



KANSAS KONTACT

**MILKING PROFIT
GRAZING PLAINS FARM SPOTLIGHT**

**2023 KANSAS
LEGISLATURE RECAP**

**State Convention Set
for November 29-30**

**FUMA Expands
Member Benefits**

MAKING BETTER NEIGHBORS
Historical Column by Tom Giessel

NFU Legislative Fly-In
set for mid-September in D.C.

**GEIGER APPOINTED TO
CATTLEMEN'S BEEF BOARD**

FOOD SAFETY & SECURITY
KFU to host Spring Farm Tours

BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Cover: Dairy farmer Jason Schmidt walks down the cow path at his family's Grazing Plains Farm near Newton, KS.

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PEARSON SIBLINGS NAMED MASTER FARMERS

For the first time, this year's K-State Research & Extension Master Farmers & Farm Homemakers class included a brother and sister duo.

Donna Pearson McClish and David Pearson carry on the tradition of Pearson's Family Farms, started in 1968 by their parents near Wichita, KS. This urban farm gave rise to their Common Ground Mobile Market and Mobile Food Hub, which they started in 2014 to provide healthy produce to people in food-insecure areas in Sedgwick, Harvey and Butler counties. David is the family farm manager, while Donna is the CEO of the farm operations and mobile market. Donna serves on the State Extension Advisory Council, a consultative group to the director of Extension. Donna also serves on KFU's Board of Directors.

It's a point of pride that Pearson's Family Farms is one of 52 African American-owned farms that is still operated by the original owners and in existence today in the Sunflower State. Congratulations, Donna and David!

Membership Update

Due to new bank rules, all members with automatic draft for payment of membership dues need to sign an updated auto draft form.

If you have not done this, we can send you a new form to fill out and return to the state office. Your membership and support are important to us! Please contact Kami at kfu.kamiv@gmail.com or 620-241-6630 for a form.

FOOD SAFETY & SECURITY FARM TOURS

Make Plans to attend three Tuesdays this Spring to join KFU's Food Safety & Security Farm Tour series. The tentative dates for the tour are **May 23, 30, and June 6** in central and southern Kansas. The tour series is open to everyone, and registration is requested.

If you're interested in attending one or all of these farm tours, visit www.kansasfarmersunion.org or email Mary Howell, KFU membership and education specialist, at kfu.mary@gmail.com or call 785-562-8726.

KFU LAUNCHES NEW WEBSITE

Check out KFU's newly refreshed website at www.kansasfarmersunion.org! Many thanks go out to Tommy Enright for his wonderful work on the new website and to Jim Richardson for the use of his beautiful pictures of rural Kansas. The 2023 Kansas Farmers Union Policy passed by delegates at the 2022 State Convention is now online under the Policy page of the KFU website.

PRESIDENT'S REPORT

By Donn Teske

On March 28th Governor Kelly signed a proclamation declaring March to be Kansas Agriculture Month. That's cool. Usually I don't really make much effort to attend these kinds of events but this one was scheduled to be held at JET Produce and Meats near Leavenworth. Jacob is always so gracious to host tours for us at their uniquely progressive farm operation and I thought that was a nice gesture by the Governor to hold the event at an operation that is outside what might be termed conventional agriculture.

During Jacob's comments before the signing, he shared that he got more involved with the Department of Agriculture after having been appointed to the Noxious Weed Advisory Committee. He serves as an agricultural producer nontraditional. That got me to reflecting to that legislative battle.

Representing what is too-often an underdog agricultural organization fighting for family farmers and usually taking on agri-business, and agri-business allied organizations, it can get frustrating. It seems like one never makes a difference. Jacob's comment at the signing made me smile, knowing that we were a small part of making a difference in this legislation.

When the bill was brought forward in the Kansas Legislature to create a Noxious Weed Czar, the embarrassing proposed committee structure advising the Czar in the bill was made up almost entirely from representatives of chemical companies and the chemical industry. I recall my testimony included something like, "This just feels wrong, it's kind of like appointing the funeral director to serve on the hospital board. Of course, it's all right and he means well, but in the back of one's mind?" There were a group of us opponents to the original proposed committee structure raising hell and although still far from perfect, the bill was eventually amended to include other sub-sectors within agriculture - an organic producer, a non-traditional producer, etc. Jacob would not have had the opportunity to serve as it was originally presented.

One needs the reminder occasionally of the small differences we make as we fight the good fight, just to refresh one's soul.

Another circumstance that surprisingly showed itself at the proclamation signing was JET farms is hosting an intern from Fort Leavenworth. Ken DeVan was at the signing, he is a retired veteran now farming near Leavenworth and serves as the president of the Kansas Chapter of the Farmers Veterans Coalition, as well as serving on the national board of FVC. Ken has been an active member in Kansas Farmers Union and has represented us as a voting delegate for Kansas at our National Union convention and also at Fly-Ins to DC. He had a mission in that there is a program for military personnel that will be mustering out in the next year in the Training Assistance Program (TAP) called Skillbridge where service people in the program go out while still on active duty and work to learn a trade. The problem is, they wouldn't recognize agriculture as a trade. Ken kept harassing the TAP director at Fort Leavenworth and they finally changed it to include ag. Now, Ken tells me that there have been 21 interns so far trained through the program on farms in Kansas and Missouri, and to have one at the signing that Ken knew nothing about was a wonderful opportunity for the Governor and the Department of Agriculture to be educated on the program.

Another is Donna Pearson McClish, an African American female urban farmer whose Common Ground project has gained national attention. She has served on KFU's board of directors for some years now, serves on the KDA advisory board, and she and her brother were recently named as Master Farmers by KSU.

These examples are truly the personal abilities and integrity of those passions of these members. They did this on their own. I would like to think that their relationship with Kansas Farmers Union was an alliance that helped them a little bit toward their goals. Now we have a Farm Bill to do this year.



The long-time stabilizing hand on the process over recent farm bills, Collin Peterson, is no longer there. Senate Ag Committee Chairwoman Debbie Stabenow is in her last term before retiring. I suspect she will want to finish this Farm Bill before the next election. The Ag Committees have traditionally been a little more bi-partisan than the rest of Congress, so maybe we can pull it off. This year we are also dealing with more than 20 of the 50 House Ag Committee members being freshmen – our own Congresswoman Davids being one of them (freshman on the Ag Committee, that is). Congresswoman Davids is very open about the fact that she is a mostly urban Congressperson that knows little about agriculture and she and her staff are eager to learn. She wants to represent Kansas farmers appropriately. Here is another role for Farmers Union.

