Amendment of Kansas Corporate Farm Law Recommended

by Mary Fund

An advisory panel for the Kansas Judicial Council has unanimously recommended that two parts of the state’s 82 year old corporate farm law be amended, as those parts may be unconstitutional if challenged in court.

“While the Committee did not see any fundamental problems with the corporate ag law,” stated Jim Kaup, Topeka attorney who served on the panel, “they did find a couple of statutes within the law to amend.”

At a meeting on November 22, the judicial review panel concluded that the law has two weak points: 1) the provision that requires all partners in a relevant farm corporation to be Kansans is discriminatory against non-residents, and is thus open to unconstitutionality; and 2) a second provision requiring that all farm corporations in Kansas (except family farm corporations) have to be formed in Kansas, discriminates against non-Kansans or non-Kansas businesses, and thus may also violate the interstate commerce clause.

Proposed solutions are to adopt language allowing corporations formed in other states to do business in Kansas, and to allow any “natural person” to be part of those structures.

These two changes are fundamental enough to open the state to outside investors and corporations, and foreign ownership. The question is to what extent this will happen. “Adoption of language to include natural persons rather than Kansas residents will open the state to the world of hedge-fund managers,” stated Paul Johnson, policy analyst for the Kansas Rural Center. “It will lead to more absentee land ownership and more contract farming.”

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From the Director

Celebrating 35 Years of KRC – and a Vision for the Future

by Julie Mettenburg

In 2014 the Kansas Rural Center will celebrate a major milestone: our 35th anniversary of working toward a sustainable farming and food system in Kansas. While that’s exciting, it also compels us to look forward, at where we will be needed in the coming years.

While reflecting on this question, recently KRC staff shared our personal reasons for our commitment to KRC and its mission. We were surprised by the breadth of our answers: To preserve the option to farm in Kansas. To promote self-sufficiency. To promote social justice in food and farming. To help meet the needs of our rural communities. To protect conservation. To improve the health of our families through the food that we eat, how it is produced, and reducing the negative environmental impact of potentially toxic production practices.

I’m guessing that if we polled all of you, we would discover many more reasons that you have become involved with KRC over the years. The Kansas Rural Center has been a place for people who understand that our great state faces great needs -- needs that require a vision for the future, and a voice for those who share that vision.

35 Years of Vision and Voice.

During the energy and farm credit crises of the late 70s and mid-80s, farmers struggled to obtain help and counseling. Staff and volunteers stepped up, leading to the first state-sponsored farm crisis hotline in the nation and the state’s first program for farmers adopting low-input sustainable agricultural practices.

By the 1990s, it became clear that more Kansas farmers needed a trusted friend to help them do right by the land as environmental stewards. KRC’s River Friendly Farms Whole-Farm Planning Assessment and consultants have helped over 300 Kansas farmers to implement solutions that balance the need to optimize production with proper care for our soil, water, and wildlife habitats. KRC also brought information and ideas to countless more through farmer to farmer events of workshops and tours.

As we entered the new millennium, KRC recognized that if our farmers and ranchers could be supported with expertise and some financial resources, they could generate solutions to their most pressing problems rather than rely on top-down change. Our Heartland Network spawned a number of farmer-led groups that still exist today, such as the Kansas Graziers Association and the Rolling Prairie Farmers Alliance, which feeds more than 300 families in Northeast Kansas and may be the oldest multi-farm CSA in the Midwest.

In addition to practical help, KRC has also provided a voice for you and countless others who care about our farming and food system, and its impact.

When responses were needed to counter the destruction of consolidation on our farms and rural communities, KRC provided a voice for social justice. We advocated that our farmers who grow our food should receive a fair livelihood that enables them to care for the land, and that those who consume our food should receive a healthful product.  Contd. on pg. 3
When it became clear that we needed to rebuild our local and regional food system, for the health of the land AND its people, KRC led efforts to form the first Kansas food policy council. Today, KRC is one of 5 statewide partners with the Kansas Health Foundation who are seeking to make healthful foods the easy, affordable choice. KRC provides the voice that ensures our own farms are part of that solution.

Years ago, when we recognized the destruction that corporate farming could bring to the state, KRC was a leading voice that helped ensure our laws retained the local control and private property rights of all Kansas citizens, not just the biggest operators. These laws are now under fire, and KRC is one of the voices pushing back against those who would like to throw open the doors to 250,000 hog operations.

A Future of Leadership. Through these years, KRC has consistently provided leadership in agricultural and environmental issues in Kansas. But sustained leadership requires looking ahead, at what will be needed tomorrow. So during the past year, we have engaged our communities and partners, and have identified several major priorities for upcoming work that we hope will benefit Kansas for generations to come:

• Helping farms implement ecologically-based Diversified Farming Systems for farm viability, ecological stewardship, and resilience in the face of change;
• Helping farms transition to new generations and new owners, without losing the farm or civility in the process;
• Helping communities tackle some of the most challenging food access and health problems this state has ever faced, and ensuring that our farms are central to those solutions;
• Helping Kansans transition to renewable energy resources, starting with on-farm solutions;
• Helping Kansans grapple with what is perhaps our most pressing issue of all: availability and protection of our water, and the impending depletion of the Ogallala Aquifer.

