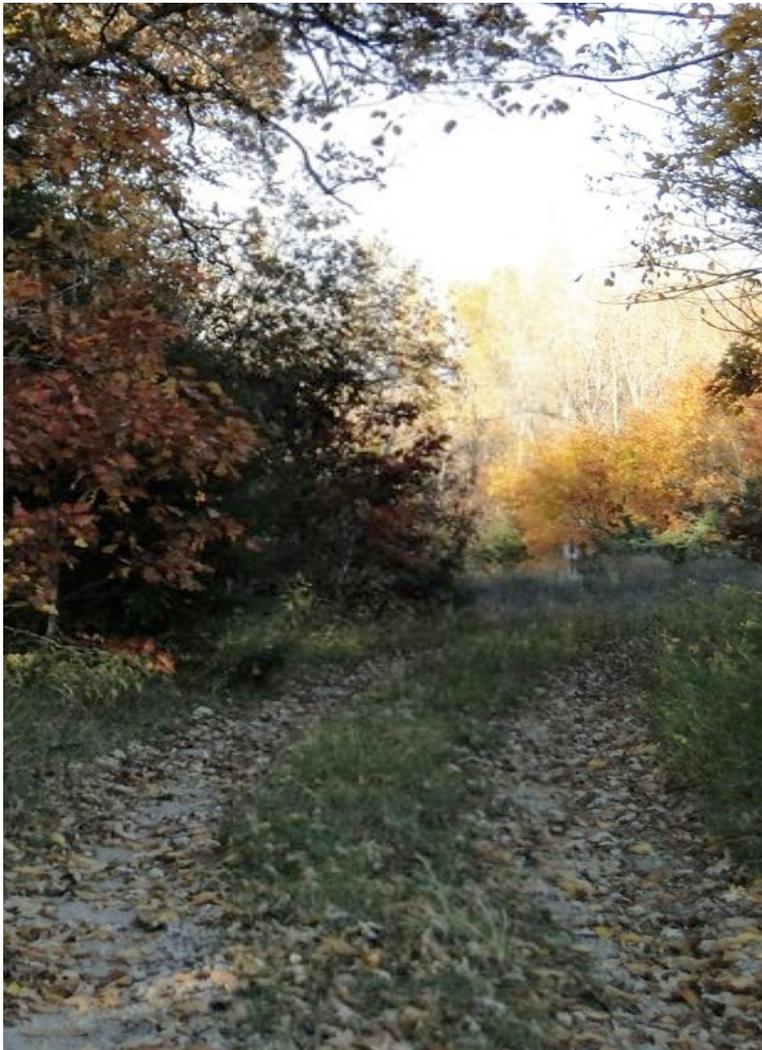


## Season's Greetings



*As we look down the road toward what next year holds for all of us, we wish you a Happy and Healthy New Year! From the Kansas Rural Center Staff and Board*

*(Photo: Amerugi Farm Timber, Fall 2012)*

## Conference Focuses on Multiple Issues Impacting Food, Farming, and Health

by Tracey Graham

“How does the way we grow our food affect our environment? the nutrient value of our food? our ability to provide access to food for all? and the health of our food and farm workers?” These were the questions posed by Julie Mettenburg, Executive Director of the Kansas Rural Center, as she framed the day’s discussion at the beginning of the recent Agriculture and Health Summit held in Topeka, Kansas.

More than 80 people attended the “Healthy Farms, Healthy People” conference on November 16. The topic of the day was “Exploring Kansas Perspectives on the Connections Between Farms, Our Food System, and the Health of Our Population”.

Mettenburg challenged attendees to consider not just community action for change, but also public policy solutions to help support and drive that change. She also challenged them to open their minds to complex problems and solutions, and to set aside preconceived notions, such as that subsidies alone are the cause of food price inequities, or the

*Continued on page 10*

# Rural Papers

Published five times/year

by the

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Reprints of articles are encouraged with acknowledgement of Rural Papers and author.

**Rural Papers** is the voice of the Kansas Rural Center, Inc., (KRC), a non-profit organization that promotes the long-term health of the land and its people through research, education, and advocacy. The KRC cultivates grassroots support for public policies that encourage family farming and stewardship of soil and water. KRC is committed to economically viable, environmentally sound, and socially sustainable rural culture. The KRC is funded by private foundations, churches, and individual contributions. **Rural Papers** is available to contributors or for a \$25 per year subscription to organizations and institutions.

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## From the Executive Director

# Why KRC is Needed Now More Than Ever

by Julie Mettenburg

*This month, I celebrate my first year as Executive Director of the Kansas Rural Center. It doesn't seem possible that a whole year has passed! We have been busy laying the foundation for a future that's worthy of all the hard work that has come before.*

*You will read about many of the year's accomplishments in this issue. We have achieved an unprecedented amount of quality programming for Kansas farmers and ranchers, from new publications to conferences to farm tours and work days. We helped galvanize the formation of new food and farming coalitions in communities around the state. And we engaged the public health community and others concerned about our agricultural system's impact on our health -- a gratifying fulfillment of one of my first goals as Executive Director.*

*Organizationally, the board and staff have renovated the budget process at KRC and developed a new funding model to help build grassroots support. And we examined, clarified and re-dedicated to KRC's mission to promote a food and farming system that is ecologically sound, economically viable, and socially just.*

*Thus, KRC is poised to move forward to continue to provide a needed vision and voice for a sustainable Kansas agriculture and food system. And we are serious about strengthening that voice, in the face of well-funded opposition as well as the eternal funding challenges that all nonprofits face.*

## KRC- A Strong Voice and Vision.

*Although I personally believe we may be reaching a tipping point in the larger food*

*and farm movement, many days it is hard to see much progress.*

- *In the latest issue of Farm Journal, more than 25 percent of the advertising pages promoted powerful chemicals and "systems" to help farmers combat tougher weeds. But you and I both know why those weeds are tougher these days!*

- *At our "Healthy Farms, Healthy People" Agriculture & Health summit, we learned about the risk that non-therapeutic antibiotic use in animal production poses to our citizens' health. Eliminating this practice for the good of our environment and our people will prove a tall order, considering the size and importance of the animal agriculture industry to our state, and its reliance on confinement feeding systems.*

- *This year's presidential race virtually ignored climate change, while we Kansas farmers are experiencing the effects of extreme weather every day.*

- *In California, despite early and overwhelming support by the public, the measure to implement GMO labeling -- Proposition 37 -- was defeated in the wake of a deluge of negative messaging financed by Big Food.*

- *Meanwhile, here in Kansas, Big Oil is developing the controversial practice of horizontal drilling, with its accompanying environmental concerns, such as its competition for our water resources, and what to do with the wells' salt-laden sludge.*

*Continued on page 3*

## From the Executive Director

• Early this year, our legislature relaxed rules on swine CAFO's, making it more difficult for citizens to protest large corporate swine facility permits, despite our vocal opposition.