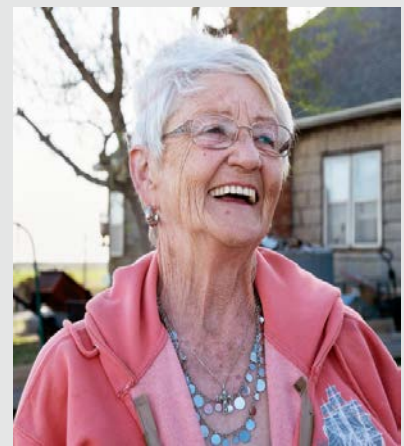
We all do better when we all do better.

P.S. I grieve and miss my, and Kansas Farmers Union's, dear friend and mentor, Linda Hessman. A life well led...

Down



KFU President Donn Teske presented Linda Hessman the 2021 Linda Hessman Lifetime Achievement Award to Rural Kansas during a visit to her farm near Dodge City, KS this past summer.



KFU Mourns the Loss of Linda Hessman

Longtime KFU board member Linda Hessman of Dodge City, KS died Saturday, December 10, 2022 after a valiant battle with cancer. Linda served as Kansas Farmers Union's vice president from 2016 to 2019 and served on the board for more than two decades. KFU also created a lifetime achievement award in her name in 2021 to recognize those individuals who have made a difference in advocacy for family farmers. Linda was the 2012 recipient of the prestigious KFU Ruth Hirsh Award and according to Donn Teske, Kansas Farmers Union President, he and Linda hold the state record for the longest mediation in state history—two full days. She and husband Jerry farmed and raised a cow herd in a family partnership for 34 years in Ford County. She also worked at the Catholic Diocese and Santa Fe Trail Community Corrections in Dodge City.

A gathering for graveside inurnment was held at Greencrest Memorial Gardens, Dodge City. A celebration of life will be held at a date yet to be determined. We are thankful for the time Linda devoted to KFU and to Kansas agriculture. Her presence is deeply missed, but her memory lives on in those who knew and loved her. Memorials are suggested to the family in care of the Ziegler Funeral Chapel, 1901 N. 14th Ave., Dodge City, Kansas 67801.

2023 KANSAS LEGISLATURE RECAP

By Sean Gatewood, KFU Contract Lobbyist

This time around I wanted to include a little extra that you would not know unless you are under the dome all day for a long time. We have seen a progression in the last few years in the rules that govern the Legislature itself. Those shifts in rules have been happening for a dozen years or so and are subtle but are becoming increasingly apparent. The clear examples are “pay go” and germaneness. As a person that absolutely loves the institution that the Legislature is I cannot imagine anything more troubling than this, because it is fundamentally undemocratic.

“Pay-go” is a rule adopted in the rules by both chambers, requiring any member bringing an amendment on an appropriations bill to pay for that bill within the same amendment by equal or greater reductions in spending in other parts of the budget. It sounds simple enough, but what happens is you have people that are for or against your spending priority, but then you have other baggage in reductions in spending elsewhere. Now you are very unlikely to find enough votes for a spending priority. Before this rule, the legislature still could not spend more money than it has. The legislature adopted priorities and then the whole thing went back to committee for trims here and there, then brought them back to the legislature in full for an up or down vote, but everyone had an opportunity to influence the state budget. Now, you only have that opportunity if you are one of the members of the budget committee.

Germaneness is the test an amendment must pass to be attached to a bill. When a member brings an amendment on the floor, another member can challenge the germaneness of the amendment in relationship to the bill. When this occurs, the rules committee assembles, and they make a ruling. If the amendment is not germane, the body moves back to the underlying bill and the amendment is discarded. The rules committee has adopted a series of tests in which to judge the amendment. Those tests have grown ever more difficult to overcome over the years. Amendments used to simply have to do with the same subject matter or touch the same statute. Now they need to have multiple “points of contact,” not “substantially expand the scope of the bill” and on and on. This has all been driven by the push for Medicaid expansion and it has once again greatly concentrated power with the Speaker of the House. This was on full display in late March when a member brought an amendment related to Medicaid expansion. The amendment simply struck a couple lines in the bill’s existing language that would allow the Governor to expand Medicaid without the Legislature’s approval, which is



Photo Credit: Rep. Tobias J. H. Schlingensiepen

how it has been done in the bulk of the other states. It was ruled not germane.

It is difficult to imagine how this reverses course at this point and it certainly makes it difficult to have real democratic debate. When you speak to your legislators, you should insist that they adhere to basic democratic principles. Stifling debate because you disagree with the subject matter and designing rules to ensure that minority voices are never heard are unhealthy for the state.

TAXES

The financial situation in Kansas is unprecedented. The state has an ending balance of around \$1.5B, so that bank account is burning a hole in the pockets of the legislators. There have been a variety of tax measures brought to the legislature this year and you can bet we will be back in a fiscal crisis in no time. We know that a recession is coming at some point and we also know that we have almost no unemployment and businesses and the government are starving for employees. To put it bluntly, we cannot handle the growth we already have. So why does the Kansas Chamber and other right leaning lobbying interests advance the argument that we need more economic growth? Why does the legislature buy that argument? The bill that the House passed has a 28% reduction in the base rates for banks, and income taxes will be at a flat 5.25%. There are some progressive tax policies in the bill like an increase in exempted home taxes and an increase in the standard deduction. All told it is about \$500 million reduction per year to the state, and that is before they compromise with the Senate, which is sure to drive those reductions up. We are very likely to see a fiscal crisis in Kansas within a few years.

MEDICAID

Expanding the state’s Medicaid program, commonly referred to as KanCare, has been a priority of mine since I left the legislature in 2012. It was passed back in 2017 and vetoed by then Governor

2023 KANSAS LEGISLATURE RECAP CONTINUED...

Brownback. In 2019, the Senate Majority Leader and Governor Kelly came to a deal on the issue only for it to get tangled up in abortion politics and then the pandemic killed off the grassroots momentum the issue had built up. This year the Alliance for a Healthy Kansas has focused on rebuilding that grassroots activism on the topic. Every poll conducted on the issue has shown that 72%-78% of Kansans support expanding the program. We just need to activate those people to put pressure on their legislators to have a hearing and a real vote. I simply cannot think of another issue that has that level of support that the legislature will not talk about at all, and the reason is simple, if it gets talked about it passes. If they allowed a real vote it would pass, and if they left it up to the people it would pass. Legislators need to be asked to go to their leadership and ask for that hearing and a vote. I would encourage our membership to sign up for the Alliance emails and action alerts. KFU is a member of the Alliance and participates whenever they can. www.expandkancare.com

WATER

The state has been making efforts in water conservation, but those efforts seem to be outpaced by reservoirs quickly filling with sediment and the draining aquifer. For the first time in my memory the state fully funded the water program last year and they will do it again this year. The legislature is also moving HB 2279 which requires the Groundwater Management Districts (GMDs) to identify problem areas in the aquifer and make a corrective action plan to conserve the aquifer. The idea is that local people can make the best decisions and handle problems best. This bill is progress, and it will force people that have not previously been forced to face the problem to do something to address it. HB2302 takes funding from the state general fund for water projects. It creates two separate funds: the Water Technical Assistance Fund, which would be used to grant-writing and engineering water projects and the Water Project Grant Fund, which would be used to fund various projects around the state. The bill would also pay down the debt for Perry and Milford Reservoir. The primary purpose of the bill is to secure a dedicated funding stream for water projects.

