignored in Seaboard’s calculation.” Seaboard plans to expand the Ladder Creek operation in this water-short area to almost 200,000 hogs next year.

“Water depth in lagoons may seem like a minor issue to some,” says Craig Volland, Chair of the Chapter's Agriculture Committee, “but KDHE’s handling of this should cause concern for all Kansans. If some big corporation brings thousands of hogs into your county, your quality of life will not be protected.”

Whole Farm Planning Workshop for Women Only
Set for Nov. 14 in Linn

The Kansas Rural Center will conduct a Women’s Only Farm Planning Workshop and farm tour Thursday November 14 in Linn, Kansas. The workshop, which will be held at the Linn American Legion starting at 9 a.m., is free of charge. Participants are welcome to come for just the morning or just the afternoon session, or both. Register by November 11 by calling 785-873-3431, or emailing ddysart@kansasruralcenter.org. Lunch will be served.

The morning session (9 a.m. to 11:30 a.m.) will focus on “whole farm planning” using KRC’s River Friendly Farm Environmental Assessment notebook and planning tool. Women will be provided a copy of the RFFP notebook and are asked to bring copies of their farm’s aerial maps and pertinent farm records of crops planted, conservation work done, etc. so they can get started on their own farm assessment and plans. Dale Kirkham and Ed Reznicek, former KRC staff field assistants, will be on hand to provide an overview of the RFFP process and how it works, and to help the women work on their own farm plans. (A second meeting will be planned to meet as individuals with staff to answer questions and complete the plans.)

After lunch from 1 p.m. to 3 p.m., the workshop will feature presentations from Kansas State University Ag Economist, Mykel Taylor on leasing and tenant agreements and pasture and cropland leasing price ranges as well as an update on land prices. Following Taylor will be Forrest Buhler, staff attorney for the Kansas Agricultural Mediation Service (KAMS) who will provide an overview of estate planning do’s and don’t’s. From 3:30 to roughly 5 p.m. there will be a tour of forage cover crops at the nearby farm of Lucinda and Sheila Stuenkel.

This meeting is a follow-up to KRC’s June tour and workshop on Women and Conservation. At that workshop, many of the women expressed interest in learning more about the whole farm planning tool described by Lucinda Stuenkel, our tour host. Lucinda and sister-in-law Sheila’s testimony that having gone through the notebook was a huge help for them when both their husbands were killed in a tragic vehicle accident, sparked many women’s interest.

The RFFP is a notebook organized to guide you through questions and answers to do a self-assessment that helps inventory and rank the state of the farm’s natural resources, its pastures, cropland, and the management practices used, and what existing problems or potential problems or changes need to be made. The process leads the participant to a farm plan complete with identified technical assistance and resources to help implement the plan.

Co-sponsors include Tuttle Creek WRAPS and KSU River Valley Extension, and KSU Research and Extension.

To register, call 785-873-3431 or e-mail Diane Dysart at ddysart@kansasruralcenter.org. Please indicate if you will be attending the full day or half day, and if you want to be included in the lunch count.
**Briefs**

**Mid-Size Farms Are Disappearing**

The average size of farms has stayed basically the same over the past three decades. But, according to the USDA Economic Research Service, this masks some important structural changes: growing numbers of very small and very large farms and declining numbers of mid-sized farms. In the process, cropland acreage is moving toward much larger farms. The shift is substantial and widespread, and is due to developments in technology and farm organization.

In 2011, the USDA Agricultural Resource Management survey showed 1.68 million farms with the average farm having 234 acres. More analysis shows 4 of 5 farms are smaller than the average. The majority of the farms are between 1 and 49 acres, but the majority of the cropland is owned by farms with over 2,000 acres.

USDA says the data is skewed by a few farms working more acres. More efficient equipment, precision farming, genetically engineered seeds and a more prominent role for GPS systems have allowed farms to manage larger farms in the same amount of time. Increased size of equipment and technology has also led to creation of larger contiguous fields.

**Prairie Conservation Strips Save Soil**

Prairie conservation strips interlaced with row crops could be one of the most cost-effective and low-effort conservation practices available to farmers and landowners in the Midwest.

According to research from the ISU STRIPs team (Science-based Trials of Rowcrops Integrated with Prairies), converting one tenth of a row-cropped field to perennial prairie could result in a reduction of more than 90 percent in soil and nutrient runoff from the entire field. A new economic analysis shows that the average cost to treat runoff from an acre of corn or soybeans is just $24 to $35 per year.