• And all of this occurs in the midst of implementation of our state's new tax structure, expected to bring about a budgetary squeeze that is all but certain to further decimate the watchdog agencies.

### **Building a Bridge to the Future**

And yet there is good news. More people are gaining interest in these issues, as grassroots energies swell in communities across the state. Citizens are joining with farmers to work on solutions: organizing healthy food coalitions, farmers markets, environmental action groups, and new businesses to replace our dying rural groceries. Producers have reported that they are overwhelmed by the demand for their local and organic foods.

These farmers, citizens and grassroots groups are asking for our help - but we need YOUR help to provide it.

KRC offers alternatives, whether helping established farms transition to organic, helping grow new vegetable producers, helping farms access new markets, or helping graziers or crop farmers implement more drought-resilient options. And farmers are interested: at our all-day organic forum at Salina in November, more than 70 farmers turned out - double the number we expected. Other workshops to raise hoopouses or learn new grazing management strategies were also full of farmers and ranchers keen to learn about new opportunities and strategies.

*In addition to the practical information, our Weekly E-Updates in our Policy Watch Project provide a unique, and much needed perspective on state legislative decisions, including the budget's impact on education and rural schools, and on our most vulnerable citizens. In addition, the Updates keep readers up to date on the Farm Bill action or inaction.*

*As always, KRC is looking toward the future, and asking a critical question: Where are we most needed?*

*Given the pressures of extended drought, extreme heat, those "tough weeds" and increasing fossil fuel-based input costs, the challenges that farmers and ranchers face are immense. Some will focus only on the short-term view that sees seductive record corn prices along with a growing land price "bubble." But others are seeking alternatives, a path that cultivates resilience in the face of changed environment.*

*The next few years will be critical investment years for KRC—and for your farms and ranches and our future as Kansans. Your financial and volunteer support will help KRC build a bridge to a better future for our state.*

*Just as the board, staff and volunteers of the Kansas Rural Center have re-dedicated ourselves to the mission of an ecologically sound, economically viable and socially just agriculture in Kansas, we hope you will, too.*

*Best Wishes for the New Year from all of us at KRC! ☐*

## Briefs

### **“Plowed Under” Report Documents Loss of Habitat and Grassland**

Between 2008 and 2011, more than 23 million acres of grassland, shrubland and wetlands were plowed under in order to plant commodity crops, according to a recently released report by the Environmental Working Group and Defenders of Wildlife. The plow down is in response to high crop prices and unlimited crop insurance, according to EWG, and signals a need for public policy such as payment limits on crop insurance premiums and requiring conservation practices.

The analysis uses U.S. Department of Agriculture satellite data to produce the most accurate estimate currently available of the rate of habitat conversion in the farm belt. It shows that more than 8.4 million acres were converted to plant corn, more than 5.6 million to raise soybeans and nearly 5.2 million to grow winter wheat. Most of the destroyed habitat was in states in the Great Plains and Upper Midwest.

The report contains maps showing grassland, shrub land and wetlands converted to crops including counties in Kansas. To view the report go to: [http://static.ewg.org/pdf/plowed\\_und er.pdf](http://static.ewg.org/pdf/plowed_und er.pdf). ☐



## Keep Up With the State Legislature and More in 2013

Will Kansas try once again to ease rules on important issues, as they did last year on CAFO's and fracking? How will our tax system changes shape up and potentially impact our state's services and rural communities? When will we get a Farm Bill out of Washington ~ and when we do, will it support sustainable agriculture, diversified farms and rural communities?

Once again in 2013, the Kansas Rural Center will send our policy analyst, Paul Johnson, to Topeka to report every week from the State Legislature about issues and action that are important to our rural communities, our environment, and our food and farming system. Plus, we'll be monitoring activity in Washington through our participation in the National Sustainable Agriculture Coalition. And we'll be sending those reports out to you, in our weekly "Policy Watch E-Update" electronic newsletter, direct to your in-box.

Make sure you're on KRC's list to receive this important e-News. You won't want to miss any of this info, much of which is not covered anywhere else ~ and certainly not with our level of depth and perspective.

If you've donated to our 2013

Annual Giving Campaign ~ with a donation since November 1, 2012 ~ you're automatically on the list (if we have your updated e-mail address!)

If you have not already donated, please consider doing so. We are asking for a minimum \$35 donation to help us support Kansas farmers in sustainable agriculture and a sustainable food system for all Kansans.

As our thanks to you, we'll provide both the Rural Papers and Policy Watch Weekly E-Updates.

To ensure that you receive the electronic Weekly Updates from our Policy Watch Project, send in your contribution to KRC, and sign-up today providing us your e-mail address using the insert coupon to this newsletter.

Back issues of the Weekly E-Updates are available on our website at [www.kansasruralcenter.org/Policy](http://www.kansasruralcenter.org/Policy).

For more information Contact Mary Fund at [ksrc@rainbowtel.net](mailto:ksrc@rainbowtel.net) or 785-873-3431. □

## 2012 Farm Bill: A When and If Story

by Mary Fund

Hopes for passage of a full five year Farm Bill quickly evaporated after Congress came back to town post-election, as the attention turned to the biggest game in town~ the end of the year "fiscal cliff" drama of tax increases and draconian automatic budget cuts.