EDUCATION

SB83 passed both chambers and is going to be in conference shortly. This bill provides for credits that can be used toward "qualified educational expenses" and is left to a very loose definition that could include premium TV or whatever else the person says they need to provide an education to their children. It only allows 2,000 children in the first year to receive these vouchers and then it ramps up after that. Opponents say that it drains money out of public schools and has no real oversight, while proponents say it gives parents real choice as to their child's educational opportunities. Governor Kelly is not interested in this bill and will veto it when that opportunity presents itself. It only

passed with a very narrow majority in either chamber so it is very unlikely that it will become law.

MARIJUANA

Medical marijuana is an issue where once again Kansas finds itself an island. 37 states have legalized medicinal marijuana, 21 states have legalized recreational marijuana, and even more have decriminalized possession. Kansas is very much on its own island on this issue. The House passed medical marijuana, but the Senate failed to act last year. Then Representative John Barker of Abilene, who led the charge lost his primary this last election cycle. There has been some talk and a few bills, but nothing serious. Governor Kelly has expressed support, but without legislative action in both chambers, the issue will never be realized.

ENERGY

There are a variety of bills that provide incentives for green generation of electricity. Unfortunately, I do not think they are going anywhere this year. I do believe, though, that these may have some momentum being built up for next year. There were bills that had some promise: the first being a tax credit for building home generation capacity like a wind turbine or solar panels modeled after the federal program. The other is net metering, which would require the power company to pay more than the wholesale price for electricity generated. These bills are dead for the year, but they may have legs for next year.

The Kansas Legislature takes a three-week long break starting in early April and returns to the Capitol for veto session later in the month. Planned adjournment for the 2023 session is in early May.



KFU staff and members participated in the inaugural BIPOC Farmer's Summit at the Kansas Capitol on March 20. Attendees heard from representatives of the Kansas Department of Agriculture, USDA Farm Service Agency & Rural Development, state legislators, and farm and livestock organizations, and were recognized on the floor of the Kansas Senate.

MAKING BETTER NEIGHBORS BY GETTING TOGETHER

By Tom Giessel, NFU Honorary Historian

In early March, the 121st anniversary convention of the National Farmers Union was held in San Francisco, California. Members from across the country gathered, making their annual pilgrimage to share their concerns and ideas in the quest of the eternal goal of both economic and social parity for our farms, ranches, and rural communities.

The Farmers Educational and Cooperative Union of America [Farmers Union] was founded in 1902 when a small group of ten men gathered to form the organization. Their initial purpose was taking action to receive a fair price for cotton. Their actions were successful, and the organization started to grow and expand to a wider geographical area. In early 1904, they could no longer ignore the call for a convention. The meeting was held in Mineola, Texas - strictly a Texas affair. Farmers Union exploded in growth almost overnight. Between, February 1904 and September 1906, seven conventions met. The September 1906 gathering was the first "national" convention, and was held in Texarkana, Texas, in which multiple state Unions were seated.

Early conventions were closed door affairs and a password was required to gain admittance. There was a very strong ritual overtone to the meetings. This was not uncommon for many organizations in that era. Between the years of 1914-1917, Farmers Union eliminated the ritual. There is record of several women delegates as early as the 1908 convention in Fort Worth, Texas. The venues for early day conventions followed membership growth and the railways, as this was the primary mode of transportation. Within ten years, meetings generally shifted to the Midwest and away from the Southeast.

Over the course of these many decades, both internal and external forces have made for interesting history. Farmers Union had at least three annual conventions postponed. The first postponement was in 1905, waiting for the first frost to kill mosquitoes and the threat of the insect infecting attendees with Yellow Fever. The second postponement was in 1918 due to the Spanish Flu pandemic, and finally, in 1943, the meeting was postponed due to travel restrictions during WWII. In 2021, our convention was conducted virtually, due to the COVID-19 pandemic. In the odd numbered years from 1945 through 1957, national Leader-



ship Training Sessions took the place of national conventions. Denver, Colorado has hosted the most conventions over the years. This is due to the fact that our National office was located there for over six decades. Kansas hosted the national meeting in Salina [1913], Topeka [1921, 1941, 1946] and Wichita [2015].

