

Rural Papers

Reporting with commentary
on agricultural and rural issues



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Working as Community During Covid-19

By Mary Fund

The current situation with the Corona COVID-19 virus leaves us all uncertain and struggling to respond. We hope you are all staying safe and taking care of each other. Above all, we hope you are taking this seriously and paying attention to the “social distancing” restrictions. Based on the scientific evidence, this is clearly necessary to flattening the curve of this disease spreading.

Despite the uncertainty around how COVID-19 will continue to affect our immediate day to day lives and the longer-term future, we must still find ways to work together on the big picture issues that impact our future. How we farm and get food to our plates, and how we work together on this and the big picture issues as communities is critical—perhaps now more than ever.

How We Are Coping

Recently I was asked by a reporter “what are rural communities and farmers and ranchers doing to cope or how are people helping each other?” My first response was that we are all still reeling a bit from this new reality, and just getting started on addressing it. Initially we responded as we do to preparing for a blizzard or ice storm—stocking on up on essential food and feed and medications and supplies. But we— and our local authorities and institutions— are facing bigger challenges than any short-term blizzard or ice storm -- and we are all working on how we will meet them.

Our now closed public schools are exploring how to continue feeding kids which is especially important in districts with high numbers of at risk students. Small town restaurants are offering new delivery services. Some small businesses are offering curbside services -- call and they will bring it to your car just like the big box stores have been

offering for a while. People are handling deliveries of food and running errands for those community members most vulnerable. School districts are agreeing to pay non-professional staff (bus drivers, cooks and para-professionals) while schools are closed. Some schools are considering allowing use of facilities for temporary hospital beds- if such a need comes to pass.

Farmers' markets and growers are looking at providing delivery services, as they also worry about income loss as restaurants and businesses close. Growers are wondering how to expand safety for their products. People are planning bigger home gardens. Grain and livestock farmers worry about supply and sales disruptions and impact on farm help and employees.

People are more mindful of each other in stores-- minding the social distancing recommendations, but also smiling and just being more kind, more patient. Humor goes a long way. A complete stranger and I stood looking at the absolutely bare toilet paper, Kleenex and paper towel aisles like it was an art work – although respectfully and safely distanced from each other of course. But laughing and noting what a strange, curious species we are!

KRC Moving Forward

While none of us know what the future holds and how our lives will change over the next few weeks and months, we are forging ahead. KRC will continue to focus on practical farm and food related information, how-to's and advocacy within our new realities and with special care for the health and safety of the land, people, and our communities.

continued on page 16

Rural Papers

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Kansas Rural Center
4021 SW 10th Street #337
Topeka, KS 66604
866-579-5469

info@kansasruralcenter.org
www.kansasruralcenter.org
Editor: Mary Fund
mfund@kansasruralcenter.org

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

KRC Staff

Mary Fund, Executive Director
Natalie Fullerton, Assistant Director/
Program Director
Joanna (Voigt) Will, Program &
Communications Coordinator

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Small Farmer Commentary

Forks that Nourish: Embracing Change in Our Communities

By Natalie Fullerton

Change is part of our everyday lives yet it's often feared, doubted, and faced with negativity. With devilish eyes and flailing pitchforks, it disrupts the familiar and threatens to make us eat old Billy goat liver and onions for the rest of our lives. (Sorry to those readers who enjoy that dish!) Sometimes it pushes us into the muddy path of a future we no longer understand or agree with. But sometimes it doesn't, and we find after stepping into the new path, those pitchforks and freaky eyes melt into community and forks that deliciously nourish.

Last summer over 250 Kansans who attended KRC's town halls shared their thoughts on the future of farming and food in Kansas within the context of the general decline in rural Kansas communities and the farm economy, the challenges in our food system for both rural and urban alike, and the challenges of our changing climate and energy future.

With 250 different backgrounds, perspectives, and outlooks on the future, folks at all town halls said change is necessary, for many reasons. One being because our food system (both urban and rural) does not support the farmers that feed it. Many passionately expressed that we cannot continue on the same familiar path we are on.

How do we go about changing laws and social and cultural constructs, and address health care, politics, climate change, succession planning, and the economy among all the things that will get us on the different path we are asking for? The future our town hall friends painted at times looked overwhelming and grey. But within them was also hope, the fertilizer of change making.

Many people warily united around an idea that a generational shift will move us out of the system that is failing us and that a shift will take place because it has to. But it takes all of us to make the big system changes we are asking for.

We simply can't wait for the next generation to do it. Keep in mind, baby boomers are still beating millennials and gen z's to the polls. In the 2016 presidential election citizens 65 years and older reported the highest turnout

continued on page 17

“We Need to Tell Our Stories”

Conference Speakers Urge Greater Communication and Cooperation to Revitalize Rural (and Urban) Kansas

By Veronica Coons

Kansans, both urban and rural, have one thing in common, and that is a tendency to deflect the spotlight. We call it “Kansas nice” and it is one obstacle addressed by all three speakers at the Kansas Rural Center’s conference last November. Kansas Lt. Governor Lynn Rogers, Douglas County Extension’s Marlin Bates, and KRC’s Natalie Fullerton provided perspectives on what the state and their organizations understand about revitalizing rural Kansas.



Lt. Governor, Lynn Rogers looks on as Natalie Fullerton, KRC Assistant Executive Director, follows up on his comments at the KRC Food & Farm Conference.

According to the speakers, Kansans need to set aside their natural reticence and begin sharing their stories, their values and their hopes for the future in ways that are actionable and help to build relationships. “We don’t

talk about the great things that are going on in rural Kansas,” stated Lt. Gov. Rogers, “and so oftentimes our story isn’t being told; we need to make sure that we do that.”

In June 2019, Kansas Governor Laura Kelly announced that the new Office of Rural Prosperity, headed by the Lt. Gov., would visit 12 Kansas communities that summer on a listening tour to solicit new ideas to help rural Kansas. On that tour, Rogers asked attendees to define what prosperity means to them. “What we heard from them was they

continued on page 18

KRC Announces New Executive Director

As this Rural Papers goes to press, the Kansas Rural Center Board of Directors is pleased to announce the hiring of Connie Bonfy of Wichita, KS as KRC’s next Executive Director. “After a dedicated search, we feel we are lucky to add someone with Connie’s experience in non-profit management. She brings her leadership skills, passion, and commitment to serve sustainable agriculture and an ecologically based food system and Kansas communities,” stated Stu Shafer, KRC board president

Bonfy’s background and education are in the arts, and she served as Executive Director for several Kansas arts focused non-profits, often combining the arts with nature’s art found in places like the Flint Hills or rural Kansas communities. She also served as a grant writer for two community colleges. These experiences honed her skills with budget and organizational management, grant writing and program development, and fund raising. Growing up in rural Kansas (Arkansas City is her hometown), her second passion has long been interest in and support for sustainable agriculture and ecologically based farming as the direction for agriculture and our food system.

“KRC is a trusted voice for independent family farms, rural communities and a sustainable, just food system, and progressive public policy,” stated Bonfy. “I want to help extend this trust to a greater level now and into the future.”

Bonfy, who will begin April 1, 2020, will succeed Mary Fund who has a long history with KRC and served as Executive Director from 2015 to the present. Fund retired at the end of 2019, but stayed on in a part-time capacity during the search. Fund will continue as a consultant while Bonfy transitions into the organization.

The next issue of Rural Papers will include a longer introduction to Ms. Bonfy.