The analysis was conducted by John Tyndall, a member of the STRIPs team and ISU assistant professor in Natural Resource Ecology and Management. Tyndall’s estimate includes the cost of land conversion, maintenance and the “opportunity cost” of lost revenue or rent from acreage taken out of crop production. More than 90 percent of the total cost is the opportunity cost, which can be offset if the land is enrolled in federal conservation programs such as the Environmental Quality Incentive Program or Conservation Reserve Program.

How Tyndall estimated these costs and ranges (representing different land values) is outlined in a new publication, “The Cost of Prairie Conservation Strips,” available on the Leopold Center website and the STRIPs website. Go to: http://www.leopold.iastate.edu/news/leopold-letter/2013/fall/cost#sthash.Z0Rgi5Ah.dpuf.

**KSU Study Shows Pumping of High Plains Aquifer Cannot be Sustained**

A recent Kansas State University (KSU) study of the High Plains Aquifer shows that 30% of the aquifer has been pumped and that given current trends, another 39% will be pumped by 2050. Current levels of crop and livestock production cannot be sustained, although cutting back now, according to researchers, would reduce the production in the short-term but extend the lifetime of the aquifer and increase net production over time.

The High Plains Aquifer supplies 30% of the nation’s groundwater and the Kansas portion support the Congressional district with the highest market value for agriculture in the nation.

Recharge accounts for 15% of current use. It would take an 80% reduction to reach recharge equilibrium.

An article in the New York Times called the aquifer depletion, “a slow motion crisis decades in the making, imminent for some, decades away for others, hitting one farm but leaving an adjacent one untouched.” The depletion is largely due to the switch over the past forty years or more from a rotation of corn, sorghum, and wheat to largely mono-cropped corn being fed to the large cattle feedlots that have sprung up along with irrigation.
The Kansas Rural Center hosted a booth at the recent Mother Earth News Fair held in Lawrence, Ks. Thousands flocked to the fair to visit vendor and organizational booths, and hear speakers like livestock handling expert Temple Grandin, small farm entrepreneur Joel Salatin, and more. The interest and enthusiasm of the crowd for farm and food solutions and enterprises was contagious. The crowd included typical back-to-the-land types, market gardeners, bee keepers, plant and gardening enthusiasts, but also drew its share of conventional farmers interested in new enterprises and learning more about alternative farming practices.

Celebrating 34 Years of Support for Sustainable Agriculture -- *Rural Papers*

___ YES, I want to support sustainable agriculture and a local/regional food system in Kansas.

___ $35 ___ $50 ___$100 ___ Other

Check preference below:

_____ Send only paper copy. _____Send electronic only.

_____ Send both paper and electronic.

Name: __________________________________________

Address: _______________________________________

______________________________________________

E-mail: _________________________________________

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


Available on KRC’s Website:

http://kansasruralcenter.org/finding-your-niche-a-marketing-guide-for-kansas-farms/

There you can access and print a full copy of the 200 page guide, OR you can view the table of contents and select (and print) section by section.

OR you can order a hard copy from the website ($25/each), or calling the KRC office at: 785-873-3431
Calendar

Saturday, November 2  KRC’s  Farming and Food Conference, Meridian Center, Newton, Ks. Contact KRC 785-873-3431; or for more info go to www.kansasruralcenter.org

Wednesday-Friday November 6-8 “Cultivating Our Food, Farms and Future” – 4th National Conference for Women in Sustainable Agriculture; Des Moines Iowa, Contact the Women Food & Ag Network at 515.460.2477 or Email: info@wfan.org or www.wfan.org

Monday, November 11 Grazing Teleconference Call, 7:30 p.m. Call 1-877-304-5632 Code 300 346 2424. Calls are free. Dial in and listen to and participate in discussion about forages and grazing management.

Thursday November 14 Whole Farm Planning for Women Only Workshop, Linn, Ks. 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. Contact 785-873-3431; or ddysart@kansasruralcenter.org.

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

Inside This Issue

No. 250
Sept.-Oct.-Nov. 2013

*Comments Needed to Protect Farms & Ensure Safe Food Supply

* Diversity Equals Stable Profits Says Iowa Study

*Small Farmer Commentary: Feeding the World: Another Perspective

*Continuing Resolution, Debt Ceiling & Deadlines: Where Does the Farm Bill Fit In?

*Beginning Farmer Tele-conference Calls Focus on Challenges & Needs

*Guest Commentary: The Ogallala & Factory Farming: Saving Water to Bring in More Hogs?

*Complaint Filed Against Seaboard’s Ladder Creek Facility

* Farm Planning Workshop for Women Only Nov. 14

* Briefs