In the next year alone, we hope you will join us in 2014 for such activities as a series of regional Agriculture & Health Summits, environmental initiatives such as our upcoming pollinator program in Northeast Kansas, innovative farming research and education such as our yearlong “Tunnel to Table” project, and continuing information and news programs such as our Legislative & Policy Watch that will begin providing reports from the legislature in early 2014.

You can learn more about many of these upcoming activities -- and how to get involved -- in this issue of the Rural Papers. We hope you will continue with us on this journey, to provide a vision and a voice for an ecologically sound, economically viable, and socially just food and farming system in Kansas.

Julie Mettenburg is KRC’s Executive Director. Contact her at jmettenburg@kansasruralcenter.org

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USDA Seeks Comments on Agricultural Coexistence

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) is accepting public comment on how various forms of agriculture can coexist in the U.S. According to USDA Secretary Vilsack earlier this fall, the Advisory Committee on Biotechnology and 21st Century Agriculture (known as AC21) recommended that USDA strengthen education and outreach on agricultural coexistence.

Coexistence is defined as the concurrent cultivation of crops produced through diverse agricultural systems including traditionally produced, organic, identity preserved, and genetically engineered crops. USDA states it supports all forms of agriculture— including conventional, organic, and genetically engineered crops.


So far, the coexistence suggestions have very few safeguards for organic or non-GMO producers. The USDA needs to know that stronger controls on GMO crops are imperative to promote a landscape where organic and non-GMO agriculture can thrive.

Public comments should focus on solutions that address the realities of crop production and the marketplace. The National Organic Coalition will have suggestions for talking points at (http://www.nationalorganiccoalition.org/) after the holidays.
As Congress heads out of town for the Christmas holidays, it appears that a Farm Bill agreement may be nearing, but will be acted on in early January.

The House left town Friday December 13, shortly after their vote on the budget deal, without any Farm Bill to act on, and the Senate will leave the next week.

But the word is that progress has been made by the “Gang of Four” (the chairs and ranking members of House and Senate Ag committees). An agreement was reached over one major stumbling block: cuts to the supplemental food assistance program or food stamps. An agreement was reached for $8 to $10 billion dollars in cuts over 10 years, as opposed to the $4 billion originally proposed by the Senate and the $39 billion by the House.

Whether the House can ultimately get such a difference voted out of the House by the conservatives who proposed the more draconian cuts is a question that will be answered after the first of the year.

Negotiations on the rest of the Farm Bill will continue as they aim to have a bill ready for a conference committee meeting on January 8 or 9.

According to the National Sustainable Agriculture Coalition (NSAC) there are several major issues under active debate. At this writing, they include:

* commodity program payment limit reform (including closing the loopholes that allow farms to collect unlimited subsidies) that is included in both House and Senate bills; opposition still exists to payment limits.

* nationwide sodsaver protection -crop insurance reform to reduce subsidized destruction of grasslands; included in the Senate bill but not the House.

* an assault on fair market competition in the livestock sector that would eliminate most of USDA’s authority to maintain a fair and competitive market and protect the rights of farmers and ranchers, which is included in the House bill.

* reversing consumer-right-to-know country of origin labeling for meat.

* and the King Amendment, that would curtail the rights of states to regulate food, agriculture and natural resources, another House provision.

More details are available at the NSAC website at: sustainableagriculturecoalition.org

Farm Bill Moving Forward~ In January
by Mary Fund

Federal Policy News

Keep Up with the 2014 State Legislature and More

In January 2014, the Kansas Rural Center will send our policy analyst, Paul Johnson, to Topeka to report once again every week from the State House. He will cover all the issues and action important to food and farming, the environment and energy, and the continuing saga of the state budget which of course impacts all other aspects of state government.

We will also provide updates on the federal farm bill and other federal food and farm related issues or implementation as needed, through our participation in the National Sustainable Agriculture Coalition. These reports will be sent to you in our weekly “Policy Watch E-Update” electronic newsletter, direct to your in-box.

All contributors of $50 or more to KRC are eligible to receive the Policy Watch E-Updates. If you have donated to our most recent annual giving campaign~ with a donation since November 2013~ you are automatically on the list (if we have your updated e-mail address!)

If you have not already donated, please consider doing so! $35 gets you Rural Papers for a year. $50 gets you both Rural Papers and the E-Updates. You can use the coupon in this newsletter, or stay tuned for our E-Notice in your in-box. For more information, contact Mary Fund at mfund@kansasruralcenter.org.
“Farming as if People Matter” Conference Draws Enthusiastic Crowd
by Natalie Fullerton

“Farming as if People Matter” was the theme echoing throughout the Kansas Rural Center’s 2013 Farm and Food Conference November 2 in Newton, Kansas. Over 140 people attended the conference that focused on farm transitioning and management, local food marketing, food and farming policy and community food solutions. Those who attended included farmers and ranchers, community leaders, rural advocates, and food and agricultural businesses.