Governmental Challenges Amid COVID-19: Legislature Passes State Budget & Recesses to Uncertain Future

by Paul Johnson

The political, economic and fundamental health changes caused by COVID-19 of the last 30 days seems unimaginable. This unprecedented crisis came on quickly, and no one has any idea of when this 'disease war' may subside or when and if normal life will resume. By executive order the Governor has closed schools for the year, prohibited utility and water shut-offs, stalled housing evictions, furloughed 18,000 executive branch employees (except for vital public services) for two weeks, and warned the State this crisis will last until late Spring if not into summer or fall.

Combined with the national and global economic crisis the disease has created, "normal" is likely a long way off. How we respond as a state and federal government is critical. Sobering lower State revenue estimates will be made on April 20 that will change Kansas' budgetary future. During this chaos, bad legislative proposals should not be slipped through.

State Budget. The Kansas Legislature rushed to pass a basic State budget for 2020 and 2021 on Thursday March 19 and recessed the session early for at least six to maybe eight weeks to the veto session scheduled for early May. The House voted 99-16 and the Senate voted 28-10 in approval.

The final approved \$19.8 billion budget gave the Budget Director \$50 million to respond to unforeseen expenses related to the coronavirus pandemic. Another \$15 million was



earmarked for emergency preparedness connected to coronavirus. The final budget also deleted the scheduled \$268 million transfer to KPERS that the Legislature had earlier approved. They also removed payments of \$132 million planned to the Pooled Money Investment Board in light of the new economic uncertainties.

It is unclear when the veto session will begin and there is also a question of whether public health conditions will allow it. But lower April 20 revenue figures will clearly impact the 2021 and future State budgets. Kansas was slowly recovering from the 2008-2009 Great Recession and self-inflicted, unaffordable tax cuts that severely impacted vital State services with arbitrary across the board reductions. Thus, Kansas has no rainy-day reserve fund to cushion an inevitable downturn in revenues. It took Kansas 3-4 years to recover from the great recession and this coming recession could be much larger in scope.

Transportation. The approved budget

also includes a new ten-year highway plan for \$9.7 billion. This highway plan consumes over 16% of general sales tax that funds all other essential state services. There is no increase in fuel taxes (user fees) and Kansas has not increased fuel taxes since 2003. There is no provision to institute a tonnage per mile tax to counter the extra weight and damage put on the highways. This is no transportation plan given that roads get 95% of the funding while alternatives such as rail and mass transit are capped at 5%.

The world of energy, transportation and mass communication is evolving and changing but Kansas has doubled down on its fossil fuel reliance. In the future, Kansas cannot afford the fourth largest highway system in the U.S. given just 2.9 million residents and most rural counties slated for population loss by 2044. The coming national recession will force Kansas to re-allocate some of these sales tax highway dollars. The highway plan should have been put on hold this year as revenue losses are computed and budget priorities re-examined.

Taxes. There has been no grand compromise on cutting taxes. The Governor's proposal of sending \$54 million to counties to lower property taxes has been scuttled. The Governor's request to re-establish a refundable food sales tax rebate for lower income individuals and couples has been set aside. The plan to allow Kansas residents – 10% of the filers

continued on page 20

First Comprehensive Climate & Agriculture Bill Introduced in Congress

On February 26, farmer and Maine Representative Chellie Pingree (D-ME) introduced the Agriculture Resilience Act (ARA), which addresses the role of agriculture in combatting climate change. The bill establishes a set of aggressive but realistic goals for farmers to help mitigate climate change and increase agricultural resilience, starting with the overarching goal of reaching net zero greenhouse gas emissions from U.S. agriculture by no later than 2040.

The legislation's substantive programmatic sections are divided into six additional titles – agricultural research, soil health, farmland preservation and viability, pasture-based livestock, on-farm renewable energy, and food waste. KRC joins the National Sustainable Agriculture Coalition (NSAC) in applauding the introduction of this bill. In response, the National Sustainable Agriculture Coalition (NSAC) issued the following comment:

“NSAC is proud to endorse the Agriculture Resilience Act and wish to thank Representative Pingree for her ongoing leadership in this vital work,” said NSAC Policy Director Eric Deeble. “This marker bill represents our nation’s first piece of comprehensive legislation on climate and agriculture, and includes a host of actionable steps toward achieving net zero emissions by 2040. The tenets of this bill are fully in line with the recommendations of NSAC’s recent climate report, *Agriculture and Climate Change: Policy Imperatives and Opportunities to Help Producers Meet the Challenge*, and

have the full support of our 130+ members nationwide.”

“Too much of the national conversation about climate change has ignored the role of agriculture, or even worse, singled out farmers as part of the problem without also recognizing them as an essential part of the solution,” said Deeble. “This legislation correctly positions agriculture as central to meaningful and long-lasting policy action on climate change. Day in and day out, farmers are on the front lines fighting the drought, floods, pests, and disease pressures that come with a rapidly changing climate. Farmers know what’s at stake, and they know how important healthy soils and resilient, sustainable ecosystems are to not just the future of farming, but the future of everything. NSAC is pleased to support this important bill, and to continue leading the charge on Capitol Hill for policies that support sustainable family farming.”

The Kansas Rural Center is a member of the National Sustainable Agriculture Coalitions 100 plus members grassroots alliance that advocates for federal policy reform supporting the long-term social, economic, and environmental sustainability of agriculture, natural resources, and rural communities. You can access more on the Agriculture Resilience Act at NSAC’s website at sustainableagriculture.net, and access NSAC’s climate report at https://sustainableagriculture.net/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/NSAC-Climate-Change-Policy-Position_paper-112019_WEB.pdf.

Paul Johnson Honored at KRC’s 40th Anniversary Celebration

Paul Johnson, KRC’s Policy Analyst and statehouse watchdog, was honored last November for his years of monitoring and reporting on state economic, farm, food, environmental and social net programs and issues. At KRC’s 40th anniversary celebration as part of the annual November 2019 conference, Mary Fund, Executive Director, and Stu Shafer, KRC board president, made the presentation.

“Paul has shown an amazing capacity for dedication to the hard issues of social and economic justice and making us all understand their connections to food, farming and environmental issues,” stated Mary Fund, KRC director who has worked closely with Paul over the years on Policy Watch and other issues. “He has also combined theory and practice better than anyone I know with his market farm and the Rolling Prairie Farmers Alliance CSA, and his policy work. Over the years, I’ve seen a lot of people come and go from this work, but Paul is a stable, relentless force. He has also become an important source of information and wisdom to the next generation of activists and policy wonks.”

Paul has worked as KRC’s Policy Analyst at the Statehouse

continued on page 21

KRC Farm & Food Conference

Changes Are Coming: Speaker Fred Iutzi Urges Diving into the Climate Challenges

By Veronica Coons

Keynote speaker Fred Iutzi, president of The Land Institute, helped the Kansas Rural Center mark its 40th anniversary at their annual conference in early November by dealing head on with the greatest challenge we face as humans on the planet: climate change. He spoke specifically to the 180 or so attendees about the role agriculture plays in ecological sustainability and economic justice in the face of climate change, arguing that we must meet many challenges simultaneously.

Iutzi began by quoting part of President Franklin Delano Roosevelt's inaugural speech on March 4, 1933—the now famous “the only fear we have to fear is fear itself” speech that rallied the country to deal with a host of economic and social crises.

FDR's words, Iutzi said, allowed the new president to rally the nation behind a program of suspending despair, suspending inaction and getting down to work. The problems outlined in the New Deal were more obvious than those the world faces today, in terms of material deprivation and the collapse of the economy, stated Iutzi. Climate problems have not yet entered into the day to day field of vision for many as the Great Depression of the 1930's did. “But our problems today are simultaneously more dire and concrete,” he said. “They concern the very biophysical and biochemical systems that sustain life on this earth. The global climate doesn't get much more concrete than that.”

