



STATE CONVENTION  
Nov. 18-19, 2025  
Drury Plaza Hotel Broadview, Wichita, KS

# FOR F★ARMERS' SAKE



STAFF & BOARD MEMBERS  
'25 CONVENTION

KANSAS FARMERS UNION STAFF

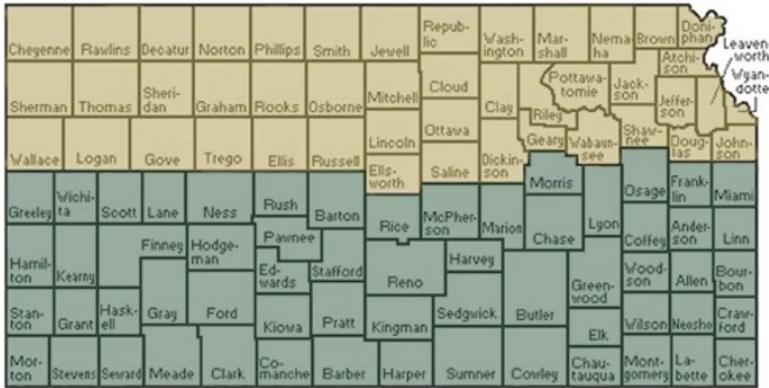
Mary Howell - Membership & Outreach  
Nick Levendofsky - Executive Director  
Kami VanCampen - Office Manager & State Secretary

KANSAS FARMERS UNION BOARD OF DIRECTORS

*\*Denotes board positions up for election at this convention\**

Donn Teske, Wheaton - State President  
Matt Ubel, Wheaton - \*State Vice President\*  
Jack Geiger, Robinson - State Treasurer  
Jill Elmers, Lawrence- \*North District Director\*  
Scott Kohl, St. George - North District Director  
Amanda Lindahl, Chapman - North District Director  
Donna Pearson McClish, Wichita- \*South District Director\*  
Ryan Goertzen-Regier - South District Director  
Rosanna Bauman, Garnett - South District Director  
Herb Bartel, Hillsboro - At-Large Director  
Jason Schmidt, Newton - At-Large Director

Kansas Farmers Union’s board of directors is made up of 9 members, along with the president and vice president. The state is divided into North and South Districts, and each district has three board members who serve three-year staggered terms. One representative from each district is up for election each year and the president and vice president are elected every two years. The positions of treasurer, secretary, and at-large board member are appointed by the board of directors at the board reorganization meeting following each State Convention.



STATE VICE PRESIDENT CANDIDATE



MATT UBEL

Matt Ubel is a generational farmer from northeast Kansas, where he raises row crops, cattle, and kids. Along with his brother, Matt owns and operates a custom application business. He is also active in local government at the county level, as well as in Farmers Union.

NORTH DISTRICT DIRECTOR CANDIDATE



JILL ELMERS

Jill has owned and operated Moon on the Meadow Farm near Lawrence since 2003 and raises 30-40 different kinds of certified organic vegetables, small fruits, herbs, and flowers on her farm’s three acres and the 30-acre Common Harvest Farms she owns with partners. Farm products are sold through the Community Mercantile grocery and Lawrence Farmers Market, nine restaurants, and Jill collaborates with other farmers to provide 265 CSA shares. Jill was a founding member of the KC Food Hub and served as a chair of the Douglas County Food Policy Council.

SOUTH DISTRICT DIRECTOR CANDIDATES



NORM OEDING

Norm is a lifelong Kansan from Kingman with roots in the Willowdale community and a background in farming. His family raised hens, a Guernsey cow, and 200 ewes, and he spent nearly a decade in 4-H.

Norm earned an A.A.S. in Auto Technology from Pratt Community College (1973) and a B.S. in Industrial Technology from Wichita State University (1995). From 1999 to 2015, he operated a certified organic farm and founded Little Red Hen Bakery- the first Kansas farm-to-table producer of hard red winter wheat, flour, and whole wheat bread. He also managed the state’s smallest licensed flour mill (2003-2022) and a grass-fed Angus herd, marketing beef directly to customers.