Commitment to working out the differences between the Senate and House versions established last summer does not exist~ at least not in the usual way where the House would vote on its bill and there would be a conference committee to work out the differences.

Instead, as this goes to press mid-December, Agriculture Committee leadership from both House and Senate, or the Gang of Four, are meeting to hammer out a full Farm Bill, that they think will mesh with possible resolutions to the "fiscal cliff".

The Gang of Four, Senate Ag Committee Chair Debbie Stabenow (D-MI), and Ranking Member Sen. Pat Roberts, (R-Ks.), and House Agriculture Committee Chair Rep. Frank Lucas (R-OK) and Ranking member Rep. Collin Peterson (D-MN) are said to be making progress on finding a compromise between the House Committee-passed bill and Senate passed versions. The House Ag Committee cut \$32 billion including \$16 billion from Food Stamps, and the Senate version cut \$23 billion with \$4 billion from Food Stamps. Both contained various pieces of the non-commodity and nutrition provisions that sustainable agriculture advocates support, but both cut conservation programs. *Continued on page 11*

# Sustainable Farming News

## Kansas Graziers Association Winter Conference January 19, 2013

The Kansas Graziers Association (KGA) Winter Conference will be held Saturday, January 19, 2013, 8:30 a.m. to 4 p.m. at the Courtyard Marriott Hotel in Salina, Ks. "Back to the Basics of Grazing Management" is the theme for this year's conference.

"With so many new people interested in grazing management or wanting information on how to manage drought stressed pastures, we thought a full day of state experts on a number of critical topics was the best idea," stated KGA secretary Mary Howell.

Speakers will include David Kraft, and Dwayne Rice, Kansas based

USDA NRCS Rangeland Management Specialists. Kraft will address drought management, and Rice will compare conventional grazing to MIG (management intensive grazing) and mob grazing. Gary Kilgore, retired KSU grass and forages specialist, will discuss soil health and fertility in grazing systems, and Dale Strickler, rancher educator, will cover plant physiology, forage options, and extending the grazing season. Rancher Ted Alexander will also lead a rancher/farmer panel on drought planning and general questions on grazing.

Registration fees are \$50 for the first person per ranch, and \$35 for a

second person. Student registration is \$25. The Courtyard Marriott is located at 3020 Riffel Drive, Salina, Ks., at the Schilling Road Exit from I-135.

Check the KRC website at [www.kansasruralcenter.org](http://www.kansasruralcenter.org) for registration forms and information, or contact Mary Howell at [marshallcofair@gmail.com](mailto:marshallcofair@gmail.com) or 785-562-8726 or call the KRC office at 785-873-3431.

KGA is sponsoring a social at the conference headquarters starting at 7 p.m. Friday night for those coming to Salina the night before. Everyone is welcome. □



### **Riparian Forestry Field Day Addressed Sediment and Water Quality Issues**

The Riparian Forestry Field Day held November 15 near Hartford, KS, highlighted establishment and management of riparian forests for multiple benefits. During a morning stop on the Flint Hills National Wildlife Refuge, about 40 participants learned how timber stand improvement, use of root plows and selective tree harvest will maintain riparian woodlands adjacent to croplands and improve buffering for water quality, wildlife habitat, and lumber production. (Above left photo of Ryan Neisis, Ecotone Forestry, discussing management of field edges)

A streambank stabilization site along the Neosho River on land owned by Kathy Stayskal was featured during the afternoon. After bank shaping and placement of rock structures in the channel, a buffer of riparian trees and native grasses was designed and planted along the field edge to control erosion and trap sediments and nutrients. This project was one of twelve found to be major sediment sources entering John Redmond Reservoir. (Above right Thad Rhodes, Kansas Forest Service, explained the design of riparian buffers to achieve multiple benefits to streams and wildlife.) The field day was sponsored by Neosho Headwaters, Upper Neosho, and Eagle Creek WRAPS, Coffee and Lyon County Conservation Districts, NRCS, KSU Research and Extension, Lake Region RC&D, Ecotone Forestry, Kansas Forest Service, US Fish and Wildlife Services, Kansas Rural Center, and the Watershed Institute. Photos by D. Kirkham

## Kansas Rural Center Transfers Local Food Program to Kansas Department of Agriculture

In mid-December, the Kansas Rural Center (KRC) and the Kansas Department of Agriculture announced that the state agency will take over administration of “Our Local Food,” a project developed by the Kansas Rural Center.

“After several hard years of work establishing the need for and user platforms for this brand, we are thrilled to see the program taken up by our state agriculture agency,” said Julie Mettenburg, executive director of the Kansas Rural Center. “This will be an important next step in growing our local foods infrastructure in Kansas, as farmers, consumers and food businesses receive more support in growing their local food economies and businesses.”

Mettenburg said that KRC will continue to work in local foods issues, such as its current role as a partner in Kansas State University’s Rural Grocery Initiative and in sponsoring other producer education and outreach opportunities.

“We will continue to promote the OLF program, while seeking to work on the next important needs in local food systems development in our state,” she said.

Beginning Jan. 1, 2013, KDA will take over ownership and administration of the OLF brandmark, promotional materials and website, ourlocalfoodks.org. In addition, KDA will assume ownership and respon-

sibility for ksfarmersmarkets.org. These programs have been purchased by KDA from the KRC through a U.S. Department of Agriculture Specialty Crop Block Grant, to promote growth in the production, consumption and sales of fresh fruits and vegetables.

The Our Local Food program will join the state trademark program for Kansas products and will specifically promote Kansas-grown fresh fruits and vegetables.

“The Our Local Food program will give us additional options for promoting, assisting and supporting producers, food businesses and consumers across the state,” said Sarah Green, local foods and rural outreach coordinator for KDA. “The Kansas Department of Agriculture is committed to supporting the entire spectrum of Kansas agriculture, which is our state’s largest industry.”

The centerpiece of Our Local Food is the website ourlocalfoodks.org, which serves as an online “food hub” for Kansans looking to sell or purchase locally grown produce and other farm goods. KRC launched the program in 2010 in several counties in northeast Kansas; in 2011 it expanded into three regions – the Kaw River Valley, or Lawrence-Kansas City region, the Twin Rivers, or Emporia region, and the South Central, or Wichita-Hutchinson region. In 2012, it expanded statewide, including to counties in the Southeast region.