Thirty experts throughout the day spoke on subjects that resonated with the themes subtitle, “how to feed ourselves, build new farms and adapt to a changing world.” Session topics such as Farm to School, the Farm Bill, farming with limited access to land, credit or capital, pollinators on the farm, and pricing product for local markets drew in audiences of diverse backgrounds concerned with advancing agriculture and food production in Kansas.

Keynote speaker, Wes Jackson president of The Land Institute in Salina, captivated the audience with his address, “when ecology replaces agronomy for food production.”

“KRC, like the Land Institute, operates on the margins,” stated Jackson, using a diversity in nature metaphor. “We are a part of the remnant.” And that is ok, he said. ‘If we were central, it would mean we are asking the wrong questions.’ But in the remnants and on the margins is the diversity, we need.

Jackson spoke of how our entire economic system came into existence to capitalize on carbon. But now we are trapped in a world of greenhouse gases impacting all aspects of our lives, due to those uses. Jackson advised the group to “to deepen the discussion” in order to find solutions and ways to adapt, and ultimately reach more people.

In addition to Jackson and the workshop sessions, conference goer’s had opportunities to network with their peers.

Fifteen organizations and businesses took advantage of the exhibition hall to offer information, networking and resources to conference participants. The end of the day also offered time for informal dialogue about the days hot topics such as the Farm Bill, beginning farmer connections, and women on the farm.

The conference was presented with generous support by several sponsors including the Kansas Center for Sustainable Agriculture and Alternative Crops, Kansas SARE, Heartland Mill, and Farm Aid.

Next year’s Farm and Food Conference will be held November 8, 2014. • Contact Natalie Fullerton at nfullerton@kansasruralcenter.org
Local Food News

Polytunnel Options Will Enhance Farmer Choices

A new KRC project will provide farmers information on their polytunnel options for specialty crop production with resource materials and workshops. (Photo by Jessi Asmussen, Mellowfields Urban Farm.)

“Kansas farmers currently lack adequate resources to inform their decision-making about how to access and integrate (plastic) tunnels into their growing systems, and which tunnel system will work best for helping them maximize their return on investment,” states Dan Phelps, Activity Coordinator for the Kansas Rural Center’s new Tunnel to Table project. KRC recently received a Kansas Department of Agriculture Specialty Crop Block Grant for the project.

“From Tunnel to Table” will highlight different polytunnel options for fruit, vegetable, and specialty crop production through publication of a resource guide and decision-making tool, and a series of regional workshops, which will take place throughout the 2014 growing season.

Polytunnels are a vital component in a diversified specialty crop farm. They give farmers the ability to dramatically extend their growing season to the point that there is no ‘off-season’, thus extending their income generating season. They also offer climatic control throughout the year, offering protection not just from the cold and snow, but also from wind, hail, heavy rain, and even the heat.

Polytunnels also allow farmers to exclude pests that can cause crop damage and that pose a food safety risk. “The economic potential for specialty crops grown in polytunnels is enormous,” says Phelps.

Through the KRC project, Kansas specialty crop growers and farm service providers will receive extensive information and hands-on tutorials to assist farmers with making important decisions about scale-appropriate investment in polytunnel infrastructure. Results of this project will include enhanced protection, production, profitability, and competitiveness of Kansas specialty crops.

Spring 2014 will kick off the first in a series of on-farm workshops that will give participants hands-on experience in the production of specialty crops under the protection of plastic. The workshops will highlight different types of polytunnel structures (low tunnel, caterpillar tunnel, high tunnel, and mobile tunnel) and how they are used during the various seasons and in diverse regions of Kansas.

The workshops will include a demonstration of low tunnel construction and will highlight the benefits of integrated use of low-tunnels within high tunnels and of movable high tunnels, also known as mobile tunnels. The events will be documented and made available to the public by December 2014, through an online ‘virtual tour’.

An accompanying Resource Guide will be compiled—organizing and making easily accessible the extensive information that is available through numerous publications, websites, farmer networks, and Kansas farm service providers. Topics will include acquiring materials, construction, economics, crop specifics, challenges, production, profitability, and competitiveness of Kansas specialty crops.

Continued on page 7
Local Food News

Polytunnel Choices....

Continued from page 6

problem solving, innovations, accessories, pests and disease, and fertility.

In addition to the Resource Guide, a Decision Making Tool will be created to assist interested farmers with deciding which polytunnel option(s) would be the best investment for them. The tool will compare the benefits and challenges of each type of structure, as well as cost, income potential, dimensions, temperature increase, season extension potential, appropriate crops, and labor requirements.