Now retired from farming, Norm lives in Newton, where he tends a rainwater-fed garden and a chicken flock. A longtime member of KFU, KRC, and KCA, he received the Kansas Friends of Education Award of Excellence in 2011. In his free time, he plays competitive pool and enjoys tennis.



DONNA PEARSON MCCLISH

Donna Pearson McClish is the founder and CEO of Common Ground Producers & Growers Mobile Farmers Market and Mobile Food Hub, a unique mobile food hub that has served both urban and rural families for a decade. She is a multi-generation urban farmer who was appointed to the Kansas State Board of Agriculture by Gov. Laura Kelly. As a trailblazer in urban agriculture, Donna is an executive board member of Sedgwick County K-State Research and Extension (KSRE), a KSRE Professional Development Committee for Community Vitality member, a Kansas Farmers Union board member, president of the Sedgwick County KFU charter, a SARE Grant Review Committee member, and more!

TUESDAY18

19WEDNESDAY

7:30 AM - 9:00 AM	Registration Opens
9:00 AM - 9:30 AM	Welcome, Land Acknowledgment, Flag Salute, & Call to Order
9:30 AM - 11:00 AM	Weathering the Storm in Agriculture: Cultivating Resiliency and a Productive Mindset <i>with Sharon Erickson-Fryback and Rachael Clews</i>
11:00 AM - 11:15 AM	KFU Board & NFU Convention Delegate Caucusing & Nominations
11:15 AM - 12:00 PM	Rooted in Resilience: The Story of the Kansas Farmers Union <i>with Tom &amp; Kate Giessel</i>
12:00 PM - 1:00 PM	Lunch (Ticket Required), Awards, & Silent Auction Begins <i>with NFU President Rob Larew</i>
1:00 PM - 2:00 PM	Visioning the Heartland Food Hub & Strengthening the Kansas Food System <i>with Stephanie Pearl &amp; Sheila Kjellberg</i>
2:00 PM - 3:00 PM	Farmer Mentorship <i>with Jack Geiger &amp; Jake Koehn</i>
3:00 PM - 3:30 PM	Dessert Reception
3:30 PM - 4:30 PM	Kansas Rural Justice Initiative <i>with Laurel Klein Searles</i>
4:30 PM - 5:30 PM	Kansas Climate <i>with Chip Redmond</i>
5:30 PM - 7:00 PM	Drury Broadview Kickback Social
6:45 PM	Meet in Drury Lobby for Keeper of the Plains Lighting

7:30 AM - 8:00 AM	Registration Opens
8:00 AM - 9:00 AM	National Farmers Union Washington Update <i>with NFU Advocacy Coordinator Charlie Decker &amp; Government Relations Rep. Layla Soberanis</i>
9:00 AM - 9:30 AM	Kansas Legislative Update <i>with KFU Contract Lobbyist Sean Gatewood</i>
9:30 AM - 10:30 AM	Kansas Appleseed & Harvesters Updates <i>with Haley Kottler &amp; Karen Siebert</i>
10:30 AM - 12:00 PM	KFU Board & NFU Convention Delegate Elections + Consideration & Adoption of 2026 KFU Policy
12:00 PM - 12:45 PM	Lunch (Ticket Required) & Silent Auction Ends
12:45 PM - 1:30 PM	Moveable Monument: The Story of the Ladies' Columbian Corn Fountain <i>with Sarah Green</i>
1:30 PM - 3:00 PM	Consideration & Adoption of 2026 KFU Policy Statement
3:00 PM - 4:00 PM	KFU Board Reorganization Meeting Following Convention Adjournment





## SESSION DESCRIPTIONS '25 CONVENTION

# TUESDAY18

### **Weathering the Storm in Agriculture: Cultivating Resiliency and a Productive Mindset**

*Sharon Erickson-Fryback & Rachael Clews | 9:30 AM - 11:00 AM*

This presentation is designed for farmers, farm families, and the professionals who work alongside them. Participants will explore the unique stressors that come with farming life, the effects of stress on the body, and practical strategies for communicating with someone in distress. The session will also cover how to recognize warning signs of suicide and connect individuals with appropriate mental health resources. The goal is to help you strengthen your mental health toolbox- equipping you to better support yourself, your family, loved ones, and your neighbors.