The Climate Reality.

In 2018, the United Nations International Panel on Climate Change published a special report (<https://www.ipcc.ch/sr15/>) documenting that human activities from the industrial era to the present have already caused a full degree Celsius increase in global warming, “which will persist for centuries to millennia and will continue to cause further long term changes in the climate system,” Iutzi quoted from the report. This is the global warming that we're locked into, even if all the smokestacks go dry today, he added.

If it continues to increase at the current rate, by 2050, we

can expect hot extremes in most inhabited regions, excessive rainfall in some places, severe drought in other places.

The effects include impacts to plants, insects and vertebrates, and also the rather chilling phrase “transformations of ecosystems from one type to another,” he said. Climate related risks to health, livelihoods, food security, water supply, human security and economic growth are projected to increase.

To avoid this, global carbon dioxide emissions must decrease by about half by 2030 and reach net zero by 2050.

Agricultural sustainability and economic justice.

Agriculture contributes about 9% of the total greenhouse gas emissions impacting climate change, Iutzi said. But the shift away from the extraction and emission economy also must take into consideration the social and other problems. Economic justice is also at play and affects both rural and urban communities in different ways. Around the world, those most impacted by the impacts of climate change are the poor and the disadvantaged, those who have not actually contributed to the problems.

“We are having a pell-mell transition into underemployment in the service sector at the same time our level of extraction is only increasing,” Iutzi said. “Rather than agriculture being poised to simply charge out and save the day, we have problems of our own, such as soil erosion, water quality, soil carbon loss, and profitability issues.”

To help understand the ecological limits and social justice issues, Iutzi put forward a framework developed by Oxford economist Kate Raworth, called the “safe and just space framework.” Within the framework, a safe space is one that avoids violating any critical planetary boundaries such as atmospheric CO2 concentrations, nitrogen/phosphorous cycles, pollution, biodiversity loss, and so forth. A just existence is one where the vast majority of the people in the

continued on page 7

KRC Farm & Food Conference

*Change is Coming
continued from page 6...*



world attain certain minimum standards of nutrition, good health, education, housing, income, social equity and political voice, energy, and so forth.

Raworth plotted these two sets of factors on two different circular diagrams, and then superimposed them on one another so that the acceptable minimum for human well-being is the inner ring, and the maximum burden placed on the planet is the outer ring, and you get a “donut” that illustrates the narrow band humanity is called to exist in.

Using this framework, other researchers found that the United States scored very high in almost every area of minimum standards for a just existence, but greatly exceeded our thresholds for living within our means compared to other countries in the world, he said. “Overall, countries that are living within their means are not supplying a very abundant existence for their citizens, and countries that are supplying

a prosperous existence are running the planet down,” Iutzi concluded. Not a lot of global north countries meet the safe and just space criteria.

With our present economy driven by our continued extraction of coal, oil and natural gas, Iutzi noted that we have a lot of work to do if we are to find a space within our ecological means that also treats people with dignity and justice. “We need to decouple human well-being from economic growth,” Iutzi said. “And, we need to do it fast.”

Solving the problem of agriculture.

The Land Institute’s paradigm is trying to move beyond confronting the problems in agriculture to the problem of agriculture,” Iutzi said. There are things that can be done to slow the rate of resource loss within the bounds of the crops and cropping systems in place now, but in order to make decisive improvements, we need to mimic the structure and function of native ecosystems. To do that, we need to mirror those systems.

“The key values that emerge for adjusting sustainable human existence on the planet are also those same familiar to perennality and diversity,” he said.

These key values translate to society, he added. The value of diversity in society is intuitive, not only in the context of what’s right, but also what’s effective. Educating and informing one another from our diverse global experience benefits all of society.

Civilization has suffered a lack of perennial regrowth structures from which to replenish and renew our good

decision making and our collective wisdom, Iutzi said. Instead, we’ve relied too heavily on the individual to consistently make good decisions without a lot of help. Civilization has suffered a lack of perennial regrowth structures from which to replenish and renew our good decision making and our collective wisdom, Iutzi said. Instead, we’ve relied too heavily on the individual to consistently make good decisions without a lot of help.

Perenniality calls us to weave sustainability and justice into the culture and institutions. As far as agriculture’s role in this endeavor, stewardship of the soil and food itself are still the starting point. “If we as rural people, as agricultural people, have the opportunity to lead and facilitate, we should certainly take it,” he said. Iutzi named four principles for a policy framework and collective action for confronting the problem of climate change:

- must be ecologically sound;
- must be just, equitable and kind;
- must align our day to day incentives and disincentives in order to get the results we want;
- must revolve around immediate action.

Phasing out fossil fuels and phasing in renewable energy and energy efficiency must begin right away. “We have no excuse for not taking immediate action on things that can be deployed immediately.”

Green is good

Over the last year, there has been a great deal of discussion nationally

continued on page 8

KRC Farm & Food Conference

*Change is Coming,
continued from page 7...*

about the “Green New Deal,” and renewed interest in the old New Deal advanced by FDR in his 1933 speech. Then, as now, political factions are butting heads, blocking any forward motion. One year can make a big difference. For example, bold new leaders are now in place in Kansas and also around the country following the 2018 elections.

In just the first 100 days of FDR’s presidency, Congress acted on many initiatives designed to turn the country around. This sort of seachange was demonstrated then, and it can happen again. Many of the initiatives gained traction early because the people implementing them believed in what they were doing. “The people at that time cultivated a willingness to try things, to fail fast, to adjust and move on,” Iutzi said.

One of the biggest innovations of the New Deal era, he said, was the idea of working from two lists simultaneously. There was a list of reforms that were easy to get support for, and there was a list of initiatives that were more radical and transformative.

But, the focus of the old New Deal was to rev up the economy, which is contrary to what needs to occur today in order to mitigate the effects of climate change. Great caution and insight are needed when we speak today of spooling up economic activity, in order to avoid worsening the condition we’re trying to improve, Iutzi said.

Things that the Green New Deal proposes that we should get behind:

- Retraining people for a range of green jobs, ranging from installation of solar panels to farmer training programs.
- Immediate policy and collective action to start phasing out fossil fuels while simultaneously spooling up as much renewable energy and efficiency as we possibly can.
- Taking immediate action to perennialize our agriculture by grassing down as much of our acreage as we can afford to and fully supporting an effort towards perennial grain crops.

The Land Institute is in the process of rebooting its 50-year Farm Bill model for the climate change era. Key is stacking benefits of immediate changes that can be adopted today with increasingly transformative benefits from perennials over time. Iutzi has faith that each incremental step towards the goal will allow the masses to get behind the process and continue to push further towards bolder change.

“We can visualize a world that’s beautiful and inspiring at the other end of this,” he said.

Embracing social capital and relating to one another in community needs to be our top priority, he said, underscoring the sentiment with a quote from the 19th century French sociologist and philosopher Alexis de Tocqueville: “Feelings and ideas are renewed, the heart expands and the human spirit develops only through the reciprocal action of human beings on one another.”

Rather than choosing to work individually, to work outside the context of

policy collectively, or to work through policy, Iuzi urged attendees to dive into all three and use them to mutually reinforce one another. In the face of overwhelming odds, he shared a nugget of wisdom he learned from Wes Jackson, who in turn was inspired by the writings of Gandhi. “When people relentlessly explain why actions you propose in the face of injustice are impractical, we must relentlessly reply, “But what are we going to do?”

In the face of climate change, Uutzi urged, we have no choice but to dive in, regardless of the unlikely possibility of immediate success. Failures will simply prepare us better for that moment when we arrive at consensus and can make progress, whether it arrives quickly or years from now.