Polytunnels are simple in design and inexpensive, considering the dramatic yield increase that they make possible. These structures range from do-it-yourself tunnels made from plastic or metal ‘hoops’ (bent pipe) covered with a single layer of plastic, all the way to the state-of-the-art mobile tunnels, that can be moved from one piece of ground to another and are structurally engineered to handle wind and snow that can destroy cheaper models.

Of the $760 million Kansans spend annually on fruits and vegetables only 4 percent are produced in-state. Kansas grown specialty crops only amount to $32 million annually - a mere 0.3% of Kansas’ total agricultural sales. Increasing the amount of specialty crops produced and sold in the state not only benefits the farmers that grow these crops, it also improves our economy through increased productivity and income per acre.

“Kansas cannot realize the vision of becoming a major specialty crop producing state until farmers have access to adequate information and resources for integrating protected production systems into their operations.” Says Cole Cottin, Program Coordinator at the Kansas Rural Center.

“Plus, increasing specialty crop production in Kansas helps increase food security - feeding more people with fewer land resources. We are very excited to see this important project take flight with support from the Kansas Department of Agriculture.”

To learn more about the Tunnel to Table Project or to get involved, contact Cole Cottin at ccottin@kansasruralcenter.org or 785-992-4572.

Above, a view of what raising the plastic on a high tunnel looks like. High tunnels can also boast low tunnels within them to add even more seasonal adaptation. Some models are also mobile. All types and options will be reviewed in the Tunnel to Table Project. Photo by Dan Phelps.

Save the Date!

Kansas Farmers Market Conference
for vendors and managers
February 28-March 1, 2014
Sponsored by the Kansas Department of Agriculture and Kansas Department of Health and Environment
Details will be available soon.
Contact Annarose Hart, KDA From the Land of Kansas™ Specialist
annarose.hart@kda.ks.gov
785-296-0362
Networking & Legal Info Focus of Fall Women and Ag Program

Thirteen women gathered in Linn, Kansas, on November 14 for a day of whole farm planning training, estate planning do’s and don’ts and basic steps, plus a tour of an integrated crop and livestock farm featuring cover crops. The day was part of the Kansas Rural Center’s Women and Conservation Program, and a follow up to a similar meeting and tour held last June.

Ed Reznicek, former KRC staff person who worked in the Clean Water Farm Project, provided the women with a basic overview of the River Friendly Farm Plan tool. The tool, available on KRC’s website, helps inventory a farm’s resources (natural and other), and identify problems or needed improvements, and helps the farmer or farm family prioritize needed actions. Reznicek stressed the importance of the tool’s quality of life and family goal setting section as particularly valuable in any transition phase of a farm or to involve the entire family in the farm management.

Forrest Buhler, attorney with the Kansas Agriculture Mediation Services, provided the group with estate planning basics, what to do before you meet with an attorney, and provided information about legal terms, forms of ownership, pitfalls, etc. The small “learning circle” group setting prompted lots of questions and discussion which was especially appreciated by the participants.

Lucking out with a beautiful fall day, the afternoon tour was the cherry on top of the day. Many of the women raise livestock and are deeply involved in their family’s farm operations. They had lots of questions and active discussion about what works and what doesn’t, and about conservation practices and programs.

KRC will post the workshop materials on our website on our Projects page under Education Initiatives at: http://kansastruralcenter.org/our-projects/#healthy_people.

This workshop and tour was the last KRC will hold under its collaborative grant partnership with the Center for Rural Affairs and Women Food and Agriculture Network. That project also resulted in a curriculum manual “Women Caring for the Land: Improving Conservation Outreach to Women Farmers and Farmland Owners.” The manual includes information on how to organize learning circles for women, and features a dozen or more hands-on activities helpful for teaching women or others about conservation principles, and facilitating discussions on values and planning. The manual can be found on KRC’s website.

KRC is seeking funding to continue its women and agriculture work. Contact Mary Fund at mfund@kansastruralcenter.org
Corporate Farm Law...
Continued from page 1

No actual challenges to the law have been made. But the Kansas Farm Bureau, Kansas Livestock Association, Kansas Pork Producers, and the Kansas Department of Agriculture say they know of entities and individuals that want to come to Kansas but the existing law is a deterrent. They also argue that farmers need outside investors to provide needed capital for expansion or to buy their existing operations, and to “grow agriculture especially animal agriculture” in Kansas, so they can compete on a global stage.

Efforts to change the current law stirred up controversy in the 2013 legislative session when the Kansas Department of Agriculture and several agricultural organizations tried to repeal corporate restrictions on farm ownership.

The judicial review was undertaken at the request of legislative leadership after efforts to repeal the law ran into opposition last winter. Several legislators opposed the changes when it became clear that the current rights of counties to say no to corporate swine and dairy facilities would be lost in the proposed changes.

According to Kaup, the judicial review panel “saw nothing to indicate that the exercise of the county option raised any commerce clause issues, so the committee saw no need to address it.”