### **Rooted in Resilience: The Story of the Kansas Farmers Union**

*Tom & Kate Giessel | 11:15 AM - 12:00 PM*

For more than a century, the Kansas Farmers Union has stood at the crossroads of agriculture, advocacy, and community. This presentation traces its history, core values, and enduring spirit in serving Kansas farmers through change and challenge.

### **Visioning the Heartland Food Hub & Strengthening the Kansas Food System**

*Stephanie Pearl & Sheila Kjellberg | 1:00 PM - 2:00 PM*

This session introduces the preliminary findings of the Heartland Food Hub Feasibility Study, led by the Kansas Wesleyan University Community Resilience Hub (KWU-CRH). The Heartland Food Hub would be a farmer-informed, Salina-based food aggregator designed to connect local producers and ranchers with institutions such as schools, hospitals, restaurants, and KWU Dining. As part of a growing network of regional food hubs, it aims to open new markets for farmers, increase access to local foods, and strengthen the Kansas food system.

Participants will also engage in interactive roundtable discussions. These conversations will provide space to share insights, network with peers, and identify opportunities to collaborate in shaping a resilient, equitable, and farmer-centered food system—for farmers' sake and for the sake of our communities.

### **Farmer Mentorship**

*Jack Geiger & Jake Koehn | 2:00 PM - 3:00 PM*

Farmer mentorship has proven to be a valuable tool for engaging future generations of producers in the agricultural industry. Through the USDA's Transition to Organic Partnership Program (TOPP) and his own personal efforts, Jack Geiger has helped many beginning farmers build profitable operations that align with personal goals and ethics. Jack will share about his mentorship efforts and the value he sees in using mentorship as a tool for building community and resilient agriculture systems. Jake Koehn, one of Jack's mentees, will share about the role mentorship has played for him as he builds his own certified organic operation.

### **Kansas Rural Justice Initiative**

*Laurel Klein Searles | 3:30 PM - 4:30 PM*

Kansas, like many other states, faces a critical shortage of attorneys in its rural communities.

This crisis threatens access to justice, undermines economic development, and weakens the social fabric of rural Kansas. As a result, the Kansas Supreme Court established the Rural Justice Initiative Committee in December 2022. The committee spent two years studying the issues that contributed to this crisis and developing recommendations to help address these issues. In this session, we will discuss the committee's findings and the response proposed in the Final Committee Report released in December 2024 and the progress that's been made since then.

### **Kansas Climate**

*Chip Redmond, K-State | 4:30 PM - 5:30 PM*

This session will provide general guidance to overall changes in Kansas weather/climate and their resulting impacts over the last few decades. It will describe the issues with weather data collection, their potential influence on decisions and sources for high quality information. Focus will be placed on the Kansas Mesonet and associated tools available for decision making in the state. Lastly, we will focus on the outlook for the coming winter/spring and how it may influence agriculture in the state.

# 19 WEDNESDAY

### **NFU Washington Update**

*Layla Soberanis & Charlie Decker | 8:00 AM - 9:00 AM*

NFU Senior Government Relations Representative Layla Soberanis and NFU Advocacy Coordinator Charlie Decker will provide an update on NFU's 2025 policy priorities, legislative wins, and end of year expectations.

### **Kansas Legislative Update**

*Sean Gatewood | 9:00 AM - 9:30 AM*

KFU contract lobbyist Sean Gatewood will provide an update on the upcoming 2026 Kansas Legislative Session.

### **Kansas Appleseed & Harvesters Updates**

*Haley Kottler & Karen Siebert | 9:30 AM - 10:30 AM*

Join Haley Kottler of Kansas Appleseed and Karen Siebert of Harvesters—The Community Food Network for a timely discussion on the state and federal landscape of the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP). Together, they'll examine current developments in Washington, D.C., and Topeka related to SNAP and explore what these changes could mean for Kansans. The session will also highlight potential policy directions for SNAP and other federal nutrition programs in the years ahead.