“We need to take ownership of our skill at making change, because that’s the only thing that is going to get us out of trouble now,” he said. “We can do it if we work together.”

Fred Iutzi’s presentation at the KRC November 8 conference is available on the KRC website at: www.kansasruralcenter.org.

Veronica Coons is a journalist who covered the conference keynote speakers for KRC.

A WEALTH of Education & Advocacy

by Veronica Coons with Natalie Fullerton and Mary Fund

Climate change and mitigating its risk is a primary concern for many state environmental organizations in Kansas. Last November a panel of environmental advocates came together at KRC's annual Farm and Food Conference to talk about what's in store for Kansas in the near future. The advocates are a part of a Kansas partnership called WEALTH, an acronym for Water, Energy, Air, Land, Transportation, and Health, that came together in 2016. The partnership was launched by the Climate and Energy Project (CEP) to improve the networking of stakeholders addressing climate risk and health equity in Kansas.



Last year the group helped CEP launch the Kansas Climate + Health Declaration to catalyze grassroots climate action. The Declaration aims to increase awareness of the impacts of climate change on public health, increase civic engagement on climate action in Kansas, advance policies that build community resilience and safeguard the future of our state. Individuals and organizations across Kansas are encouraged to sign the declaration to strengthen its support.

Last November, WEALTH partners primed Kansans who attended KRC's Farm & Food conference on the political landscape for 2020, an election year, in terms of WEALTH priorities at the state level and issues folks can take action on. In February, 2020 WEALTH Partners organized WEALTH Day at the capital with attracted over 400 Kansans to learn and education policy makers.

Water

Dawn Buehler, Friends of the KAW (FOK) Executive Director, advocates for Kansas river systems. Water quality and water quantity both impact health and every person. According to Buehler, healthy Kansas rivers equal a healthy Kansas. FOK's top three priorities are 1) fully fund the State of Kansas Water Plan; 2) rethink the management of Missouri River System Reservoirs, and 3) support creation of a state climate plan.

The goal and recommendation from the State has been for \$8 million annually to fund the State Water Plan, but this has not happened for the past 18 years. The Governor's Blue Ribbon Task Force on Water Resource Management in 2016 called for \$56 million/annually—over a number of years—in order to carry out needed projects and actions. The positive news is that legislators have increased

funding in the past couple of years.

The Kansas River System and the greater Missouri River System experienced major flooding in the spring and summer of 2019. Not only were these areas inundated with runoff from storms in northern states from “bomb cyclones,” excessive rainfall occurred along the rivers. Reservoirs throughout the Kansas River Basin were filled to capacity earlier in the year. After initial drops, some have come back up prompting concern that levels could be too high by the beginning of 2020, which doesn't bode well for the coming year.

“Kansas needs a climate plan to prepare for these things,” Buehler said. Climate change is impacting the Kansas river system. Water and drought extremes are becoming more common statewide. Part of a climate plan should include identifying how people can get the information they need to plan and protect themselves. The coming year could bring more flooding issues, but it could just as likely be a drought year. A climate plan should encompass both eventualities, Buehler said.

Energy

Jessica Lucas, the government affairs representative for the Clean Energy Business Council (CEBC) shared that a broader stakeholder process is needed that examines energy as a whole and includes greater adoption of

continued on page 10

State Policy

A WEALTH of Education & Advocacy continued from page 9...

energy efficiency tools.

In 2018, the CEBC met with then candidate Laura Kelly about the need for a Kansas Energy Office that resides as a standalone regulatory agency, not simply within the Kansas Corporation Commission (KCC). While its creation is at a standstill, Gov. Kelly's announcement a few weeks earlier that the state will pursue a comprehensive energy plan beginning in 2020, is encouraging. But, each step in the right direction is hard fought. The Kansas Energy Efficiency Investment Act was passed by the state legislature, but the KCC didn't feel it was cost effective after review, Lucas said.

The adoption of new technologies must be affordable and reliable. That's not to say utility companies shouldn't be able to make a profit, Lucas said. "We need to engage stakeholders in a comprehensive effort that provides us with a clear vision, guiding principles, realistic objectives and actionable strategies that can actually inform our energy future," she said.

Ensuring everyone is at the table to bring their thoughts and perspectives is important, because utility companies and the KCC have dominated the conversation with what works in the traditional model. A more holistic approach is what is called for in the fight for climate resiliency and a better energy future.

Air

Zack Pistora is the Legislative Director for the Sierra Club of Kansas, a

KRC board member, and vice-president of the Kansas Natural Resource Council. Sierra Club may be best known for their fight against coal-fired power plants and concrete factories.

Pistora shared that the state could reduce carbon emissions by allowing securitization of utility assets which would allow coal fired infrastructure to make way for investment in clean energy options. While Kansas leads the nation in production of wind energy, 39% of its own energy is still produced by coal fired power plants powered by Wyoming coal and operating on a part time basis, costing Kansans \$267 million more than the cost of buying power on the Southwest Power Pool open market. "We're going to work cooperatively with our utilities to allow that refinancing so we can transition those capital assets from coal, which is becoming an increasingly expensive and outdated infrastructure, into the next phase of clean energy," Pistora said. "Kansas has wind, sun and some homegrown advanced fuels."

Pistora highlighted the reduction of six common pollutants identified by the Clean Air Act of 1970 which included ozone, lead, carbon monoxide, sulfur dioxide and particulates. Chlorofluorocarbons were causing a widening hole in the ozone layer of our atmosphere. The world came together to create the Montreal protocol to phase out CFC producing items, and since then, our ozone layer has been replenishing, and is close to being fully repaired. And, from 1972 to 2015, the presence of those identified pollutants has dropped by an average

of 70% in the United States, he said. In the face of the current environmental challenges, it's important to remember that working together and taking action can have promising results.

Land

Paul Johnson, a policy analyst with the KRC focusing on local foods, water, environment, pesticides and noxious weed law. Johnson called on the group to consider what transformations in federal farm policy would drive a better food and agriculture future in Kansas.

The federal farm bill currently drives agriculture in Kansas. In 2018, \$1.12 billion was allocated to farmers in Kansas, mostly for commodity and crop insurance payments. Only \$55 million was earmarked for disaster assistance and \$90 million for conservation. On top of that, 88 % went to the top 20% of producers who receive farm subsidies, leaving the lower 80% to divide up just 12% of the remainder.

By transitioning the number of acres devoted to commodities over to fruits and vegetables by less than one percent, Kansas farmers could up production of the state's primary fruit and vegetable supply from 5% to 100%, Johnson said.

Johnson called for putting caps on commodity and crop insurance payments, as well as a five-year transition from the bulk of the payouts from the Farm Bill for commodities and crop insurance payments to conservation

continued on page 11

State Policy

*A WEALTH of Education & Advocacy
continued from page 10...*

related payments. This would provide farmers with a base of income from which they could diversify operations and try new options, and provide ecosystem benefits for all.

Johnson also called for efforts to encourage younger farmers. “In the next 20 years, much farmland will turn over, something we need to keep in mind when envisioning a regional system of small and niche farms for the future,” he said. “The same way we need a climate change plan in this state, we also need a state local food plan.”

Transportation

Tammy Alexander with the Metropolitan Energy Center’s Central Kansas Clean Cities Program, is working to offset petroleum use in transportation. Alexander wants the state to push through some mandates similar to what Minnesota has for minimum requirements of biofuels in both the

gas and diesel supply so that Kansans can start eliminating these emissions, before they have to transition all of these vehicles to new technology. “These fuels can be run in the vehicles we have on the road today,” she said. “Any vehicle can run on a 10 percent blend, and vehicles built as early as 2001 can operate on a 15 percent blend, Alexander added.