The regional chapters will be phased out of the program, and attention turned to recruiting producers across the state. Interested consumers, producers or food businesses may sign-up for the program by visiting ourlocalfoodks.org.

Mettenburg said the transfer of the OLF program and websites was a testament to KRC’s long history of work in local food systems.

“KRC has served as a pioneer in the agricultural community, listening to the needs of our farmers and rural Kansans and initiating important conversations,” she says. “Our work in local food goes back to our early days, and includes our leadership of the Kansas Food Policy Council. KDA’s further promotion of this program is a major indicator of just how important local foods will be in the future to our state economy and rural community development.” □

## Niche Marketing Guide Available For Kansas Farms

Farm producers interested in selling their goods into local, niche and direct markets will have a new resource this month when the Kansas Rural Center's "Finding Your Niche: A Marketing Guide for Kansas Farms" rolls off the press.

Packed with more than 150 pages of information, tips, resources, links and profiles, the guide has been a labor of love for KRC's Our Local Food program team. Funding for the project was provided by the USDA Specialty Crop Block Grant through the Kansas Department of Agriculture and by the USDA Risk Management Agency.

The Guide provides information for

farms producing a wide range of products, from specialty crops to livestock products, honey, aquaculture and more. Topics include how to set prices, develop a wholesale business with restaurants and institutions, set-up online marketing, and more. The Guide also includes a special section for beginning farmers.

Cole Cottin, OLF-Kaw River Valley coordinator for KRC this year, served as editor of the guide, and said it is intended for experienced farmers and aspiring farmers alike. "If you are interested in selling farm products of any kind to local or regional markets, this guide is for you!"

The guide will be available at the Kansas Rural Center web site. Or, you may order a print copy while supplies last by e-mailing your full contact information ~ including address and phone number -- to [ddysart@rainbowtel.net](mailto:ddysart@rainbowtel.net) or call 785-873-3431. A donation to KRC to help cover shipping and handling costs, and to help continue our work with Kansas farmers in sustainable agriculture, is appreciated.

The guide is in production now and expected to be printed by Dec. 31. □

## Warm Thank You and Appreciation to OLF Staff

by Julie Mettenburg

*While grants provide the lifeblood for our work, when they end, we must often say farewell to staff and contributors who have become beloved to KRC and its constituents. Such is the case as this year ends, with the completion of our USDA Specialty Crop Block grants and Risk Management Agency grant, which have provided funding over the past two to three years to launch our pilot local foods promotion program, Our Local Food.*

*Natalie Fullerton, Wichita, who coordinated the South Central region for OLF; Tracey Graham, Emporia, coordinator for the Twin Rivers region; and Cole Cottin, Lawrence, coordinator for the Kaw River Valley, will be moving on to more local foods work in their communities, plus Cole and Natalie will be helping KRC with some community*

*work under our Rural Groceries Project in early 2013.*

*We also thank Talia Neely and her colleagues at See-Kan RC&D, Chanute, for their partnership in the Southeast region, where they will continue to promote local foods and farmers markets development.*

*We also thank the consultants and collaborators who helped us complete this year's impressive body of accomplishments: communications coordinator Tom King; interns Chhaya Kolavalli, Clinton Idol, Annarose Hart and Valerie Dysart Niehues; the folks at Minuteman Press of Lawrence and Printing Plus of Emporia; and Andrew Carothers of Sprout Design, Lawrence.*

*Finally, former KRC staff Jerry Jost,*

*Dan Nagengast and Mercedes Taylor-Puckett provided years of labor that brought these grants and the OLF Program to fruition. We thank them for their vision, dedication and hard work.*

*As a testament to KRC's leadership, the Our Local Food program will move out of the pilot stage to become the local food and farming component of the state's trademark marketing program, administered by the Kansas Department of Agriculture. Please continue to look for it at [ourlocalfoods.org](http://ourlocalfoods.org), and [ksfarmersmarkets.org](http://ksfarmersmarkets.org). (See page 6.)*

*KRC will continue its leadership around local food and farming systems. Watch for news regarding our partnership in K-State's Rural Grocery Project, producer and organic trainings, workshops and tours, and other upcoming initiatives. □*

# Sustainable Farming News

## Organic Farming Opportunities and Benefits Highlighted at Forum



Dr. Michel Cavigelli, USDA ARS Farming System Project leader spoke (above left) to about 70 organic farmers, transitional organic and conventional farmers at the Organic Farming Forum in mid-November. Cavigelli provided an overview of the research findings at the nine long term agricultural research sites on organic around the country.

“Dollars for organic research exist because of all of you,” Dr. Michel Cavigelli, USDA ARS lead scientist for the Farming Systems Program told the crowd at a recent forum on organic farming in Salina, Ks.

About 70 organic farmers, transitional or beginning farmers and a number of conventional farmers and non-farming landowners gathered to listen to Cavigelli’s overview of organic research across the country, as well as to learn more about organic cropping systems, certification, marketing opportunities, and USDA NRCS resources for organic.

Cavigelli was referring to the growing farmer interest and consumer demand for organic products, and to the funds included in the past couple of farm bills dedicated to organic research needs. Organic production is one of the fastest growing sectors within agriculture averaging about 18 to 20% per year the past 15 years. While

research funds have not grown proportionately, forum participants learned that USDA and a few universities around the country have still been able to establish some important long-term studies and begin collecting base data.

Cavigelli and others spoke at the day long forum organized by the Kansas Rural Center, and cosponsored by the Kansas Organic Producers Marketing Association, and Kansas Center for Sustainable Agriculture and Alternative Crops.

All farming systems manage ecological processes to provide ecosystem services, Cavigelli explained. These services include food production, regulating of water quality, pests, and climate, and supporting soil retention and nutrient cycling. Soil organic matter is the new buzz word in agronomy and conservation circles, largely due to concerns about soil health and carbon sequestration.