### **Moveable Monument: The Story of the Ladies' Columbian Corn Fountain**

*Sarah Green | 12:45 PM - 1:30 PM*

Kansas-based writer Sarah Green will share the story of the Ladies' Columbian Corn Fountain, a relic of the 1893 Columbian Exposition that now lives on the Kansas State Fairgrounds in Hutchinson. It's a story of civic engagement, public art, community pride, and Kansas agriculture.



## SPEAKERS '25 CONVENTION



**RACHAEL CLEWS**

K-State Research & Extension

Rachael Clews is a Family and Consumer Sciences Extension Specialist at Kansas State University. She holds degrees in Psychology (B.S.), Theology (M.A.), and Family Studies (M.S.), and is a Certified Family Life Educator (CFLE) through the National Council on Family Relations. A proud Texan who married a Kansas farmer, she's spent the last nine years learning to love wheat fields as much as Texas bluebonnets. Rachael and her husband farm together, continuing a legacy that stretches back more than four generations on both sides. Having grown up on a small farm in Texas, she brings both personal experience and professional insight to her work supporting rural families. Her goal is to offer practical tools and heartfelt encouragement for those navigating the unique challenges of farm life. Her approachable style, humor, and deep connection to the farming community make her a powerful advocate for the wellbeing of those who feed us all.



**SHARON ERICKSON-FRYBACK**

K-State Research & Extension

Sharon Erickson-Fryback has served as a Family and Consumer Sciences Agent with K-State Research and Extension in Gray County, Kansas, for over 15 years. With dual bachelor's degrees in psychological services and criminal justice, she brings a unique blend of insight and compassion to her work. Sharon is a Licensed Addictions Counselor (LAC), a certified QPR suicide prevention trainer, and previously spent seven years working in mental health services. A lifelong Kansan and proud farm girl, Sharon understands firsthand the challenges of rural life and the emotional complexities of transitioning the family farm from aging parents. Her deep roots in agriculture and dedication to community wellbeing make her a passionate and relatable presenter, committed to helping individuals and families thrive.



**KATE GIESSEL**

PH Business Law Advisors

Kate Giessel is a Kansas City-based attorney who works alongside small and closely held family businesses, providing practical guidance on corporate structuring, governance, regulatory compliance, and business transactions. A lifelong member of Kansas Farmers Union, Kate has been presenting Farmers Union history programs with her dad, Tom, since 2015. She earned her J.D. from Benjamin N. Cardozo Law School after graduating from the University of Kansas and has worked with the National Farmers Union, Harvard Law School's Food Law and Policy Clinic, and GrowNYC. She serves on the Board of Directors for the Kansas Rural Center and Farm Commons. Kate lives in Kansas City with her husband, Brad.



**TOM GIESSEL**

Farmer Emeritus

Tom Giessel is a recently retired farmer who lives with his wife, Sheryl, in Pawnee County Kansas, near Larned. Tom is a life-long member of the Kansas Farmers Union and currently serves as the Pawnee County Farmers Union President. For over 25, years he was on the KFU Board of Directors, serving as KFU Vice President from 1980-1999. In 2007, he started researching the history of Kansas Farmers Union and has since expanded the scope of study to include Farmers Union nationally. In addition to being involved in many local activities, Tom regularly researches and presents original programs on local and regional history, believing that a shared understanding of the past is essential to building engaged and resilient communities.



**SHEILA KJELLBERG**

Kansas Wesleyan University

With a deep commitment to sustainable and accessible food systems, Sheila Kjellberg brings hands-on experience to the discussion of effective collaboration. Her work as the Community Resilience Hub Coordinator at Kansas Wesleyan University involves practical strategies for expanding food access and agriculture. Drawing on her history of community engagement and her recent mentorship with Karen Washington, Sheila is adept at identifying opportunities for partnership and driving collective impact, even in the face of limited resources.