Currently any individual with the means can come in and buy land or facilities but corporations like Seaboard Farms or Premium Standard Farms, both mega-hog corporations, cannot. However, these and other companies like them, are still able to operate in Kansas by contracting production with willing farmers. The changes recommended will make all of that easier.

It is unclear whether the state legislature will tackle the repeal or amendment of the corporate farm law in the 2014 session, which is an election year.

Kansas is one of eight states that restricts corporate ownership by limiting it to family farm corporations or partnerships, although a string of exemptions have been established. Current law limits corporate ownership of agricultural land to family farm corporations with fewer than 15 stockholders who must all be Kansas residents with at least one partner living on the land or actively engaged in the farm management.

There are numerous exemptions but the current language has helped keep out or limit non-family corporate control of Kansas’s agricultural land and assets.

The law has been steadily eroding since it was first established in 1931 as a reaction to absentee out of state owners and investors moving into the High Plains to become large wheat producers, and thus displacing smaller family farms. The law has been amended many times over the years, each amendment moving it further from its original intent. In 1994, Kansas cracked the door open further with a provision allowing counties to opt in or out of allowing corporate swine or dairies, but still giving counties the ability to decide.

Under that change, counties have to pass a resolution, subject to protest petition, to allow a corporation into the county. A further change in 2012 brought what were slightly different processes for swine and dairy into alignment. But citizens were basically given the power to challenge a decision to allow corporate swine or dairies into their county. Since the county option provision was passed in 1994, twenty counties in western Kansas voted against corporate hog facilities in their backyards. Only Greeley County reversed its vote in 2011, and it is now home to a 132,000 hog facility.

If the corporate farm law is opened up to amend any part of it, supporters of corporate farming and outside investment may also try to repeal the county option provision, regardless of the judicial review panel’s report. Loss of county or local control will mean that every county in the state would be open to a corporate buyer and willing seller.

Officials and farm organization representatives say it is unclear if the state legislature will tackle the repeal or amendment of the law in the 2014 session, just prior to an election. The Judicial Review Council will send its final report to the Legislature in January. Contact Mary Fund at mfund@kansasruralcenter.org
The Kansas Rural Center (KRC) has been awarded a $10,000 grant from the Elizabeth Schultz Environmental Fund for a project aimed at promoting pollinator awareness and conservation. Throughout 2014, KRC will host a series of workshops designed to increase the number of honeybees and beekeepers, the quantity and quality of pollinator habitat, and access to locally-produced honey, in Douglas County. The dates, locations, and speaker line-ups for the workshops will be announced early in 2014.

According to Julie Mettenburg, Executive Director of the Kansas Rural Center: “Pollinator conservation is a timely and urgent undertaking, and a good focus for the organization, because pollinators play a critical role in food production and are a key component of a healthy agricultural landscape.”

Honeybees are particularly important to production of food crops in the US. The US Department of Agriculture estimates that one-quarter of the American diet depends on food that is pollinated by honeybees. In 2006, a precipitous decline in global honeybee populations was first noticed, and by 2009, 30% of the global honeybee population had been wiped out. To date, the condition that is now referred to as “Colony Collapse Disorder” has decimated 50% of all honeybee colonies.

By providing training and equipment to aspiring beekeepers, KRC hopes to shore up the honeybee population in Douglas County, and to promote sustainable beekeeping and local honey production.

Additionally, KRC hopes to promote conservation of pollinator species of all kinds. There are around 4000 species of native bees in the US, and these populations are critical to maintaining biodiversity. Habitat loss, and decreasing diversity in remaining habitat, play an enormous role in the decline of many pollinator species. Monoculture agricultural production, which dominates the Kansas agricultural landscape, does not adequately support pollinator populations.

Working with Douglas County Extension and bringing in experts in pollinator habitat and conservation, KRC aims to increase the quantity and quality of pollinator habitat in Douglas County through education and information on creating pollinator habitat and funding opportunities that exist to help finance pollinator habitat projects.

Joanna Voigt, Communications Coordinator of the Kansas Rural Center, will be managing the project. Joanna is a beekeeper, and was recently certified by Partners for Sustainable Pollination as a “Bee Friendly Farmer”. She has a strong interest in habitat conservation, and helped install a ¼-acre pollinator habitat on her dad’s pecan farm near Perry, Kansas.

Look for more information about the pollinator project on the KRC website, as it develops.

Contact Joanna Voigt at jvoigt@kansasruralcenter.org or call 785-764-3481.
Sustainable Farming and Food News

Summit Focuses on KS Farm-to-Fork Food Future

Sixty people attended the Dec. 6 Farm to Fork Summit in Newton. Hard at work discussing Kansas-grown specialty crops as a key component to addressing food security challenges in our state, are: (clockwise from left front) Emily Lucas (KC Healthy Kids), Kelsey Rose (People’s Grocery, Manhattan, Ks.), Ben Stallings (Interdependent Web Urban Farm), John Fast (Superintendent & Elementary Principal at Goessel, USD 411), Katrina McClure (University of Kansas student farm), Edward Mitchell (Prairie Band Potawatomi Nation traditional gardener), and Stu Shafer (Sanderson Farm & Johnson County Community College Sustainable Agriculture Program). Photo by C. Cottin.