In addition, work is underway to change the laws in regards to electric vehicle charging. Currently, only utility companies can charge for the amount of energy sold to consumers. She said, “We would like to see that restructured so that non-utilities can charge for energy used, limited to charging electric vehicles.” Charging stations have gotten around restrictions by charging for the amount of time a vehicle is hooked up to a charging station. The State of Kansas received \$15 million from the VW emissions settlement, of which \$2.3

million has been earmarked for electric charging station upgrades.

Alexander’s group has been working with partners to lay out a plan targeting main corridors throughout the state where charging stations will be established to make traveling through

the state in electric passenger vehicles possible. These corridors will include both interstates and well-traveled state highways, she said. Kansas needs to be prepared with infrastructure so it doesn’t become an island where nobody can drive through with their electric vehicles.

Health

Sheldon Weiss is a policy adviser with the Alliance for a Healthy Kansas. The statewide coalition focuses on expanding KanCare, the state’s Medicare program. He is hopeful with a new administration in office, Kansas will finally become part of Medicare expansion and will finally see its federal tax dollars coming back to the state instead of funding other states’ medical systems. That would translate to \$700 million in new federal funding and an increase of 13,000 new jobs related to the healthcare and supporting sectors of the economy.

“This is hugely important for rural communities,” he said. “More than 80 percent of our rural hospitals operate at a loss and are largely subsidized by local taxpayers.” At this point, the federal government will pay 90 percent of the cost of expansion provided the state puts in a 10 % match. “This will be about a \$40 to \$50 million cost for the state to bring in \$700 million in federal money,” Weiss said.

Participants at the conference were urged to keep active on the issues and visit with WEALTH partners to find out more about how to get engaged.



Sustainable Farm & Food News

Future of Farming & Food Town Hall Summary & Recommendations Available

A Summary Report of the 2019 Kansas Rural Center (KRC) Town Halls is now available on KRC's website. About 250 people attended the five town halls held in Emporia, Wichita, Garden City, St. Francis, and Kansas City held between July and September 2019. The report was developed for state and local policy makers and decision makers as well as for individual citizens to help identify key points for advocacy and action.

The release of this report comes at a time when many Kansans are thinking about resiliency and what the future has in store. Despite the uncertainty around how COVID-19 will impact future gatherings, we must still work together on big picture issues that impact our future. How we farm and get food to our plates and how we work together as communities is critical- perhaps now more than ever. This report does not address the current COVID-19 crisis however the recommendations and calls to action are critical to working together to ensure a resilient farm and food future.

Based on dialogue and feedback from participants last summer, KRC identified components of a vision for the future and developed recommendations for a more resilient food, farm and energy future in these four categories: Local/Regional Food and Agriculture; Rural Revitalization; Water, Conservation and the Environment; and Energy.

While some of the recommendations may seem overwhelming, it's important to think about what you know you can do, especially during times like now. Natalie Fullerton, KRC staff who coordinated the town halls, states, "If you want to do something about these recommendations but are not sure where to start, start small. Start where you are at. Simply writing to your legislator or letter to the editor about an issue you care about, or talking to your neighbor about it can be a great way to open that door."

This was the 6th year of town hall meetings KRC has held to inform Kansans about farm, food and rural issues, facilitate community conversations, and motivate action. KRC included two major urban cities (Wichita and Kansas City,

Ks.) in order to gain understanding on the similarities and/or differences between rural and urban perspectives regarding food, farm, and rural issues.

KRC will share this report with legislators and encourage them to consider these recommendations as they engage in the issues and work on legislation. This report will also help frame the issues as KRC organizes their 2020 summer town hall series, and its advocacy and program priorities. The 2020 meetings may be different than in the past as KRC is considering holding digital or virtual meetings in light of current restrictions.

The report is available to read and download at <https://kansasruralcenter.org/krc-future-of-farming-food-town-hall-summary-recommendations-available/>.

KRC's annual town hall series is a part of KRC's Civic Agriculture for Civic Health and Integrated Voter Engagement Initiatives. For questions about the initiatives or Town Hall Summary & Recommendations, contact Natalie Fullerton at nfullerton@kansasruralcenter.org or 866-579-5469.

Kansas Rural Center Summary of 2019 Town Hall Meetings



Summer 2019

Kansas Advocates Gather for WEALTH Day

On February 10, 400 Kansans participated in WEALTH Day at the State Capitol to take their messages on state water, air, energy, land (farm and food), transportation and health issues to State Legislators. Starting with a Climate Vigil hosted by Interfaith Action followed by a packed room Policy Briefing and ending with a standing room only Climate Hearing and Rally, the day brought energy and a sense of unified commitment to these issues. Over 30 co-sponsors including the Kansas Rural Center, hosted booths and assisted with the program.

Although not a formally sanctioned legislative hearing, the Climate Hearing was made up of members of both chambers and parties and community members. The committee heard from a range of experts on how climate change is already impacting Kansans, and will impact the Kansas economy, agriculture, and public health.

Climate hearing committee members included: Jeremy Johnson, Crawford County Commissioner; Melissa Cheatham, Johnson County Sustainability Board member; Rev. Cathleen Bascom, and Legislators Rep. Rui XU (D-Westwood); Rep. Don Hineman (R- Dighton); Rep. Tom Cox

(R- Shawnee); Rep. Eileen Horn (D-Lawrence); Rep. Jason Probst (D-Hutchinson); Rep. Annie Keuther (D-Topeka); Sen. Marci Francisco (D-Lawrence); Sen. Randall Hardy, R- Salina).

Climate hearing conferees included: Doug Kluck, Central Region Climate Services Director of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA); Richard Mabion, president of KC Chapter of NAACP; Rabbi Moti Reiber, Executive Director of Kansas Interfaith Action; Rachel MySlivy, Associate Director of the Climate + Energy Project; Dorothy Barnett, Executive Director of the Climate + Energy Project; and Fred Iutzi, President of the Land Institute.

You can now view the full recording of the hearing online at <https://youtu.be/nQbOHt3YtHg>.

You can also find all of the climate hearing testimonies and supporting documents archived at: http://www.climateandenergy.org/admin_upload/2020%20wealth%20day/2020%20WEALTH%20Day%20Climate%20Hearing%20Support%20Document-merged.pdf.

KRC Receives Funding for Pollinator Protection Work in Kansas

The Kansas Rural Center (KRC) has been awarded \$20,000 from the Ceres Trust to protect pollinators from the harms of pesticides. The funds will be used to bring together a diverse group of stakeholders to share information and education around strategies for protecting pollinators in the agricultural landscape in Kansas and working to increase pollinator populations in Kansas. A publication that provides information on resources for protecting pollinators from pesticides and increasing pollinator populations, both managed and native, on farms and ranches in Kansas will be created and made available through KRC. KRC will work to foster and strengthen community around pollinator protection in Kansas, making sure to include both long-time pollinator advocates and advocacy groups and voices new to the conversation.

For more information, contact Joanna Will at jvoigt@kansasruralcenter.org.



KRC Farm & Food Conference

Local & Regional Food Systems Can Offer Economic Benefits for Farmers and Communities

by Veronica Coons

Energy and interest in local and regional food systems runs high across the country for both producers and consumers, but what do we really know about the economic impact for farmers and ranchers and communities? What works and what does not? And what about opportunities or need for urban-rural linkages?

As beginning farmers look to develop economically viable operations and existing traditional commodity producers look for ways to diversify their operations or expand into new markets, and as consumers demand more local products, answers to these questions are important.