**STEPHANIE PEARL**

Adaptive Roots Consulting

Stephanie Pearl, founder of Adaptive Roots Consulting, currently partners with Kansas Wesleyan University's Community Resilience Hub to develop the Heartland Food Hub Plan and Feasibility Study. Previously, she served as Interim Executive Director of the Alabama Sustainable Agriculture Network and held fellowships at the USDA Agricultural Research Service and the USDA National Institute of Food and Agriculture. She holds a PhD in Plant Biology from the University of Georgia, where she studied crop breeding and genomics.



**JACK GEIGER**

Geiger Farms & Geiger Beef

Jack is a 6th generation NE Kansas farmer. He returned to the farm in 1993 with a B.S. in Agronomy and Natural Resource Management from KSU. With his family, he operates a 30+ year certified organic mixed grain and livestock farm. They hold a Kansas retail meat license and direct market beef under the Geiger Beef brand. Jack currently serves on the Kansas Executive Beef Council, the Cattleman's Beef Board, the OCIA Board of Directors, and on the Rose Hill Cemetery Association. He has mentored beginning organic farmers nationwide for over eight years and maintains an educational channel, Geiger Farm, on YouTube.

## SPEAKERS '25 CONVENTION



**JAKE KOEHN**

Organic Farmer

Jake Koehn's ancestors came from Russia to America in the 1870s seeking religious freedom and land to farm. They found both in central Kansas, and have been farming there ever since. Jake grew up on a conventional grain farm and acquired his first piece of land in 2013. In 2022, he became certified organic. Jake strives to improve the land using organic methods, livestock, and cover crops, leaving healthier soil and a sustainable future for our children.



**LAUREL KLEIN SEARLES**

Office of Judicial Admin.,  
Kansas Supreme Court

Laurel Klein Searles is Chief of Attorney Services and Compliance for the Kansas Supreme Court's Office of Judicial Administration. She earned a bachelor's degree in business administration from Kansas State University (2004) and a law degree with dean's honors from Washburn University School of Law (2008). In her role, she staffs the Rural Justice Initiative and Learning Center Committees and serves as an ad hoc member of the Judicial Council's Juvenile Offender/Child in Need of Care Advisory Committee. Laurel also serves on the National Conference of Bar Examiners' MPRE Committee and previously on its Education Committee. In 2020, she was appointed by Gov. Laura Kelly and confirmed by the Kansas Senate as a Commissioner on the Kansas Human Rights Commission.



**CHIP REDMOND**

Kansas State University

Chip Redmond is the Kansas Mesonet manager for the K-State Department of Agronomy. He focuses on collecting quality weather/climate data and building tools for decision support of all industries in the state of Kansas. He provides state agencies and producers with long-term outlooks to help anticipate future stressors of the changing Kansas climate.



**ROB LAREW**

National Farmers Union

Rob Larew is an esteemed leader in agriculture, public policy, and advocacy. As President of National Farmers Union (NFU), he leads the second-largest general farm organization, representing over 230,000 family farmers and ranchers. Since assuming this role in 2020, Rob has championed fair competition, sustainable agriculture, and rural economic development. Under his leadership, NFU has strengthened its voice on Capitol Hill and in international forums, advocating for policies that empower farmers and enhance food security. He has played a critical role in expanding economic opportunities for family farmers while combating corporate monopolies that exploit farmers and ranchers. A sixth-generation dairy farmer from West Virginia, Rob has dedicated his career to advancing the interests of family farmers and rural communities across the United States.



**LAYLA SOBERANIS**

National Farmers Union

Layla Soberanis serves as the NFU Senior Government Relations Representative, covering issues related to trade, transportation, agricultural workforce, competition, and rural development. Layla also serves as NFUPAC Treasurer (National Farmers Union Political Action Committee). Prior to joining NFU in 2020, Layla represented the National Corn Growers Association and the Laborers International Union of North America (LIUNA) and has also worked on several federal and state campaigns. A native of Virginia, Layla earned her bachelor's degree from the College of William and Mary and a juris doctorate from Ave Maria School of Law. Layla is bilingual in English in Spanish.