Soil organic matter, stated Cavigelli, provides ecosystems services of increasing fertility, stabilizing soils to prevent erosion, helping control some pests, increasing carbon sequestration, and building system resilience in all agricultural systems. But organic farming, he explained, does all this without synthetic fertilizers, pesticides, or genetically modified organisms. “Improving organic matter and soil health have long been the foundation of organic farming systems.”

“Organic farming systems have a mean carbon sequestration rate similar to no till systems,” he stated. While quick to acknowledge that more research is needed because the sites were not set up for one-to one comparison, organic systems fixed carbon in the soil at rates equal or higher than no till, especially at lower soil profiles at five long term agriculture research sites (LIARS). In addition to the carbon benefits,

*Continued on page 9*

# Sustainable Farming News

## Organic Farming...

*Continued from page 8*

organic systems also can have erosion or loss rates comparable to no till despite the tillage used in organic, although reduced tillage or no till within organic systems had better results than organic with tillage.

As for yields, organic yields are on average lower than conventional systems—about 85 to 90% of conventional yields on average in all of the LIAR sites. But a closer look at the research has shown that the longer rotation systems (i.e. a six year rotation such as a corn followed by a fall rye cover crop, then soybeans, followed by wheat and then 3 years of alfalfa) brought crop yields closer to conventional averages. The longer term rotations also showed better weed control and lower soil erosion.

Cavigelli pointed to organic farming's research needs and challenges: improve manure management, integrate cover crops and perennial forages, and reducing tillage. "We have learned," stated Cavigelli, "that you must pay as much attention to the cover crop as to the cash crop."

Crop rotations and soil building legume's and manure management practices were emphasized by Ed Reznicek, organic farmer and General Manager of the Kansas Organic Producers Association, as he outlined the challenges and opportunities in organic field crop production. Ib Hagsten, independent certified organic inspector, laid out the basics of organic certification. If you are averse to record keeping, then organic farming is probably not for you, he advised.

"Demand for organic crops surpasses the available supply," stated Rodger Schneider, Kansas Organic Producers Association Marketing Director. "About 60% of the organic soybeans processed in this country are imported from China or India. That is opportunity for Kansas farmers." While conventional crop prices are at all time highs, premiums for organic crops have climbed too. "We need more organic farmers to meet the product demand."

USDA official numbers for certified organic farmers nationally was under 12,000 with 400 million in sales in 2002. By 2011, the number was nearly 13,000 with \$3.5 billion in sales. The official numbers for organic farmers certified in Kansas ranges from 83 to 167, depending on which set of data you are looking at and which definitions of organic farmer they used. Numbers for surrounding states such as Iowa and Nebraska are much higher (Iowa 677 and Nebraska 211), according to USDA.

Lyle Frees, Resource Conservationist, with the USDA NRCS office in Salina described how the EQIP Organic Initiative can help transitioning or existing organic farmers. The NRCS program is there to provide cost-share assistance to transitioning organic farmers in adopting conservation practices (such as crop rotations, cover crops, nutrient management, grazing management, etc.) to facilitate the transition, and to help existing organic farmers in adopting needed conservation measures. Each county should have a staff person who participated in the organic training workshops coordinated by the Kansas Rural Center and State NRCS office in 2010 and 2011.

A range of farmers attended the meeting coming from all parts of the state and some from Nebraska and Northwest Missouri.

At the beginning of the day forum organizer Mary Fund told the group, "This is exactly what we wanted to see today—a broad spectrum of experienced organic farmers and transitional or beginning farmers or just curious conventional farmers. I don't want to downplay what you will learn from the speakers today, but what you'll learn from each other will be just as important."

About a third of those attending were currently certified organic farmers, another third were land-owners or non-organic farmers interested in learning more, and about a quarter were beginning or transitional organic farmers. Following the forum, Fund said, "98 percent of those responding to our forum evaluation asked for additional regional or local education and information meetings. KRC is going to see what we can do to help make that happen."

Presentations from the forum are posted on KRC's website at [www.kansaruralcenter.org](http://www.kansaruralcenter.org).

The Forum was partly funded by a grant from the National Center for Appropriate Technology via a USDA NRCS Conservation Innovation Grant. □

# Sustainable Food and Farming News

## Healthy Farms, Healthy People...

*Continued from page 1*

common statement that Kansas farmers feed the world. "Are we even feeding our own state's population?" she asked. "You will learn later today that we are not."

Keynote speaker Robert Martin, policy analyst for Center for a Livable Future at the Bloomberg School of Public Health, Johns Hopkins University, shared the results of the Pew Commission on Farm Animal Production, a two-year study he led along with former Kansas Governor John Carlin.

In 2008, the 16-member commission provided 24 recommendations for industrial animal agriculture, including the elimination of non-therapeutic use of antibiotics, a common protocol in confinement feeding operations.

Martin reported that some efforts at reducing antibiotics are being discussed by the FDA and that anticipated water quality policy changes in the Chesapeake Bay region may become a model. Martin said he expects the Pew Commission to release a 5-year anniversary update this coming April.

As for action that Kansans could take to improve agriculture for public health outcomes, Martin recommended contacting senators and representatives to demand a more democratic food policy. Also, ask questions at the meat counter, such as "How is this meat raised?" and don't take "I don't know" for an answer. He

also suggested that HHS head Kathleen Sebelius may be receptive to Kansans requesting that the FDA address antibiotics in animal production.

Recent studies on the eating habits of Kansans, as well as issues of access, nutrition, food safety and environmental impact, and health impact on farmers and farm workers was the topic of speaker Barbara LaClair, policy analyst for the Kansas Health Institute.

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**Kansas farmers produce only a small fraction of the fruits and vegetables we now consume. For Kansans to feed ourselves the fruits and vegetables that can and do grow well here, we would need 121,000 acres of farmland.**

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LaClair distinguished between food deserts, rural regions and urban pockets where there is little or no access to healthy foods, and Food Swamps, where unhealthy food options are overabundant. Nearly half of Kansas counties contain USDA-designated "food desert" communities, with some western counties having no grocery store at all.

She said that KHI recommendations to improve the food environment include changes to farm policy to align food production more closely with dietary recommendations, emphasizing nutrient value and transparency in labeling, and making the healthy choices the easiest and most attractive choices.