Kansas’ Farm-to-Fork future was the focus of a daylong Summit hosted by KRC Friday, December 6 at the Meridian Center in Newton, Kansas. Over 60 Kansas food producers, processors, distributors, retail and institutional outlets, home use specialists, and community leaders actively working in farming and food were on hand to start developing the Kansas farm-to-fork food system vision for 2020.

KRC is leading a 3-year Statewide Partnership Initiative, “Community Food Solutions for a Healthy Kansas”, aimed at increasing healthy foods access and consumption in Kansas. The Rural Center has chosen to advance a farm-to-fork approach to the initiative’s goals, recognizing that in Kansas, our own farms are a critical part of the solution to good eating and health.

Participants at the summit worked on tough questions related to advancing the food system in Kansas and providing an assessment of the barriers to achieving that vision. Questions included, “What is the hoped for future in our farm-to-fork food system?” and “What is in the way of advancing that vision?”

The information and feedback from these meetings, and an earlier October meeting, will identify strap-teic goals to be published in a Statewide Farm-to-Fork Food Assessment and Plan by summer 2014. Similar plans have been successful in transforming farm and food systems in in Iowa, North Carolina, and a number of other states.

By the end of 2014, the Assessment and Plan will be used to generate a targeted list of public policies needed to provide support or remove barriers in Kansas’ farm-to-fork food system. The final report will help guide the work of policymakers at every level.

In making healthful foods the easy, affordable choice for Kansans, KRC’s goal is to enable local farms to boost the availability of fruits, vegetables, whole grains and a variety of proteins, and to increase access to and use of these foods at food outlets and in home settings across the state.

The outcomes of the dialogue on December 6 will be brought to a larger audience at a series of Kansas Ag & Health Summits that will take place regionally in the spring. Dates and locations for these events will be announced in early 2014.

For more information, contact Natalie Fullerton, Program Coordinator, or nfullerton@kansarsruralcenter.org; or Julie Mettenburg, KRC Executive Director, jmettenburg@kansasruralcenter.org
Events

Regional Food Hub Survey Deadline Jan. 17

The Greater Kansas City Food Hub Working Group and the Douglas County Food Policy Council are surveying buyers and growers across Kansas and Missouri to assess the type and quantity of supply and demand that exists in the region, establish key features and services, and uncover any obstacles that may hinder the success of any food hubs that are developed.

Food hubs are businesses that manage the packaging, storage, processing, distribution, and marketing of locally produced food in order to help farmers with small operations move their products to a broader market.

This innovative business model can take on many forms depending on the needs of the farmers and their customers. Some are permanent facilities where farmers deliver their harvest for packaging and distribution. Others operate virtually, with the use of computer software to organize the flow of products from farm to market.

If you are a potential buyer of produce from a food hub, or a producer that may be interested in selling produce a food hub, please take this survey for growers at https://www.surveymonkey.com/s/K9BGWLG or this survey for buyers https://www.surveymonkey.com/s/K9H3YSV by January 17th, 2014 to make your voice heard in this decision making process. Or contact Emily Lucas of KC Healthy Kids and Greater KC Food Circle for more information at elucas@kchealthykids.org for more information; or Eileen Horn, Douglas County Food Policy at 785-330-3121.

Buyers include produce retailers, distributors, restaurants, and institutions with food service operations. Growers are any producers of fruits, vegetables, meat, grains, dairy, or value-added products.

MOSES Annual Conference Set for Feb. 28-March 1

The Midwest Organic and Sustainable Education Service (MOSES) announces its annual MOSES Organic Farming Conference on February 27-March 1, 2014 in LaCrosse, Wisconsin. This year is the 25th anniversary.

Growing from 90 participants in its first year to over 3,000 each year, it is the country’s largest organic farming event featuring over 65 workshops, inspiring keynote speakers, and over 170 exhibitors. This year’s keynote speakers include sustainable food advocate and author Anna Lappe, and Mark Shepard, farmer and permaculture expert. They will talk about food, farming and the climate crisis.

Alan Guebert, author of the syndicated column “The Farm and Food File”, will also speak, weaving his family’s farm history into a message about the public policy, private muscle and intelligent innovations the next generation of farmers needs to succeed.

MOSES is a non-profit organization that provides education, resources and expertise to help farmers grow organic, hosting not only their annual conference, but field days and an information hotline, regular publications, and other projects.

Cost ranges from $195 for full conference or $110 for one day if registered by Jan. 17. For more details on workshops and registration information, go to http://mosesorganic.org/conference/.