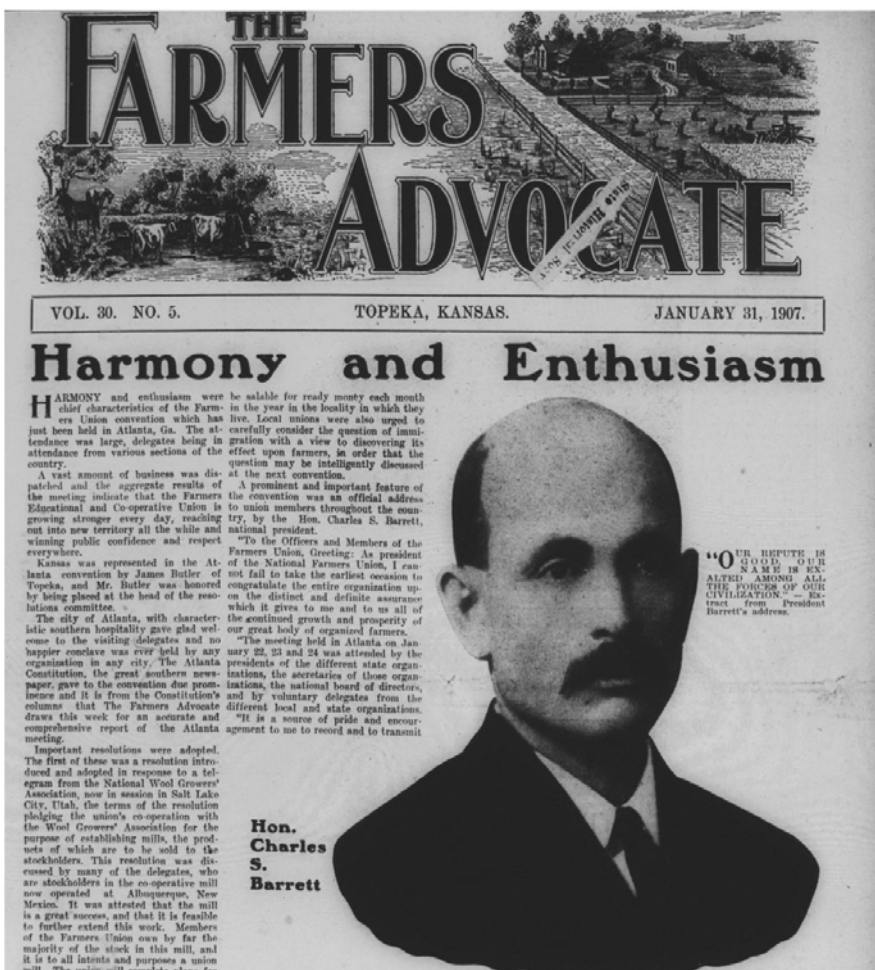
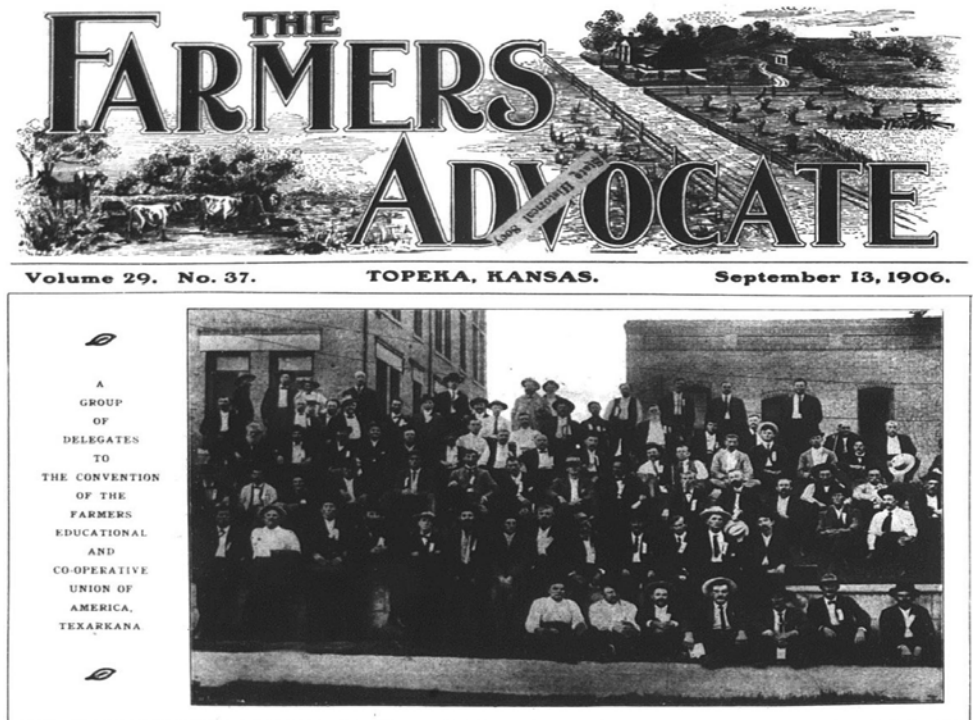
We all are aware of the broad and diverse nature of not only our farms and ranches, but ideas and solutions. This is especially true of general farm organizations. Over the decades, newspaper headlines from conventions range from, "Harmony and Enthusiasm" to "Assault, Battery and Mayhem." It is this diversity that makes our dialogue healthy and our organization so impactful. Farmers Union members can take pride in our legacy of advocating for Agriculture and promoting the dignity of all mankind. Charles Barrett, Farmers Union president from 1906 - 1928 once said,

“First we connect our heads,
then we connect our hearts.”

The legacy of perennial Farmers Union conventions reflects our heritage. Our story is deeply rooted, and has, indeed, connected not only our heads and hearts, but the soul of rural America.

MAKING BETTER NEIGHBORS BY GETTING TOGETHER CONTINUED...

The clipping on the right is from the first official Farmers Educational & Cooperative Union of America (Farmers Union) convention, held in Texarkana, TX in 1906. Source: Tom Giessel Farmers Union Historical Archives



Less than a year later, Farmers Union members gathered in Atlanta, GA for convention where they were addressed by then national President Charles Barrett who shared, "Our repute is good, our name is exalted among all the forces of our civilization." Source: Tom Giessel Farmers Union Archives

KFU Congratulates Geiger on Appointment to Cattlemen's Beef Board

By Nick Levendofsky, Executive Director

On January 27, the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) announced the appointment of 40 members to serve on the Cattlemen's Beef Promotion and Research Board.

Kansas Farmers Union board member Jack Geiger, Robinson, was appointed to one of two seats on the board for the state of Kansas. The other Kansas board position went to Amy Lyons Langvardt, Alta Vista. The term of board members appointed to three-year terms starts February 2023 and ends February 2026.

"I am honored by the appointment and the trust placed in me," Geiger said. "I will work to see that small and alternative producers and production methods are represented on the CBB."

Geiger is a sixth generation Kansan and cattleman from Northeast Kansas. With his family, he operates a direct marketing beef operation and certified organic farm. The Geigers produce beef using exclusively on-farm produced organic grains, improved pasture management including rotational grazing and an extended seasonal finishing period which includes continuous access to green forages. Learn more at www.geigerfarm.com

The Cattlemen's Beef Board is authorized by the Beef Promotion and Research Act of 1985 and is composed of 101 members representing 34 States and 5 units. Members must be beef producers or importers of beef and beef products nominated by certified producer organizations.



Jack Geiger (second from left) and his family.

After many years as a member, Geiger was recently appointed state treasurer on Kansas Farmers Union's (KFU) board of directors in early December. "Jack is a sharp cattleman and farmer. He will represent cattle producers on the CBB well," said KFU President Donn Teske. "It's so good to watch the next generation taking leadership roles in agriculture."

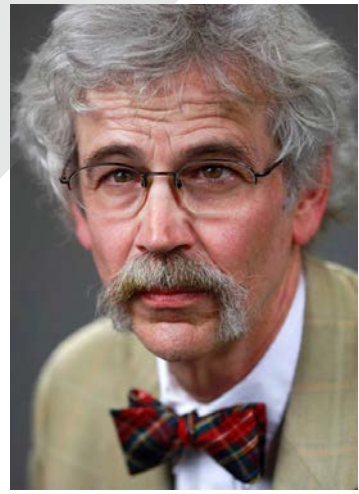
More information about the Cattlemen's Beef Board is available on the Agricultural Marketing Service (AMS) Cattlemen's Beef Board webpage.