"We're all consumers and can vote with our food dollars. Ask the questions, force industry to respond," LaClair stated. "If industry can't sell GMOs and antibiotic-filled meats, they'll stop."

Speakers Rhonda Janke, Ph.D., of Kansas State Research and Extension, and Paul Johnson, public policy analyst for the Kansas Rural Center, provided an assessment of the Kansas food and farming system.

Dr. Janke critiqued the recent controversial Stanford analysis of 230 research studies on organically-grown foods, citing several areas of flawed methodology and the exclusion of numerous research projects with organic-favorable results.

Both speakers pointed to data that shows that Kansas farmers produce only a small fraction of the fruits and vegetables that we consume - a total market value of \$767 million. Janke said that to feed ourselves the fruits and vegetables that can and do grow well here, we would need 121,000 acres of farmland near our population centers.

Johnson shared policy programs that are making a difference in other states, citing Michigan's Good Food Charter, North Carolina's Farm To Fork campaign, and Iowa's Local Farm and Food Plan.

Both Janke and Johnson called for citizen and corporate action in Kansas, to change food and farming policy. Janke pointed out that only one food-related bill was proposed in Kansas this last session, and it was defeated.

*Continued on page 11*

# Sustainable Food & Farming

## Healthy Farms, Food....

*Continued from page 10*

“Kansas state senators and representatives need to learn what we know, and need to know we care.” Johnson also said, “Kansas needs a more comprehensive Food and Farm Policy, with emphasis on diet and health outcomes.”

Donn Teske, president of the Kansas Farmers Union, shared the history, status, and prospects for the Farm Bill and the agriculture committees in Washington. He questioned the claim that industrial agriculture is needed to feed the world. “Peasants still feed at least 70 percent of the world population.”

With an eye toward finding community food and farming solutions, attendees participated in a series of round table discussions, facilitated by Marci Penner of the Kansas Sampler Foundation. Topics included Local Food Policy Councils, Farm to School, Food Cost vs. Food Quality; Work Place Wellness, Local Food Business Development, Food Hubs and Infrastructure (Aggregation/Distribution), Farmers Markets, Rural Groceries, Organics, and food assistance programs.

Participants were asked to make action commitments, which they recorded on postcards that will be mailed back to them in several months as reminders to check their progress. They were also asked, Who was not at the summit that should be included? And what policy ideas could drive change? Their answers will be considered by the organizing team and funders as they consider follow-up activities from the summit.

In addition to KRC, organizers of the summit included the Kansas Health Institute, Kansas Department of Health and Environment, Kansas Farmers Union, and Bon Appétit Harvest Café, with funding from the Centers for Disease Control through the National Network of Public Health Institutes, and additional support by the Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Kansas Foundation.

Jennifer Billig, of Institute for Agriculture and Trade Policy, Minneapolis, and liaison for the national organizing team, explained that the summit was one of seven being held across the country to start conversations about the intersection of food, farming, health and public health. □

## KRC Grazing Teleconference Calls Continue in 2013

Just a reminder that the monthly teleconference calls for grazing management hosted by KRC's Dale Kirkham will continue in 2013.

The second Monday evening of each month from 7:30 p.m. to no later than 9 p.m., farmers and ranchers with grazing management or forage questions are invited to join the conference call. Dale, Gary Kilgore and Keith Harmony will discuss issues important to you. The call is toll-free. Call 877-304-5632, Room #: 300 346 2424#. For more information, Contact Dale Kirkham at 620-344-0202.

The calls are made possible by generous donations from several ranchers and graziers. □

# Policy News

## Farm Bill...

*Continued from page 4*

This comes as the White House and House leadership continue to spar over the lines each have drawn in the sand over solutions to the looming tax increases and budget cuts. But chances are that if there is an agreement, a new farm bill could be absorbed into the overall budget bill that would avoid the fiscal cliff.

But that is a big IF.

Others argue that, barring the fiscal cliff solution, an extension of the old Farm Bill with direction to the Agriculture committees to cut a certain amount (probably within \$23 to \$35 billion) from the overall budget by a certain date in 2013, is the most likely.

As we have pointed out in earlier articles, some programs that expired September 30 (rural development, beginning farmer, organic cost-share and research, value added, renewable on-farm energy, etc.) will need specific inclusion in an extension if they are to not suffer a further gap in program administration and funding while a full farm bill is being re-debated. Reforms to commodity programs and crop insurance also could begin in an extension- if specifically included.

Also under a simple extension, disaster provisions for the livestock and fruit sectors would not be possible in 2013 unless the extension is modified to include them.

So the big question remains who will do what, and when and if any action will take place- on either the Farm Bill or the fiscal cliff, or both together.

I seriously hope this article is moot by the time it is printed, as that means someone somewhere took the steps needed to move us out of this what-if limbo. □

## Local Food Connections Workshop Draws Farms, Food Businesses, Locavores

By Natalie Fullerton

Fifty-six people attended the November 10 “Local Food Connections Workshop” held in Wichita, Kansas. The workshop focused on networking, marketing, and locating local food in south central Kansas. Those in attendance included farms, food businesses, and locavores looking to start or expand marketing and purchasing locally sourced food.

Breakout sessions, comprised of ten different presentations, brought in speakers ranging from a chef Michael Beard, owner of 715 Restaurant in Lawrence, KS using a nose-to-tail meat use approach in his restaurant to Paula Miller, a dietitian offering advice on how to find and use local food in Kansas.

Other speakers included: Rebecca McMahon, Sedgwick County Extension Agent who presented on “Planning Crops for Consistent Yields;” Brady Krueger, Krueger Insurance, “Liability Insurance for Market Farms;” Pam Paulsen, Reno County Extension Agent, “Post-Harvest Handling for Produce;” Brian Phillips, Store Operations Manager for The Merc in Lawrence, “Local Food as a Marketing Tool”; Cherie Schenker, owner of Schenker Family Farms “Regulations of Buying & Selling Animal Products” and “Niche Livestock Marketing;” and Tracey Graham, Our Local Food-Twin Rivers Coordinator “Eating by the Calendar in Kansas” and “Preserving the Harvest.”