Garden City Site of January 9 Drought Workshop

Southern Plains farmers and ranchers can register now for a one-day workshop Jan. 9 in Garden City, Kan., to discuss planning for long-term and extreme drought in their operations.

The workshop will be at the 4-H building on the county fairgrounds. Registration begins at 8 a.m. It is a joint effort by the National Drought Mitigation Center (NDMC) at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, Finney County Extension-KSU, and the National Integrated Drought Information System (NIDIS), led by the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA).

Crop farmers and ranchers will come away with new information and resources to help them plan and adapt to drought. Speakers. Details can be found at http://drought.unl.edu/ranchplan. Or, contact the National Drought Mitigation Center at ranchplan@unl.edu or (402) 472-6776.
Briefs

**New Antibiotic Guidelines Released**

On December 11, the Federal Drug Administration (FDA) released new voluntary guidelines for drug companies and livestock producers, a long awaited update to the existing antibiotic use in livestock policy.

FDA’s new guideline requests that pharmaceutical companies change the labels on medications used in feed. The label states how the medicine is legally allowed to be used, and the change being requested is that antibiotics important in human medicine no longer be labeled for growth promotion purposes.

The FDA guidelines are just that—guidelines and are voluntary. Two major pharmaceutical companies have already agreed to the label change. Once the label change is made, the antibiotics can only be used to “treat, prevent or control disease” (and not to promote growth). The drugs will also only be available through a veterinary prescription, and no longer over the counter.

The practice of routine use of antibiotics in feed to promote growth and prevent disease, a practice known as sub-therapeutic use, has been linked to the development of antibiotic resistant bacteria, a growing human health crisis.


**Aquifer Found in Kenya Will Need Sound Management**

Just as all eyes turned to the recent studies of the Ogallala Aquifer and its depletion woes caused by agriculture’s irrigated crops and big livestock facilities, comes a story from Kenya. Satellite and radar technology have detected two large aquifers throughout the Turkana and Lotikipi basins and another in Namibia, which is sub-Saharan Africa’s driest country.

According to a National Geographic online story, the region “is one of the most arid regions on this planet, with soaring temperatures that burn the earth and suck out moisture. The local people are nomads and follow water to survive. They and their livestock are often plagued by famine, thirst, and poverty. This is an area of the world known for its deserts, chronic drought.”

The aquifer underlying the Turkana region of Kenya is estimated at large enough to provide water for the country's 42 million people for 70 years. The find has been touted as a solution to the country’s humanitarian and economic problems.

But many are urging caution, as other aquifers around the globe are being depleted by too much development. Research needs to be conducted to determine just how much water there is, and how it recharges if at all. Discussions with local communities is being urged in order to manage the resource in a sustainable manner. As one UNESCO Hydrologist commented, “It is critical for governments to realize they don’t… come up with programs without community ownership… and linking it to economic development.” 17 million of Kenya’s 41 million people lack access to safe water. The question is not only how, but who will establish management of the water. From (in part) The Water Table, Groundwater Management District #4’s Newsletter Nov.-Dec. 2013. Also See more at http://news.nationalgeographic.com/news/2013/10/131002-kenya-aquifer-lotikipi-groundwater/

**Cover Crops and Crop Insurance Webinar Announced**

The National Center for Appropriate Technology (NCAT) and the National Sustainable Agriculture Coalition (NSAC) will host a national webinar on January 23, 2014, addressing the important question: when and how can you terminate your cover crops and not risk losing crop insurance coverage of cash crops that follow?

The webinar will feature short presentations by experts in cover crops and crop insurance policy, who will explain the new cover crop termination guidelines and answer questions. The webinar is funded in part by the USDA Risk Management Agency (RMA) through the Risk Management Education Partnership Program. The webinar will take place on Thursday, January 23rd 2014 from 2:00 – 3:30pm EST, or 3:00 P.m. CST to 4:30 p.m. The webinar is free and accessible by visiting: https://www2.gotomeeting.com/register/ 789127970. Or visit sustainableagriculture.net for the link. Farmers utilizing cover crops or considering cover crops are particularly encouraged to participate.
Hanging over the mantle above my wood stove at home is a classic Charles Russell print, “Lost in a snowstorm, we are friends.” It shows a wind swept desolate prairie, cold and wintry, the wind clearly blowing blizzard-scale over two soldiers hunched over their horses, and five Indians also on horseback with blankets pulled tight. One of the Indians is signaling friendship or peace to the soldiers.

The spirit of that picture has (perhaps oddly) come to my mind this past week or more with the honoring of South Africa’s Nelson Mandela. He was, or became, a man who embodied the spirit of that picture and so much more.

Lost in a storm within his country and within the historic struggle for political democracy, Mandela was a man who kept his head up, his heart open, and his resolve firm. But he understood that survival for him, like for the humans caught in the prairie storm, was not possible alone. Uppermost in his mind through all those years in prison and beyond was that his personal freedom was not possible until ALL people in his country had freedom.