KFU MEMBERS SIT DOWN WITH REP. SHARICE DAVIDS

Rep. Sharice Davids (KS-3) visited KFU board member Rosanna Bauman's Cedar Valley Farm near Garnett, KS to tour the farm and hold a Farm Bill discussion with farmers and farm organization leaders on February 14. Davids is one of the newest members appointed to the House Agriculture Committee. We look forward to working with Rep. Davids and her staff to elevate Farmers Union's numerous priorities for the 2023 Farm Bill.

Farm bill will be a rare accomplishment for a divided Congress



By Art Cullen, Storm Lake Times Pilot

A new five-year farm bill could be one of the rare accomplishments this year from an otherwise deadlocked Congress. Talks are just beginning as the House Republicans and Senate Democrats organize their respective agriculture committees. They are starting amicably enough.

It was not so last time around, when the farm bill was delayed a couple years mainly by House radicals trying to burn down the food stamp program. House Ag Committee Chair Glenn GT Thompson, R-Pa., and Ranking Member David Scott, D-Ga., both come from purple districts. Thompson is defending nutrition programs against Republican assaults, and last week brushed off suggestions of new restrictions on SNAP benefits. He did criticize a Biden Administration expansion of benefits.

Thompson said his priority is to strengthen crop insurance, as half the corn growers in his state don't buy in. He's looking to sweeten that pot.

Senate Ag Committee Chair Debbie Stabenow, D-Mich., puts conservation at the center of the discussion and, of course, defending nutrition program from cuts.

Their common interests may result in one of the best farm bills in history for conservation and food security.

The main rap on Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack is that he is too cozy with agribusiness. But he managed to assemble a "climate-smart ag" coalition that includes titans like Cargill, ADM and Tyson alongside the Farmers Union and Practical Farmers of Iowa. Vilsack doled out several billion last year in pilot projects designed to promote sustainable production and resiliency with many of those corporate players leading projects.

Critics call it greenwashing. Call it what you will. You could call it smart politics. The ag supply chain understands that change is underfoot. Farmers get that the climate is changing — if you're growing corn in Western Kansas, you should be highly interested in how you can convert to grassland grazing.

Vilsack bringing in the corporate players helps remind the House GOP that conservation programs might play a role in sweetening crop insurance — for example, a generous spiff for planting cover crops that actually could get something seeded.

There will be money for carbon pipelines to protect the ethanol industry, for manure digesters that interest the livestock industry, and "smart fertilizer" programs to keep Koch Industries at bay.

In return, Thompson makes kind remarks about nutrition programs. Of course, there will be a lot of rhetoric about welfare queens feeding at the USDA trough. There also will be whispers to keep a rein on it if you want to keep the climate spigot open to the big boys.

This will be Stabenow's legacy bill, as she intends to retire. She also wields tremendous influence in energy legislation that draws the interest of these same corporate players. Michigan's interests are in many ways Pennsylvania's.

Vilsack has claimed that the next farm bill could be "transformative" for rural America through conservation and renewable energy.

Armed with \$20 billion for climate and agriculture in the Inflation Reduction Act, Vilsack has been deferential to Congress in marching forward. So far, the administration has taken baby steps in addressing food security and sustainable agriculture in a rapidly changing environment. You would have to squint hard to see transformation.

There is unquestionably an openness to conservation agriculture that there was not before.

Thompson and his colleagues insist on voluntary programs. Regulation is their red line, as it is with the corporate lobby. Vilsack has enough sugar cubs in his pocket to keep the horses from nipping. Senators will cluck about antitrust, Rep. Randy Feenstra will make several angry statements, and that will be about it. The farm bill is supposed to be finished by September. It may get held up a couple months but not a couple years. It should be good for crop insurance and conservation, and food stamps will get protected.

The coalition has been assembled. It's hard to fight the most powerful players in world food markets. It is better politics at the moment to dance with them. As Thompson said, "The farm bill is always bipartisan, always bipartisan. At the end of the day, final votes are fairly bipartisan, and my goal is to keep it that way from the very beginning." Go along to get along.

Art Cullen is editor of the Storm Lake Times Pilot in Northwest Iowa.



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FUMA EXPANDS MEMBER BENEFITS

After years of negotiations with insurance carriers, we can finally announce that NFU Member Benefits are ready for all National Farmers Union Members and their families. **Farmers Union Midwest Agency** (FUMA) will be rolling out these amazing Life, Dental, Disability and other Great Benefits to the Kansas and Nebraska Members starting on May 1, 2023.

The insurance benefit products that are being introduced are for **Farmers Union Members ONLY**. As fully proprietary products, they are only available through our FUMA agents or the FUMA Regional Office in Lincoln, NE. We hope to bolster our membership numbers through this offering, while greatly enhancing the health and wellbeing of our wonderful members.

We will be sending information to each member family during the month of April. If we don't have your email address, please let us know which address is best to reach you. FUMA will be sending information through the US Postal Service as well, but as you all know, we can save tons in postage if we can contact you via email or even text messages.

To name a few of the Farmers Union Benefit Plans: Dental, Vision, Life, Disability, Accident, Cancer, and Telemedicine among others, will be represented. In addition, FUMA will have a full-time agent on staff to assist with any claims. We will also be offering counselling for any questions about the available Affordable Care Act policies, and even how a couple of these new products can highly complement your ACA policy. Since we want to help with all your benefits, we also have agents to assist with Medicare supplements, and end of life financial planning.

For more information, please contact Jennifer Larabee 402-560-0047 Jennifer@Fumafinancial.com or Kevin Harrington 402-253-6926 Kevin@Fumafinancial.com

USDA Seeks Applications for Grants to Help Socially Disadvantaged Agricultural Producers and Business Owners in Rural Areas

U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) Rural Development Under Secretary Xochitl Torres Small today announced that the Department is accepting applications for grants to support technical assistance for socially disadvantaged agricultural producers and rural business owners.

USDA is making available up to \$3 million in Fiscal Year 2023 through the Socially Disadvantaged Groups Grant Program. The maximum amount an individual applicant may receive is \$175,000.

The Department is making the Socially Disadvantaged Groups Grants available to organizations that will provide any technical assistance for the development of cooperatives or the formation of new cooperatives. Technical assistance includes leadership training, and developing feasibility studies, business plans and/or strategic plans. The grants are not provided directly to businesses or individuals.