Dr. Becca Jablonski, Assistant Professor and Extension Food Systems Specialist at the Department of Agricultural and Resource Economics at Colorado State University, addressed some of these questions at the Kansas Rural Center's November 2019 Food and

Farm Conference in Wichita, Ks. In a keynote address and a follow up workshop, she shared findings and conclusions drawn from her work at USDA, Cornell University and Colorado State over the past two decades.

Jablonski, who was a contributor to the Federal Reserve Bank of St. Louis' October 2017 report, "Harvesting Opportunities: The Power of Regional Food System Investments to Transform Communities," pointed to two indicators of the interest in local food. First, there has been a proliferation of federal and state programs to incentivize local food production and for healthier food. The last two federal farm bills have introduced and provided support for

a number of programs to put in place local food production and marketing efforts. This is an important shift from the commodity program focus of the past and is due to the rise of farmer interest and consumer demand.

Second, there has been a proliferation of local food policy councils nationwide. Since 2010, 300 such councils have emerged across the country and 52 of them have published food plans for their state or community. Jablonski stated that only two of those food plans actually addressed the need for urban-rural linkages or partnerships. These linkages, it turns out, are focused on something very simple but essential to ensuring success for the community their councils serve: procurement. Procurement represents opportunities to support surrounding rural areas and farmers and ranchers. But to get from Point A to Point B, all parties must be represented on local food councils including rural stakeholders and farmers.

It is important to clarify that urban farms of scale are virtually non-existent in major metropolitan areas. Denver County, Colorado, serving the Denver Metropolitan area, for example has 12 farms and all are fairly small scale. While there are many benefits to encouraging urban agriculture, these farms will not be able to handle the demand for all the food an urban area needs. Jablonski pointed to a survey she did a few years ago of the Union Square Farmer's Market in New York City, probably the largest in the country, where 400,000 attendees is not unusual. Most of the farms that supplied the market came not from within the city itself, but from a nine-state region surrounding the market.

Jablonski emphasized that the end goal of local food councils is not to simply establish a local and/or regional food system. Rather, it is to create opportunities, not only to support food needs, but to support farmers and the next generation of farmers. To do that, we need to understand the economic impacts to farms and ranches and to commu-

continued on page 15

KRC Farm & Food Conference

Local & Regional Food Systems
continued from page 14...

nity economic development—and the opportunities.

Farmers and ranchers need to be able to make a living, she stated. “Even those that are making a living off the farm are not earning what I think most people would call the sort of income that people aspire to,” she said. Scaling up to meet the procurement demands of the market is critical but can’t be done in a vacuum.

There is good evidence that consumers are willing to pay a premium for products that are marked “local,” Jablonski said. Not only that, consumers are willing to pay for organic, free-range, grass-fed, and other differentiation strategies. Farmers and ranchers selling in these markets also do more of their own marketing, processing, and distribution of their products.

By analyzing the annual USDA Agricultural Resource Management Survey results, Jablonski strives to understand the variable expenses of farmers and ranchers who participate in local and regional food markets, broken down by market channel. These assessments start with harvest and track through marketing.

For small and medium sized farms represented in this survey, labor is unsurprisingly the highest expense. As they grow, the cost of labor continues to go up. Digging deeper, about half of the sample loses money at any scale, but half either breaks even or makes money. This is encouraging, Jablonski says.

“We’ve seen that some of our direct market producers, because they’re trying to think about labor efficiency, have now started to have their CSA customers (community supported agriculture) pick up at the farmers’ market, so they’re not expending time waiting for people to come to the farm to pick up,” Jablonski said. This begins to get at the labor efficiency question because it is not simply the need to add more laborers, but that the relationship marketing that is part of direct marketing and intermediate marketing takes time. Figuring out how to be more efficient with labor is critical.

Communities need a way to evaluate what the economic impact of an initiative to strengthen a local food system will be. It is important to keep in mind that resources are finite. “It’s not like there’s extra land sitting around waiting for someone to farm it,” she said. Organizers also need to take into consideration impacts on both the supply side and the demand side. Some of the demands from consumers or urban councils in terms of certifications or criteria can have other ramifications for producers or the resource base.

One study by Iowa State University found that if the Midwest grew enough fruits and vegetables to feed all the people in its cities, land would need to be pulled out of the commodity crop production, such as corn and soybeans. There was a positive effect, but not as big as many imagined, because the study accounted for the fact that growing corn and soy also had a positive economic impact on the community, and that had to be subtracted from the change to vegetable production.

However, all in all, impacts of local initiatives tend to be positive, she assured, because farmers markets and food hubs act essentially as small business incubators providing opportunity to build skills and gain business experience. Also, the regular interactions with buyers and consumers may help circulate knowledge and ideas about new products and creative marketing.

Local and regional food policy councils are finding success, and Jablonski shared examples, starting with the aforementioned Denver Sustainable Food Policy Council. Through reciprocal arrangements with area schools, distributors who have gone through the city’s bid process are then qualified to bid for schools.

Through the 2014 Farm Bill, Colorado State University received a grant from the USDA Foundation for Food and Ag Research, which was matched by several commodity groups including the Colorado Wheat and Colorado Potato administrative committees. They are currently building a model that helps them understand the trade-offs along the supply chain for the benefit of the Denver Sustainable Food Policy Council.

continued on page 16

Sustainable Farm & Food News

*Local & Regional Food Systems
continued from page 15..*

Through the model, Jablonski was surprised to learn that many of the decisions made were not based on maximizing profit. Sometimes, shifts are based on how they impact dietary quality or the environment, and are driven primarily by urban council members.

“We’re really trying to look at how we can get some of our urban partners to understand that some of these certifications aren’t so black and white,” she said. Councils serving these areas should consider including rural members that are farmers and ranchers, Jablonski said. They could inform the council what impacts these policies might have for farmers and along the supply chain.

“It’s important to understand that urban people aren’t doing what they do because they don’t like farmers and they don’t like rural places,” Jablonski said. “They have good intentions, but they don’t understand what they don’t understand.”

Similarly, rural producers are not as engaged in with urban communities and their challenges, challenges. For these reasons, Jablonski urges local food policy councils to make room at the table for both urban and rural interests, and perhaps from organizations they’ve never considered.

Veronica Coons is a Great Bend based journalist who covered the Kansas Rural Center Farm & Food Conference for KRC.

*Moving Forward
continued from page 1...*

We have cancelled planned spring workshops and trainings and are looking at how to replace them with more digital online versions. We have not yet given up on holding our summer/fall series of Town Hall meetings but we are exploring how to do this online or as safely as possible.

A primary message from last year’s Town Halls was that we need to keep having conversations and communications with each other if we are to overcome cultural, economic, political, and environmental challenges. Now we must find a safer way of doing this. (See story on page 12 for more on our 2019 Town Hall Summary) Above all, we must find a way to continue working together in the time of Covid-19.

How Can KRC Help?

Since we are all figuring this out together, let us know how you are doing and how KRC can help now and in the future. How are you and your family and your community doing? What actions do you see unfolding as your local neighborhood, church, civic organizations, and local businesses navigate this new reality? A reality that has yet to stop changing?

Let us know what you see in your community. Tell us what particular problems you are running into or are worried about. Also tell us what is working well. You can contact us through phone, email, or social media. Find all of our points of communication below. This will help KRC better serve you as we figure out how to

work together in the time of Covid-19. Thank you.