Achieving political democracy in South Africa depended on collaboration, setting aside differences and working for common goals. It was not always peaceful or non-violent. Often, it was ugly and brutal and anything but clear. But achieving it was not possible without that spirit of healing and reconciliation that Mandela came to embody.

Today, across the globe (including South Africa), we face many storms or problems—big and small. The truly daunting like climate change and meeting basic human needs for food, shelter and meaningful livelihoods, are deeply entwined with assumptions about growth or no growth economics, and the increasing disparities of wealth and income around the world.

The smaller and closer to home storms are entangled with the above more than some care to think. A stagnant economy and tight jobs market contrasts with record gains on Wall Street and record corporate profits. Funding crises in education threaten our local schools and our children’s futures. Growing numbers on the food stamp rolls and demands on food pantries point to growing poverty. In rural areas, increasing concentration of land, resources, and agricultural input ownership go hand in hand with loss of opportunities for not just the next generation of farmers but our youth in general, and for small farmers and businesses everywhere.

But the spirit of reconciliation and recognition of common goals, as evidenced in the work of Mandela, is necessary in order to address these problems or storms—big or small.

We have caught a glimpse of this spirit in this country today. After two long years of bitter fighting and obstinate breath-holding behavior in Congress, we watched representatives of both houses of Congress take a step toward collaboration and compromise on a federal budget agreement that stops us from lurching from crisis to crisis. (House passed the budget; Senate has yet to vote at this writing.) While nowhere near the achievement of the end of apartheid, this small step forward gives me hope.

Maybe collaboration and recognition of common problems and mutual goals is possible and can move us forward to solve problems—one step at a time.

While caught in the day to day treadmill of life, we often forget that we are ALL lost in the same storm, that we have common needs, common goals—whether we are fighting for human justice and equality like Mandela, or fighting for education funding to keep our local schools open, or whether we are fighting to protect our farms from outside forces, and for a food and farming future for our children.

My Christmas wish this year is that we take the spirit of healing and reconciliation, the spirit of Nelson Mandela and the figures in that picture above my mantle, forward with us in whatever storm we find ourselves.

Mary Fund, editor of Rural Papers, farms with her husband in Nemaha County.
Events

No Till on the Plains Conference Set for Jan. 28-29

The 2014 No Till on the Plains Winter Conference, “Back to the Basics: Managing Water and Nutrients” will be held January 28-29 in Salina, Ks. at the Bi-centennial Center. Registration cost is $175 and $90 for a spouse or student if registered by January 10, or $225 at the door.

Featured speaker will be Dwayne Beck, Research Manager, Dakota Lakes Research Farm, Pierre, South Dakota, who will cover the “back to the basics” of managing water and nutrients.

Topics covered include: Using Web Soil Survey Information to Guide Your Decisions; Methods to Optimize Your Water Use - The Water Cycle; Cover Crops - Managing Water and Nutrients; Moving to Continuous No-till - A Logical Progression; Soil...Just What Goes On in There?; Crop Sequencing - What Options Do I Have?; How to Deal Effectively with Absentee Landlords; Grazing Livestock in Continuous No-till Systems; Meeting the Nutritional Needs of Livestock Through the Year; Understanding the Cover Crop Balance; Comparing No-till Systems North to South 1,000 Miles - East; Comparing No-till Systems North to South 1,000 Miles - West; and No-till Equipment - What’s New.

For more information and to register online, go to www.notill.org.

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Calendar

Friday January 3 - Saturday January 4, 2014 Kansas Farmers Union Annual Conference, Ramada Downtown Hotel & Conference Center, Topeka, Ks. Plus Jan. 5, Beginning Farmer Coalition Day For more information, visit kansasfarmersunion.org

Thursday, January 9, 2014, Crop & Range Managers Weather Extreme & Extended Drought Workshop, 8 a.m.; For ranchers & irrigated crop producers concerned about aquifer declines & drought. For more information go to http://drought.unl.edu/ranchplan or Contact Tonya Haigh at thaigh@unl.edu. Pre-register by Jan. 3. $10 lunch.

Thursday January 16, KSU Leasing Workshop, Sunflower Room, Pottawatomie County Extension Office, Westmoreland, Ks. 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. Register by Jan. 10; $15 for lunch & materials; More information at www.pottawatomie.ksu.edu or call Kara Mayer 785-765-3319.

Tuesday, January 21, 2014 Environmental Women's Group Legislative Panel, at Van Go Inc. 715 New Jersey St., Lawrence, Ks. at 6:30 p.m. Contact Rachel Mysilby at 785-424-4115 or mysrachel@gmail.com.

Thursday, January 23, 2014 Cover Crops & Crop Insurance Webinar, Hosted by National Center for Appropriate Technology & National Sustainable Ag Coalition at 3 p.m. -4:30 CST. Free and accessible at https://www2.gotomeeting.com/register/789127970

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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