**CHARLIE DECKER**

National Farmers Union

Charlie Decker is the National Farmers Union Advocacy Coordinator. He serves on the government relations team, advocating on behalf of Farmers Union's legislative and policy priorities. He also coordinates efforts to help Farmers Union members become more involved with federal policy issues and advocacy campaigns. Charlie has been with NFU for four years.



**SEAN GATEWOOD**

Contract Lobbyist

Sean Gatewood is a contract lobbyist and grassroots advisor. He represents KFU in the legislature and works for a variety of other, largely health related interests. Prior to joining us, Sean served as the Advocacy Director and Interim Executive Director of the Kansas Health Consumer Coalition. Before that he served two terms in the Kansas House of Representatives. He is a Council of State Governments BILLD Fellow, Kansas Leadership Center alumni, and a graduate of the KARL program. Sean has a B.A. in Organizational Leadership from Fort Hays State University.



SPEAKERS  
'25 CONVENTION



KAREN SIEBERT  
Harvesters

Karen is the Advocacy and Public Policy Advisor for Harvesters, the regional Feeding America food bank serving northeast Kansas and northwest Missouri. She has worked with Harvesters since 2004 doing communications and advocacy work. In her current role, Karen works with both the Kansas and Missouri federal and state legislative delegations, educating about and advocating for the federal nutrition programs administered by the states, our neighbors facing food insecurity and the community organizations that serve them. Karen grew up on a farm in south central Kansas and comes from multiple generations of Kansas and Nebraska farmers and ranchers. She holds a bachelor’s degree from Bethel College in North Newton and a master’s degree from the University of Kansas.



HALEY KOTTLER  
Kansas Appleseed

Haley Kottler is the Thriving Campaign Director at Kansas Appleseed, overseeing the organization’s anti-hunger advocacy and economic justice work. She is a proud Kansas native who was born in Wichita. Haley engages with Kansans across the state in anti-hunger advocacy, leading grassroots campaigns, and making the case for change through policy and legislative action. Haley’s fight for justice is rooted in a devotion to equity and fairness for all.



SARAH GREEN  
Prairie Meadowlark

Sarah Green is driven by asking questions and telling stories that inspire good work and positive change. She loves opportunities to bring people together to have productive conversations and experiences that make progress on issues big and small. She’s the Managing Director of Kansas-based Prairie Meadowlark, where she is a writer, facilitator, coach, and consultant. She’s also a co-creator of Rock Paper Feather Press, which published her first zine - Moveable Monument - in 2025.



NOTES

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## NOTES

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## NOTES

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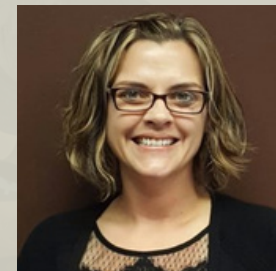
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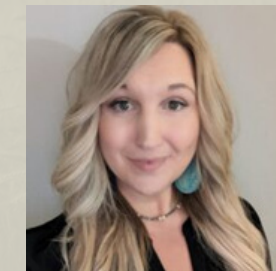
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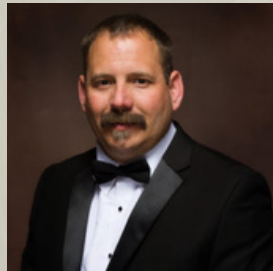
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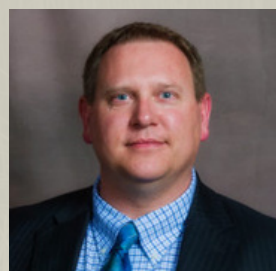
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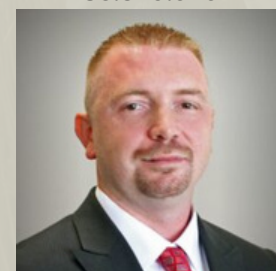
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