USDA defines a socially disadvantaged group as one whose members have been subjected to racial, ethnic or gender prejudice because of their identity as a member of that group without regard to their individual qualities. Applicants may be based in any area, but the groups they serve must be located in an eligible rural area.

The Department is offering priority points to projects that advance key priorities under the Biden-Harris Administration to create more and better market opportunities and improved infrastructure, advance equity and combat climate change. These extra points will increase the likelihood of funding for projects seeking to address these critical challenges in rural America.

USDA encourages applicants to contact the USDA RD State Office well in advance of the application deadline to discuss the project and ask any questions about the application process.

For additional information, see page 16404 of the March 17, 2023, Federal Register.



Jason Schmidt stands by the sign that represents he and his family's fifth-generation dairy farm near Newton, KS.

If I've learned anything in life, it's that there is never a truly perfect time to visit a dairy farm, but the day I chose to visit and interview Jason Schmidt at Grazing Plains Farm might have been the most imperfect. That was the day he was trying to do his farm taxes and ran into issues with the tax software and ended up on-hold most of the morning.

Luckily, Jason had an intern who was handling milking that day, so he had time to get things resolved, which gave me plenty of time to walk around the farm and take in the beautiful, springlike weather. The Schmidts have a flock of sheep penned up near the house, so I went over and made a friend in a chubby, little lamb, who then found a gap in the fence and decided to join me on my walk. After getting the lamb back in, I made my way up to the dairy barn where chickens were pecking and strutting, the farm dog was looking for belly scratches, and barn cats kept multiplying before my eyes. The cows were out in the pasture just north-east of the barn, awaiting the next milking later that afternoon.

Jason was able to resolve his tax software issue and he and Miriam Goertzen-Regier joined me in the granary that now doubles as a picnic spot, complete with tables, a propane heater, and a mini fridge stocked with beverages. The walls of the granary are adorned with old metal signs, tools, and car tags from long gone farm vehicles. The constant clicking of an electric fencer ticked in the background. It's the perfect place to relax after a hard day's work, or in this case, talk about the farm, cheesemaking, and dairy policy.

Jason Schmidt's Ukrainian Mennonite ancestors settled this land in the 1870s. His great-grandparents purchased the family farm he resides on from an aunt and uncle back in the 1890s. His grandparents started their Grade B dairy here in 1937 and farmed until the 1970s when his parents established their Grade A dairy in 1976. Since 2011, Jason and his family have been the fifth generation to farm this land.

MILKING PROFIT

By Nick Levendofsky, Executive Director

After high school, Jason didn't think he would come back to the farm. "I had itchy feet and liked to travel overseas, so I got a degree in international development and did apprenticeships and internships through various volunteer programs after college," he said. "That's when I realized how much I loved farming." Slowly, through graduate school while studying grazing management, he learned a way of farming that was different from his parents' through apprenticing with grassfed ranchers in Colorado, along with alternative sustainable agriculture ideas he gathered during that time. He came back to the farm in 2009 with those ideas while his wife Carol was in law school at Washburn University. Jason started working for the Kansas Rural Center and got more connected to the sustainable agriculture and grazing world in Kansas.

During those years in Topeka, Jason traveled to the farm weekly, helping his parents, renting ground, and slowly getting his foot in the door. His parents worked out a transition plan where he would buy out the dairy over five years. In 2011, Jason and Carol rented a house, and after the buyout, his parents moved across the road. Jason's father took over the crop farming in "retirement" and Jason took over the dairying and grazing. "I came back, always with the dream of transitioning the dairy to more managed grazing," he said. "I always managed a good portion of the farm semi-organically, but still use some herbicides on the crop and antibiotics on the cows. My goal has always been to move toward 100% grazing, organic, and renewable energy on the farm," he said. To that note, the Schmidts installed solar panels in 2016 that power both the house and the farm, which covers about 50% of their electric usage.

Schmidt is currently milking 70-75 head of crossbred Jerseys. He crossbred his parents' Holsteins with Jersey over the last 10 years, mainly because he wanted to do something different. "Holsteins require lots of inputs to pump out all that milk. I wanted to go with a lower input system and more aggressive grazer that was more efficient and held up on pasture," he said. He adds that he's always known the commodity milk market is a dying marketplace for the small dairy, hence the dream for a direct marketing component. Twice a year, Schmidt reaches out to all the organic dairy cooperatives in the U.S., but no one seems interested in picking up his milk. He currently sells his to Dairy Farmers of America (DFA), the largest dairy cooperative in the U.S., and the only marketing option for most of the dairies in the state.

The direct marketing component of Grazing Plains Farm started as a conversation among friends Miriam and Ryan Goertzen-Regier in 2013 and the topic kept coming up over time. Miriam handles the cheesemaking at Grazing Plains Farm and says the food science side of cheesemaking was always interesting to her. She had been helping a local grocery store develop recipes

MILKING PROFIT CONTINUED...

for pepper nuts and was ready to move on to something else. In the summer of 2018, Ryan and Jason were at a Farm and Food Council meeting where the idea of cheesemaking came up again. Miriam was looking for a transition point to an opportunity to be involved in something that would provide food within her community. “I was making cookies, but you can only feel good about making cookies for so long,” she said. “Then people start telling you, ‘Your cookies are addictive!’ which I think is a compliment, but what am I doing for the health of my community?” That fall, she started coming to the farm to pick up a few gallons of milk at a time, sterilizing the kitchen, and working on recipes.

“It was like pulling teeth getting everything lined up,” Miriam noted. “We weren’t quite ready to build on-farm yet, so we rented a space in town.” Jason added, “We had a couple ‘false starts’ at first but overcame the challenges.” Now, everything is done on-farm. “I was amazed we were able to pull it off on a shoestring budget and get licensed,” Schmidt said.

“There were logistical challenges. The first six months were difficult. There were things we’d never done before and never will do again – starting from scratch and jumping through hoops”

Schmidt adds that there are raw milk dairies that never do get licensed, and he sometimes thinks that would be a nice alternative, but wholesale markets are about 70% of total sales, and they just couldn’t do that as a raw milk dairy.

Those wholesale accounts are delivered on a regular basis and marketing is constant. The holidays (November–December) are the higher retail months and January–February are slow for most retailers. At the time I was visiting the farm (early February) Jason noted that it was time to make a push for new retailers and markets. “We had two restaurants in Wichita buying 50% of everything we produced, then they hit a financial and managerial bump, so we had to reconfigure.”