Connect with us:
e-mail - info@kansasruralcenter.org
phone - 866-579-5469
Facebook - [@kansasruralcenter](https://www.facebook.com/kansasruralcenter)
Twitter - [@ksruralcenter](https://twitter.com/ksruralcenter)
Instagram - [@kansasruralcenter](https://www.instagram.com/kansasruralcenter)

Mary Fund is KRC’s outgoing Executive Director having retired from full-time work in Dec. 2019. but working part-time through March during the search for a new director. She will continue to help out with the transition on a consultant basis.

Grazing Calls Have New Call-In Number

KRC and the Kansas Grazing Lands Coalition (KGLC) has finalized the transfer of the monthly grazing call to KGLC. The call are still on the second Monday of each month, from 7:30 pm to 9:00 pm, but the new-call in number is:

1-712-775-7031

Code : 770024

For more information, please contact Barry Barber, facilitator, at turkeyfootbeef@turkeyfoot-ranch.com or Barth Crouch at 785-452-0780 or barth.crouch@gmail.com.

Small Farmer Commentary

*Small Farmer Commentary -
Forks that Nourish, continued from page 2...*

at 70.9% followed by 45 to 64 year olds - 66.6%; 30 to 44 year-olds - 58.7%; and 18 to 29 year-olds - 46.1%. We all have to pull our weight and take action to realize the changes we seek.

Have we already started to accept our changing world by building a future more resilient? Energy and support for local/regional food systems, soil health, and other community efforts that help address some of these challenges are increasing across the state.

Where do I start with all the good news around movements and support for addressing the challenges above?! In December, K-State announced a newly formed [Transdisciplinary Issue-Based Teams](#) tackling three statewide concerns: Local Foods, Rural Stress, and Succession Planning. Local extension agents volunteered to serve on these teams and have begun work focusing on these issues.

The [Kansas Health Foundation](#) recently announced support in the form of \$1.9 million to enhance the [Double Up Heartland Collaborative's](#) efforts to expand Kansas's existing Double Up Food Bucks program. In January, hundreds of high plains farmers attended [Soil Health U](#) in Salina to learn about "shifting to farming with nature rather than against it." [Food and farm councils](#) continue to strengthen around the state to take on local issues like disappearing grocery stores and supporting local food enterprises.

With the COVID-19 pandemic, new immediate challenges have entered our farms and communities around access to markets especially. A lot of work is needed to support farmers who grow the food that feed into these systems. Succession planning, access to land, adapting to climate change, and education in alternative ways to grow, and development of markets are critical needs for Kansas farmers. I know, I'm preaching to the choir here.

Looking at the big system changes needed, it's easy to see why we get quickly overwhelmed and confused about where to start or be involved. In a recent NPR feature, author BJ Frogg points out in his new book, "Tiny Habits" that "making small behavior changes required just a little motivation and lots of celebration to lead to big changes." It's important to change the way we think about these big changes. By just talking to our neighbors once a week or committing to call your legislator or write a letter to the editor during the session on a topic important to you can lead to bigger waves.

A few weeks ago at a convening of the Dominican Sisters of Peace ministries, Sister Christine Loughlin, Director at Crystal Spring Center of Earth Learning in Plainville, MA, called for a mind shift to radical humility in how we approach challenges and change. Perhaps in this shift is acknowledgment of fears and acceptance of uncomfortable solutions to remedy those fears. It means by taking a step back and embracing the present so we can perhaps better prepare and serve the future.

This summer KRC will again host our future of farming and food town halls, although amid the COVID-19 they may take a different form. Look for more information later this spring. The issues above will be a strong topic of discussion but within the context of an election year. We hope you will join us to embrace the present and share ideas about how you are turning flailing pitchforks into community and forks that deliciously nourish.

I welcome you to join us in fulfilling change within our own organization as we continue forward with our new Executive Director, and support KRC as we continue to focus on practical farm and food relating information, how-to's and advocacy with renewed ideas, leadership, and thinking towards care for the land, people, and our communities.

Natalie Fullerton can be reached at nfullerton@kansasruralcenter.org.

KRC Farm & Food Conference

We Need to Tell Our Stories
continued from page 3...

wanted good paying jobs that would allow them to raise a family and give them a future in communities that are forward thinking, and they wanted to provide for many of the quality of life issues that urban Kansas has,” he said. “If we’d asked the same question in urban Kansas, the answers would have been no different. I think we have a lot in common and we need to work together.”

Each community was also asked what is it doing right? The list was huge. After hearing numerous testimonials, it became clear that many communities fail to tell the stories about all the great things going on in rural Kansas. He also asked what was standing in their way? People responded with the need to rehabilitate existing housing and to build new rural housing, access to broadband, good quality health care, and quality child care. Transitioning leadership from older leaders to younger and access to food were also on the list.

Rogers stressed that urban communities need to be included in these conversations to make sure they know what is going on in rural Kansas and so they understand they can’t take these neighbors for granted. He pointed to recent research which has shown when rural Kansas income rises, the income of urban counties rises as well.

“When rural Kansas prospers, urban Kansas prospers,” he said. “We need to make sure that our urban neighbors know that, and that the investment that we make in rural Kansas is really,

really important.”

He will also reach out to state agency heads and remind them that they need to do everything they can to focus on rural issues or needs whenever they work on a new policy or new program, he said. They need to consider how they will impact small towns and rural communities.

A new website, ruralkanprosper.ks.gov, is live, where visitors can find newsletters, research and information to help them to tell the story of the things that are happening in rural Kansas. A report on the ORP’s 2019 town hall tour is also available. The report highlights recommendations including: 1) Creation of three interagency work groups on housing, childcare and workforce recruitment, retention and education and 2) Establishment of the Community Development Division within the Dept. of Commerce to “align existing resources, enhance technical assistance to communities and expand programs to focus better on rural community needs.” 3) It also lists several policy priorities related to ensuring rural healthcare, addressing property tax issues, and infrastructure needs. The report can be viewed at ruralkanprosper.ks.gov.

Harvesting Opportunities in Kansas. “We are ‘Kansas nice’ a lot, and because of this we often fail to bring that to a level that’s recognized by others in a way that is actionable by them,” Kansas State University Research and Extension Douglas County’s Marlon Bates said.

“There has been recognition at the national level, and people are paying a lot of attention to economic development through food system development, which prompted the Douglas County Food Policy Council and Douglas County Research and Extension to take stock of how Kansans want to approach food system development, and formulate specific recommendations that are feasible to enact to “move that needle down the line,” Bates said.

The Federal Reserve publication, “Harvesting Opportunity: The Power of Regional Finance System Investment to Transform Communities” was published in October 2017 by the Federal Reserve Bank and timing was right in Douglas County to host what became the Harvesting Opportunities Symposium held in Lawrence in May, 2018, attracting 150 stakeholders from around the state. An outpouring of support allowed the symposium organizers to develop resources aimed directly at food policy councils, over 25 so far, across the state.

A collection of tools and information from the symposium and following it can be found at douglas.k-state.edu/community/harvesting-opportunities.

“We really feel like telling the story is an important piece of how we accomplish change,” Bates said. “We have to be careful in how we craft that narrative in a way that is palatable to anybody who might be listening.

Food is a universal enough item that
continued on page 19

KRC Farm & Food Conference

We Need to Tell Our Stories
continued from page 18...

we can probably make that relatable to anybody.”

This universal need is one of the most valuable things we have going for us, he added.

To advance the narrative, they partnered with the KRC to collect stories from people who attended the symposium. Those stories can be found at the KRC website to elevate conversations about what is happening with rural food systems.

A major outcome has been K-State Research and Extension recently announcing three issue areas to be launched in 2020. They are rural stress, farm and business succession, and local food.