A local food buyers and sellers panel shared their experiences. Challenges to buying and selling local food and how to overcome them, how far in advance connections with farms or businesses need to be made, important regulations and resources were a few of the topics addressed.

The workshop concluded with keynote speaker, Diana Endicott, founder and president of Good Natured Family Farms (GNFF). The company is a pioneering alliance of over 160 family farms within a 200 mile radius of the Kansas City metro area. Endicott manages the company’s many facets including sales to area grocery stores, a workplace wellness CSA which services employees at companies in the Kansas City community, a partnership with Bistro Kids to bring a farm to school program in eight Kansas City metro YMCA Head Starts, and Good Natured Market at Harvest Learning Center, a non-profit grocery store in Kansas City’s Ivanhoe neighborhood. Endicott discussed her current and future endeavors with the company and filled the room with excitement about the opportunities local food can provide for small farms and businesses. □

## Marketing Discussion Aims to Move Lawrence Forward

by Cole Cottin

Niche marketing and under-tapped markets for farms was the discussion topic at a monthly Growing Lawrence ([www.growinglawrence.org/](http://www.growinglawrence.org/)) meeting on November 6.

Participants were surveyed about types of wholesale or direct-to-consumer markets they are already selling farm products to. Nearly all were currently selling through multiple marketing outlets, primarily farmers markets, restaurants, and/or grocery stores. Several farms also sold through community supported agriculture (CSA) or on farm sales. Very few attendees were engaged in selling through internet, food distributors, caterers, or institutions (such as schools and hospitals).

Following the survey, discussion focused on the benefits and challenges of selling to various market outlets. Participants addressed issues of scaling-up to meet growing demands for higher volumes of farm products. Ideas for the way forward included:

\*Saving on overhead expenses through the creation of an agricultural production co-operative for purchasing farm inputs (such as fertility irrigation supplies) and sharing farm equipment (such as a grain mill, or root washer);

\* Labor-savings through the creation of a agricultural marketing co-operative and/or “food hub” - to increase efficiency of local food distribution by aggregating and delivering higher volumes of farm products from multiple farms to a broader range of marketing outlets;

*Continued on page 13*

## Rural Brainstorm Sparks Discussion in NE Kansas

by Jamie Dysart

One woman is taking the initiative to sustain rural communities, while letting the younger rural generation who are “rural by choice” have an active voice in their communities.

Marci Penner, the director of the Kansas Sampler Foundation and the author of “8 Wonders of Kansas Guidebook”, was the facilitator of the Northeast Kansas Big Rural Brainstorm (BRB), which was held November 12 at the Holton Evangel United Methodist Church.

The BRB brought local citizens of Northeast Kansas together to discuss issues of living rural and how to solve

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### Lawrence Marketing....

*Continued from page 12*

\*Exploring options for opening a food processing facility that could take raw local food products and process them into the types of foods needed by institutions, such as schools, that may not have access to equipment or labor for accomplishing food processing themselves.

As a follow-up to the identified need for collaboration, Growing Lawrence’s December 4th meeting will center around sharing resources, such as seed catalogues, equipment catalogs, or other farm related resources with the group. Growing Lawrence meetings are open and free to the public and take place on the first Tuesday of every month, from 7:00am to 8:00am at the Lawrence Chamber of Commerce (7th and Vermont). □

their concerns, in hopes to have “collective brilliance”.

“If we are all the same, we will always have the same thoughts,” said Penner. Penner explained the “power up movement”, which includes six divisions of agriculturists. These groups include the “power ups” who are people between the ages of 21-39 who are rural by choice and struggle with the connotation that “rural isn’t cool,” Penner said, while “sparks” are people under 21 who add good energy to community spirit.

“Power Ons” are ages 40 and older who are passionate about rural living, she said. Citizens 80 years and older, Penner said, who are still offering positive input in the community are known as “super powers”.

She said, “power generators” include those who live in bigger cities, but work to better rural communities, while “rural enthusiasts” are comprised of people who live anywhere and are supportive of rural Kansas.

When Penner traveled Kansas to do research for her book she went to all 626 incorporated towns. She said half of those towns had less than 400 citizens. Those 313 towns only thrived when they accepted the voice of young people, Penner said, “Those were the towns that had the most ‘explorer value’.”

Discussion groups were asked to answer the question of how well northeast Kansas is connected, and how can we communicate better? “Before we can communicate in a region, you must communicate in your town,” Penner said.

Penner introduced the “We Kan! Bank” to the BRB group. This is a system that matches community needs with those who can donate services, labor or money, she said. Everyone participated in the exercise of posting their accounts of service and their towns accounts of needs, and later could look at these to find out if they could help someone or if a services would be beneficial to a community need.

Teresa McAnerney, a facilitator at the Northeast Kansas Enterprise Facilitation, said she is surprised at the amount of resources there is in a community and the willingness of people to work together. Courtney Schmelzie, Seneca Chamber of Commerce, said she is excited about the community involvement especially in the “power ups”. With almost 60 people in attendance at the northeast Kansas BRB only eight people were “power ups”. Penner said that the results of other BRBs are a lot different when there are more “power ups” in attendance.

At the end of the BRB everyone wrote down how they can help sustain rural northeast Kansas on their “This is my Rural Action” card, and was encouraged keep working on it when they went home.

“We need to fight for what we need,” said Penner, “if we don’t say what we need, it will not get done.” □

*Jamie Dysart is a senior in agriculture communications at Kansas State University.*

## Drought Year Ponderings

by Mary Fund

Late one Sunday afternoon in early December, we saw billowing clouds of smoke on the southern horizon of our farm. Given how incredibly dry it has been, we were alarmed, and jumped into the truck to race around the section to see what was going on. Surely no one would be crazy enough to set a fire on purpose.

And yet that is what we found.

The local fire department was burning an 80 acre field of former CRP ground so that the farmer could work the ground yet this fall, and plant it to corn or soybeans next spring.

It was a warm calm day, so there was not much danger of the fire escaping the field, but it still deeply disturbed me.