Schmidt and Goertzen-Regier use about 10% of the milk for cheese, and they know they need to expand, but they also want to know it will work. There is a strong desire to get out of the commodity milk market, and it’s their hope that cheese will provide an off-ramp to commodity sales. “The problem is, we’re just doing good to break even with cheese as well,” Schmidt said. “Especially once inflation hit, we’re probably losing less money on the commodity side versus the cheese side, but the cheese side gives me more satisfaction than sending milk down the road,” he adds.



Cheesemaker Miriam Goertzen-Regier stirs cheese curds in the Grazing Plains Farm creamery.

One way Schmidt markets his farm and cheese is through social media – Instagram, to be exact. “Like everything, I could do such a better job of utilizing it (social media),” Schmidt notes. “I’ve seen others do really well with social media building their business. I know there are strategies like ‘post this on this day, post that on that day,’ have a strategic plan, etc. I’ve always just used it as my personal, fun place.” He notes that during the holidays, Facebook and Instagram posts helped drive sales. He estimates 2/3 of the followers are people he doesn’t even know. “It is and has been a very helpful tool for retail sales and for people finding the farm as well,” he adds. “People want to hear and buy into the story of the farm and the cheese.”

Jason and Miriam have looked at other dairies doing similar things, but those farms are struggling, too, and only make money from agritourism. “The cheese creamery size I dream of growing to and the cheese creamery that’s producing cheese that’s three times more in value than mine is barely breaking even,” Schmidt said. “Am I chasing the economic model that’s just as bad or worse than commodity milk? That really knocked the wind out of my sails.”

Schmidt has reason to be concerned about the future of small dairies in the U.S. According to a January 31 article from The Guardian, two decades of misguided U.S. dairy policies centered around boosting milk production and export markets have hurt family-scale farms and the environment while enriching agribusinesses and corporate lobbyists. The average American dairy turned a profit only twice in the past two decades despite milk production rising by almost 40%, according to analysis by Food and Water Watch (FWW). Nationally, the total number of US dairy farms fell by more than half between 1997 and 2017, while the average number of cows per farm increased by 139%, according to analysis of USDA data. More than 70% of US milk is produced on farms with at least 500 cows, with the largest dairies boasting herds of more than 25,000.

MILKING PROFIT CONTINUED...



Cheese ages in Grazing Plains Farm's cooler, which is housed in the on-farm creamery.

The late celebrity chef and author Anthony Bourdain once said, "You have to be a romantic to invest yourself, your money, and your time in cheese." "Romantic" is likely not the word that comes to mind when one sets foot in Grazing Plains Farms' farm store and creamery and looks over the equipment and available cheeses, but it works for their operation and clientele. Current available cheeses include cheddar in various forms, Havarti with dill and with caraway at Christmas, Elbing, cow's milk feta cheese, and fromage blanc - a soft, tangy, spreadable cheese - either at the farm store, numerous shops, or online at their website. Tilsit was an early cheese that was popular with locals but production had to stop because of aging challenges. It came from an encounter Goertzen-Regier had with a professor at Bethel College who recommended its production. According to the professor, Tilsit was developed by Mennonites in Prussia in the 1700s, and Goertzen-Regier was able to find a recipe online from a YouTuber in Australia. Most recipes come from a book, and she adapts them for the region and equipment. She notes, "I look for something that works well with our equipment and fits the tastebuds of south-central Kansas. I think about what people want like mozzarella and cheeses that are harder or aged a little longer, like for the winery down the road."

"A goal of ours would be to have a complement of cheeses that we can sell for a lot and some that are more economical, cheeses that yield a lot and some that don't, cheeses that take more labor to offset those that are easier to make," said Schmidt. "We had initially hoped to steer away from cheeses you can go to the store and buy, but there is a market for it. I didn't want to just be another 'cheddar creamery,' but that's what people like, and that's what my kids eat," he adds. "Our very limited infrastructure doesn't allow us to do really fancy cheeses. It would be fun to do a Swiss cheese or brie, but we don't have the aging environment for that."

As far as solutions to the challenges facing family dairy farmers, Schmidt notes, "It's way too easy to simplify it down to one or two things. Global forces, economic realities, lobbying efforts from agribusiness, monopolies, and price fixing. It's a real mess," he notes. "In a dream world, there would be production quotes, floor prices, and a meaningful safety net for small farmers. Dairy Margin Coverage (DMC) vastly improved in 2021, but in 2022, there was very little money made and inflation caused many problems. The U.S. dairy industry hates Canada's system, but Canada is protecting their small dairy farmers. We are not. It's overproduction and they call it market capitalism, and to me, that's B.S."

Two years ago, Schmidt pushed DFA to do a special order that would look into ways to support small dairy farms by helping support specialty niche markets. DFA pushed back and said, "We have to treat everyone the same." The problem is, they aren't. "They are building massive dairy plants in western Kansas on top of finite resources like the Ogallala Aquifer, supporting that infrastructure while doing nothing for the little guy," Schmidt said. Climate change is also top of mind for Schmidt. He is constantly dreaming and experimenting with practices like continuous cover, no-tillage, etc. "There are lots of failures," he notes, "but the cows graze the failures." Schmidt didn't use any nitrogen fertilizer last year and did lots of interplanting crops into thinning alfalfa stands for nitrogen. "I'm always experimenting," Schmidt says,

“I just wish I was rewarded for experimenting and rewarded for attempting to store more carbon and create more resilience. There are plenty of people who talk the talk, but it's hard to walk the walk.”

To learn more about Grazing Plains Farm and to purchase cheese, go to www.grazingplains.com or stop by the farm outside of Newton. All sales at the on-farm store are on the honor system, just keep in mind that they're open dawn to dusk Monday-Saturday and by appointment only on Sundays.



WASHINGTON

from National Farmers Union

Corner

Throughout February and early March, NFU was busy preparing for our annual convention. The convention was a success, with nearly 500 family farmers and ranchers and guests in attendance. Farmers Union delegates and members from across the country gathered to set NFU's policy priorities for the year and heard from agricultural experts and political leaders on various issues facing American family farm agriculture.

Just before Convention, NFU enjoyed some time in the spotlight on Capitol Hill, with NFU President Larew testifying before the House Agriculture Committee.

CONVENTION RECAP

From March 5-7, Farmers Union members, delegates, and friends from across the country met in San Francisco, CA for NFU's 121st Anniversary Convention.



Sec. Vilsack addresses convention body.

Convention programming highlighted the ability of Farmers Union members to create change at local, state, and federal levels. Featured speakers included U.S. Secretary of Agriculture Tom Vilsack, U.S. House Speaker Emerita Nancy Pelosi, and California Secretary of Agriculture Karen Ross, all of whom emphasized the importance of preserving American family farms, ensuring equitable and fair distribution of farm income, and empowering the next generation of agricultural leaders. President Joe Biden provided pre-recorded remarks on promoting competition in agriculture markets and the need for Fairness for Farmers.