“I feel a great sense of relief and accomplishment that Kansas is going to be putting forward a multidisciplinary effort to address local food issues, in both the rural and urban communities across the state,” he said.

Insights gleaned from KRC Summer Town Halls

“We really need to be talking to our neighbors and being transparent about our values, and finding common values and common ground to work towards our goals,” KRC’s Natalie Fullerton said. She shared what concerns Kansans who attended the 2019 KRC town halls this past summer.

The goal of the town halls was to identify common values and language and

begin community conversations and dialogue to increase civic engagement within the context of climate change and the future of food and farming in Kansas. Town halls were held in Wichita, Garden City, St. Francis, Kansas City and Emporia. This was a switch from the usual roster of small rural towns, but it was by design. They wanted to broaden the perspective of those in rural communities by bringing in the viewpoints of urban Kansans.

Panelists at each town hall were asked the following: “What is the change you want to see to ensure a more resilient future?” “What are three things that need to be addressed that would advance this change?” and “What policies or actions at the local, state or national level would help advance this vision?” While climate change was not directly addressed by attendees, overall, they agreed there is a need to increase diversity, decentralize and reconnect within their communities to solve problems. Food and its production is an important issue for the future, and a sustainable local food economy needs to be established. Kansas is known for feeding the world, but there’s much to be done in order to feed its own communities. Many communities suffer from food insecurity and hunger.

“Diversity is needed, not only in the food we grow and provide to our communities, but also the people we engage and involve in our food choices and other aspects of community,” Fullerton said.

“This, and a willingness to adapt to the changes in our climate, something we

are already involved in out of necessity, will help us to be more efficient and effective change makers.”

Needs or actions identified at the KRC town halls included:

- Policies to advance clean energy and citizen education on energy needs and renewable energy options;
- Policies and programs to provide education/information to farmers for adopting sustainable/regenerative farming practices that increase diversity and contribute to local/regional food economy;
- Provide beginning or new farmer education and resources to access land and markets;
- Adopt size appropriate rules and regulations for cottage food industry and remove barriers to value-added production;
- Encourage community dialogue with our neighbors, both those who agree and those who disagree with us, in a search for common ground.

KRC recently published a summary report of the town halls and recommendations. See page ___ for more details.

This idea of the need for greater communication ran through all three speakers as they acknowledged that in an era of limited resources and complex issues, crossing ideological gaps and barriers is hard.

Lt. Governor Lynn Rogers agreed, “Oftentimes we need to talk more about what we agree on than what we disagree. That’s a starting point. We also need to make sure we have everybody at the table.”

State Policy

Legislative Review
continued from page 4...

to itemize deductions on state taxes if they don't itemize federally is on the backburner as is the plan to lower certain corporate income taxes on multi-national corporations that bring foreign cash reserves back to Kansas. For now, any tax reduction legislation will have to wait till the veto session and the lower revenue picture probably stops any significant reduction.

Energy. EVERGY's quest to offer reduced electric rates to certain large customers - with all other rate classes funding the revenue loss - continues to progress. This bill passed the Senate unanimously and had a House committee hearing but no committee action was taken. The political games have started to stuff this legislation into another bill (HB 2585) and run it through even though there were meaningful concerns expressed in the House committee.

Independent Energy Office. On a partisan basis, the House duly voted down the Governor's Executive Order to establish an independent energy office to write a state energy plan. Kansas is one of only six states that have not developed such plans. It is sad in the sense that the Legislature ordered an independent study of Kansas electric rates which clearly reported back to the Legislature that Kansas needs a state energy plan. The current Governor has appointed one commissioner – Susan Duffy - to the three-member Kansas Corporation Commission (KCC). A second KCC commissioner's term is up in March but the Governor's office has not yet announced a replacement. The future of the state's electric service, its reliability and affordability are at stake.

Medicaid Expansion. The battle over Medicaid (KanCare) expansion has stalled since it is politically tied to the constitutional amendment on women's health (abortion). But the debate has now sharpened with the health and survival of thousands of Kansans on the line. Time will tell whether by the veto session there has been enough political pressure and health care concerns expressed to separate these issues and deal with Medicaid expansion on its own. As federal Medicaid funding increases to respond to the coronavirus, will Kansas lose out on any expedited funding because

Kansas has not expanded Medicaid? This is not a time to play politics with basic health care for any Kansan.

Human Resources. The House also voted down the Governor's plan to create the Department of Human Resources by combining the Department on Children and Families, Department on Aging and Disability Services and certain juvenile offender programs from the Department of Corrections.

Federal Response to COVID-19. The question now turns to federal government stimulus packages. While Kansas and all states must balance state budgets, the federal government has the ability to debt finance assistance. Hopefully the support for state and local government needs will be prioritized over saving the cruise ship and other corporate industries.

The 2017 federal tax cuts went primarily to executive salaries and stock buy backs that assisted existing stockholders while the new federal bailouts should be fairly shared with the most vulnerable among us – workers, families, and small businesses that are the lifeblood of the country.

Will COVID-19 be the catalyst like a World War to force meaningful compromise at both the state and federal level? Sound science in the name of saving Mother Earth may not matter to many vested political leaders, but sound science to save your life or that of your community may finally be the saving grace for consensus.

While seasonal flu can impact 20% of the nation (but be tempered by built up immunity over decades), everyone is susceptible to COVID-19 with possibly half of the population catching this virus. Covid-19 does not discriminate by race, gender, religion or economic class. This disease war is now in Kansas with the number of infected patients rising daily. We've suffered the first couple of deaths. Will political leadership promoting equitable solutions and certainty be found in Topeka? And in Washington, D.C.?

(By Paul Johnson with assistance from Mary Fund)
Paul Johnson can be contacted at pdjohson@centurylink.net.

KRC News

*Johnson Receives Award
continued from page 19...*

since 2011, when KRC launched its weekly Policy Watch e-newsletter. But his roots in policy were set long before that. He was the lobbyist for Kansas Legal Services, 1978-1980 back when KLS was still allowed to lobby. In 1980, he began working for the Public Assistance Coalition of Kansas (PACK) made up of several church organizations, several social welfare groups, and the League of Women Voters, following family and child welfare issues. By the mid-1990's he worked for the Kansas Catholic Conference following similar social welfare issues.

During that time, he also served on the KRC board, and represented KRC on the Midwest Sustainable Agriculture

Working Group, which morphed later into the National Sustainable Agriculture Coalition, serving as a member of MSAWG's Coordinating Council for several years. Currently, he also works for the League of Women Voters as a consultant/mentor for their policy work. He operates a market vegetable and fruit farm near Perry, Ks. and was a founding member of the Rolling Prairie Farmers Alliance, a community supported agriculture (CSA) which continues to sell to customers in the Topeka, Lawrence, and Kansas City area.



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Kansas Rural Center
4021 SW 10th Street #337
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info@kansasruralcenter.org
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Inside This Issue

- Working as Community During Covid-19
- Small Farmer Commentary: Forks that Nourish: Embracing Change in Our Communities
- “We Need to Tell Our Stories”
- KRC Announces New Executive Director
- Governmental Challenges Amid COVID-19
- First Comprehensive Climate & Agriculture Bill Introduced in Congress
- Paul Johnson Honored
- Changes Are Coming: Speaker Fred Iutzi Urges Diving into the Climate Challenges
- A WEALTH of Education & Advocacy
- Future of Farming & Food Town Hall Summary & Recommendations Available
- Kansas Advocates Gather for WEALTH Day
- KRC Receives Funding for Pollinator Protection Local & Regional Food Systems
- Can Offer Economic Benefits for Farmers and Communities
- KRC 2019 Donor List