By all official reports, 2013 will see more of the same here in Kansas as far as drought goes. And yet, farmers are willing to gamble on the likelihood of rain in order to cash in on high grain prices.

Or is it just rain they rely on?

While in the above instance, I do not claim to know the specific farmer's plan (and he is but one of many doing the same thing; see article on page 3), I am told that crop insurance plays a big role. I've heard stories about farmers buying poorer quality land in grass or brush, tearing these out to plant high priced corn or soybeans, and buying federally subsidized crop insurance which guarantees them a payment if they lose that crop due to drought or flood etc.

Sounds like poor public policy to me—especially in a drought year or cycle. Subsidized crop insurance is intended to protect farmers from routine risks. But instead it appears to be encouraging many to take risks they might not otherwise take-

risks that will expose more than just the individual to loss.

In mid-November, not long before we saw the billowing smoke, Ken Burn's documentary "The Dust Bowl" was aired on PBS. I am amazed at the number of old and young alike who were shocked at how bad the drought was in western and southwest Kansas and throughout the Plains. "We never knew it was so bad!", they claimed. "So hard on young and old. So totally destructive! It can't happen again, can it?"

While the topic of another Dust Bowl happening is fodder for a future article, I fear that the actions of those who tear out grassland to plant crops for short term profit reflects that same lack of historical memory. "Those who do not remember history are condemned to repeat it."

My father was a story teller. So while growing up, I heard lots about the Dirty Thirties and the Depression and yes, the drought. When my son was home from college over Thanksgiving, he unearthed a copy of an interview he'd done for high school with his Grandmother about the Dust Bowl. Ken Burns documentary- impressive. Personal interview- priceless.

This holiday season as families, friends and neighbors gather, take the opportunity to ask about the Dust Bowl. Ask your grandparents, older aunts and uncles, and older neighbors about the 1930's and what they experienced. Learn from history.

And, oh yes, talk to your Congressman about conservation compliance for subsidized crop insurance, and putting caps on those insurance subsidies. □  
Mary Fund, editor of Rural Papers, farms with her husband in Nemaha County.

## NRCS Launches Soil Health Initiative

In October, USDA's Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS) launched a national initiative to highlight the benefits of healthy soils. "By focusing more attention on soil health and by educating our customers and the public about the positive impact healthy soils can have on productivity and conservation, we can help our Nation's farmers and ranchers feed the world more profitably and sustainably - now and for generations to come" states the website.

At the initiative's launch in Ohio, NRCS Chief Dave White explained that there are four keys to "unlock the secrets of the soil." First, you want to increase the diversity above the ground to increase the life diversity below the ground," said White. "You want to keep the soil covered as much as possible, you want to have a living root in the soil and you really want to optimize the inputs you put in."

For more information visit the NRCS website at <http://soils.usda.gov/sqi/>. Or for special videos and more information, visit: <http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/wops/portal/nrcs/main/national/soils/health/>, or talk to your local conservation district. □

## Report on Coexistence of GMO's and Organic Sharply Criticized

In mid-November, the Advisory Committee on Biotechnology and 21st Century Agriculture (AC21) released its recommendations regarding transgenic contamination of organic and non-genetically engineered crops. The Committee was charged by Agriculture Secretary Vilsack with developing practical recommendations strengthening coexistence among different agricultural production methods.

The National Organic Coalition, a national alliance of organizations representing organic farmers, environmentalists and organic industry, sharply condemned the recommendations. Of particular concern in the report is the recommendation that organic and non-GE conventional farmers pay for crop insurance or self-insure themselves against unwanted GE contamination.

NOC strongly asserts that this proposal allows USDA and the agricultural biotechnology industry to abdicate responsibility for preventing GE contamination while making the victim of GE pollution pay for damages resulting from transgenic contamination.

“The AC21 report takes responsibility for GE contamination prevention out of the hands of USDA and the biotech industry where it belongs and puts it squarely on the backs of organic and non-GE farmers,” said Andrew Kimbrell, executive director at Center for Food Safety and a NOC member. “This ill-conceived solution of penalizing the victim is fundamentally unjust and fails to address the root cause of the problem – transgenic contamination.”

The underlying assumption of USDA's work plan for the committee was that as long as farmers are adequately compensated, GE contamination is a permissible and acceptable cost of doing business for organic and non-GE farmers. NOC has rejected this assumption, as did several members of the AC21.

According to NOC, the committee's final report failed to make a single recommendation holding the patent holders of genetic engineering technologies responsible and liable for damages caused by its use.

The report can be viewed at [http://www.usda.gov/documents/ac21\\_report-enhancing-coexistence.pdf](http://www.usda.gov/documents/ac21_report-enhancing-coexistence.pdf)



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## Calendar

**Monday, January 14, 2013, Grazing Teleconference Call.** 7:30 p.m. to 9 p.m. Dial in 108770304-5632. Conference room number 300 346 2424 #. For more information contact Dale Kirkham 620-344-0202.

**Thursday-Saturday, January 10-12, Great Plains Growers Conference and Trade Show.** Visit <http://www.greatplainsgrowers.org/>

**Saturday January 19, Kansas Graziers Association Annual Winter Conference,** Courtyard Marriott, Salina, Ks. 8:30 - 4; Contact Mary Howell at 785-562-8726, or [marshallcofair@gmail.com](mailto:marshallcofair@gmail.com).

**Tuesday-Wednesday, January 29-30, 2013 - No Till on the Plains Conference.** Bicentennial Center, Salina, Ks., \$175 registration/ \$90 spouse. For more information, go to [www.notill.org](http://www.notill.org)

**Monday, February 11, Grazing Teleconference Call.** See Jan. 14 info.

**Thursday, February 21-23, 2013 - Midwest Organic and Sustainable Education Services (MOSES) Organic Farming Conference,** LaCrosse, WI., Visit [www.mosesorganic.org/conference/html](http://www.mosesorganic.org/conference/html).

**Saturday March 2, 2013, Kansas Rural Center Board Meeting.** Matfield Green, Ks. Agenda TBA.

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/calendar](http://www.kansasruralcenter.org/calendar).

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