Attendees heard from key players in NFU's efforts to boost competition in agriculture markets.

Tom Undlin, Partner at Robins Kaplan LLP, discussed how legal action can help spur greater competition and fairness in the food system. Kevin O'Reilly of the Public Interest Research Group



President Larew greets U.S. House Speaker Emerita Pelosi

(PIRG) provided updates on our Right to Repair efforts to ensure farmers and ranchers have access to the tools and resources to fix their own equipment. Michael Kades, Deputy Assistant Attorney General with the Department of Justice discussed the Administration's antitrust efforts. Dr. Glenda Humiston, Vice President of Agriculture and Natural Resources at the University of California, Davis, provided the keynote address, discussing how producers can collaborate with research institutions, state governments, and other partners to build a more competitive and resilient food system and rural economy.

Delegates debated and adopted the 2023 NFU policy book and approved three special orders of business. The special order on Fairness for Farmers focuses on advancing NFU's priorities to address corporate consolidation in agriculture. The special order on the 2023 Farm Bill calls on Congress to establish a dedicated competition title in the next farm bill, bolster the farm safety net, strengthen conservation programs, and maintain a strong nutrition title. Delegates also approved a special order on dairy policy reform, which calls on Congress to pass a farmer-led, incentive-based milk production growth plan to match milk supply with profitable market demand. The special orders and the full 2023 policy book will be published at www.nfu.org/policy.

NFU President Larew testified before the U.S. House Committee on Agriculture for its first hearing of the 118th Congress. The hearing, titled "Uncertainty, Inflation, Regulations: Challenges Facing American Agriculture," included a panel of agricultural leaders to provide insight into the biggest challenges facing farms across the country, as Congress gears up for the 2023 Farm Bill.



NFU President Larew testifies before House Agriculture Committee

In his testimony, Larew detailed how key issues facing farmers and ranchers stem from consolidation and concentration in the food system. Reduction in competition in grocery retail, input markets, and processing have created major bottlenecks in America's food supply chain. For example, just four companies control 85% of the market for beef, 67% for pork, and 53% for poultry. These large corporations have been raking in record profits while consumers are paying record prices at the grocery store and the farmer's share of the food dollar remains historically low.

Larew emphasized the need for strong enforcement of the Packers and Stockyards Act (P&S Act) and voiced support for recent USDA P&S Act rulemakings to increase transparency in poultry and livestock markets and protect producers from unfair, deceptive, and retaliatory practices. Larew voiced support for the establishment of an independent office within USDA to investigate and prosecute abuses by corporate monopolies. President Larew also stressed the need for regulations to be science-based, size- and risk-appropriate, and to provide for ample producer and community feedback. Recent regulations have created uncertainty for farmers and ranchers. Prominent examples include ongoing challenges concerning the definition of Waters of the United States (WOTUS) under the Clean Water Act and issues related to the regulation of crop protection products. Larew also advocated for a strong Renewable Fuel Standard (RFS) with future regulatory actions geared toward the growth and success of homegrown, clean fuels.

When it comes to uncertainty, one of the greatest challenges facing American agriculture is climate change. Shifting precipitation patterns, devastating droughts, and extreme weather events pose a serious threat to the operations and livelihoods of farmers. President Larew's testimony emphasized the need for the expansion of climate-smart agriculture projects and the importance of voluntary, incentive-based conservation programs, which are critical for farmers to be part of the solution in the fight against climate change.

Larew fielded many questions from members of the committee, several of which were focused on Right to Repair. Larew stressed the need for legislation that ensures farmers and ranchers have the right to repair their own equipment.



FACA RELEASES 2023 FARM BILL PRIORITIES

In late February, the Food and Agriculture Climate Alliance (FACA) released policy recommendations for the 2023 Farm Bill. FACA is a coalition representing food, agriculture, forestry, environmental, and other organizations with an interest in advancing bipartisan climate solutions.

What started as an informal dialogue between eight organizations, FACA has now grown to over 80 member organizations since it formally launched in 2020. NFU is a co-chair and founding member of FACA.

For the 2023 Farm Bill, FACA's priorities cover six major categories:

- Conservation, Risk Management, and Credit.
- Energy.
- Food Waste.
- Forestry.
- Livestock and Dairy.
- Research, Extension, and Innovation.

FACA's farm bill recommendations call for the development of a comprehensive strategy to reduce emissions throughout food, agricultural, and forestry supply chains. These recommendations are grounded in the shared support by all FACA members for federal climate policies that are voluntary, incentive- and science-based, promote resilience and help rural communities adapt to climate change, and ensure equitable opportunities for all farmers, ranchers, and forest owners.

HOLD FOR PHOTO

NFU LEGISLATIVE FLY-IN SET FOR MID-SEPTEMBER IN D.C.

Farmers Union members from across the country will gather in person in Washington, DC, for the 2023 Fall Legislative Fly-In on September 10-13.

Attendees will have the opportunity to hear from U.S. Department of Agriculture officials about current events, opportunities, and other initiatives the department is undertaking on behalf of farmers. We expect to meet with officials from the Biden Administration about their important work on competition and resiliency in the food system. Participants will also receive briefings from key Congressional leaders. The most important agenda items of the Fly-In are the meetings with legislators, which are a hallmark of our organization's grassroots structure. Farmers Union members will meet with their members of Congress to highlight their priorities, the challenges they are facing, and goals for future legislation.

For more information about how to participate in fly-in activities, please contact Nick Levendofsky, KFU Executive Director, at nick@kansasfarmersunion.org or call (785) 527-0941.



116TH ANNIVERSARY CONVENTION

WEDNESDAY, NOVEMBER 29-30, 2023

HILTON GARDEN INN

SALINA, KANSAS

To share your suggestions on speakers and breakout topics, email nick@kansasfarmersunion.org or kfu.mary@gmail.com.

As it becomes available, look for more information under the News and Events section of the new KFU website.



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NFU'S 121ST ANNIVERSARY CONVENTION WAS HELD MARCH 5-7, 2023 IN SAN FRANCISCO, CA. KANSAS FARMERS UNION DELEGATES AND ATTENDEES INCLUDED

(Back row left to right) Nick Levendofsky, Donn Teske, Tom Giessel, Jill Elmers, Scott Kohl, Pete Ferrell
(Front row left to right) Sheryl Giessel, Donna Pearson McClish, Kate Giessel
NFU Convention attendees not pictured: Keisha and Randy Coutts