



Kansas Kontakt

PHOTO FIELD SIGN AT MCGINN'S GRAPES AND GRAINS



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ON THE COVER KFU PRESIDENT DONN TESKE WITH FORMER U.S. SENATOR NANCY LANDON KASSEBAUM BAKER. KANSAS FARMERS UNION MOURNS THE PASSING OF SEN. BAKER. SHE SPOKE AT KFU'S 2017 CONVENTION IN EMPORIA AND WAS AWARDED THE RUTH HIRSH AWARD FOR, "A LIFETIME OF SERVICE DEVOTED TO ETHICS, DIGNITY, AND GRACE, AS WELL AS TO THE PEOPLE OF KANSAS." WE SEND OUR DEEPEST CONDOLENCES TO THE KASSEBAUM AND BAKER FAMILIES.

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Riding Off into the Sunset

By **DONN TESKE**, KFU PRESIDENT

Many, many moons ago, I was talked into running for Kansas Farmers Union's president. There were serious issues with my predecessor, who had been in the position for 20 years; it was feared we would have to be closing the doors sooner rather than later. When I finally agreed to run, I told them that I wouldn't do it for more than five years. Now, after 25 years, I'm finally stepping aside for the next generation. Bout danged time...

We are in really good shape right now with a great board of directors and staff, all of whom can step into the role of president and do a better job than I ever have. It's time for the kids to fly.

And, I find myself rambling on too much at board meetings with old stories of how we did this or that, and how who did what to who. Historical knowledge is good; it's good to know where the skeletons are buried, but haltering the vision with a rambling old coot at the helm isn't productive for future growth of where Kansas Farmers Union will go.

This isn't new news; last year at convention I announced that when my term was up for election the following year (this year), it was my hope not to file for re-election. And I think there are a lot of people out there who think I've already retired. I've even been introduced at speaking events as the "past president of KFU". It's been good to dump what I don't want to do off on Nick. So, there will be an election for a new KFU president at this upcoming convention in Wichita.

Now, on with my rambling...

Kathy and I were milking cows in the early nineties. The anti-corporate laws in Kansas were being railroaded out by the powers that be. I was sure that abolishing the laws was a threat to our dairying future, and I was down at the Statehouse watching and testifying in opposition to abolishing the laws. I watched domination, bullying, and outright lying in our legislative chambers. When the laws were abolished, I was so pissed-off at what I had witnessed that I went home and resigned from the Republican Party,

the Kansas Livestock Association, and Kansas Farm Bureau, all in one day. I have been an Independent since then.

I was milking cows one day when Don Honig, the Pottawatomie County Farmers Union President, and legendary KFU member, Vernon Deines, stopped in at the dairy on a membership drive. They signed me up.

Shortly after that, I saw that there was going to be a Nemaha County FU meeting in Seneca the next week, so I went to see what this org was about. A man whom I did not know greeted me at the door and shook my hand, welcoming me. It turned out it was the National Farmers Union President, Lee Swenson, who greeted me! I thought at the time that if the national president was this accessible, that this was a good organization. Then I went to our first county meeting and, against my wishes, I was elected county president. They couldn't get anyone to agree to go to the state convention as a voting delegate from Pott County, so I agreed to represent us there.

The state KFU convention was held at the convention center in McPherson. (In a little déjà vu-ish coincidence, that was the site where I was elected state Kansas Young Farmer President back in the mid-eighties, and where I was elected state Kansas Farmers Union President later on). I was a stranger there and didn't know anybody. At breakfast I sat next to a beautiful, elegant lady who I found out was on the board of directors of KFU. It was Linda Hessman! As we visited about what our lives were about, all at once she exclaimed, "You are the new number cruncher!" I had recently accepted an offer to be a Farm Analyst at K-State's Ag Econ. For the first time in my life, I was going to start working off of the farm. In that role, I would work with Kansas farmers on their finances. Linda was a professional mediator. We worked with clients through mediations together for five years, Linda as the mediator, myself as the "number cruncher". Linda became one of my dearest friends and

confidants for the rest of her life. And when I was elected state KFU president, she was one of the board members who always had my back. That kind of friend is special.

Then, I was elected at that convention to represent our district on the KFU Board of Directors. I did that for three years, then stepped aside from that role as my life got busier. Then, the state presidential election happened, and you all have been stuck with me ever since.

I have been blessed with making so many dear friends and confidants over the years at Kansas Farmers Union, and I grieve those who have passed on as our time together moved on; it seems too many. I really grieve those still-living dear friends and confidants whom I have lost serving as KFU President, whose lives have taken them down different paths. I miss them.

Serving as KFU President takes a massive amount of one's time. I reflect back on how much I missed as our children and grandchildren have grown and I have been gone on the road. I regret I wasn't there for them in their crises and their triumphs, but they have been blessed with a wonderful mother and grandmother who kept the ship headed straight through the turbulent waters.

There are lots of things I did wrong, lots of learning the role, lots of things that I could have done better. But I am so proud that we kept the doors open, that we grew the financial stability of KFU, that we stayed true to our mission, our charter, and our policy, and that a new generation of great leaders has deemed the Kansas Farmers Union worthy of their time and energy!

Cooperatively,



THE MORE THINGS *Change,* THE MORE THEY *Stay* THE SAME

By **NICK LEVENDOFSKY**, KFU EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

The Kansas Union Farmer
SALINA, KANSAS, THURSDAY, JUNE 19, 1924.



By the time you read this, Congress will be back in session following its month-long, “well-deserved” August recess. This is after a failed attempt at getting a new Farm Bill out of the Senate Agriculture Committee and no clear understanding as to what kind of relief farmers should expect from high input costs and the trade war.

If this sounds familiar, we’ve been down this road before. Three times in fact. The 2018 Farm Bill expired on September 30, 2023, and after two extensions, it is due to expire again this coming September 30th. There are many reasons as to why Congress can’t seem to get a Farm Bill passed, but at the end of the day, it’s all about politics.

Farm Bills are never easy to pass, but especially during an election year when every House seat is up for election, along with a good number of Senate seats. There are also a number of Members of Congress running for Governor of their respective states, and

the reality is, passage of a Farm Bill is not exactly top of mind for most, if not all of them.

While it’s easy to grumble and groan about “politics as usual,” this should be a rallying cry to all farmers, ranchers, and citizens to reach out to their federal legislators and share their thoughts on why we need a new Farm Bill and why it’s important for all of America – not just rural America.

From crop insurance for farmers to rural development programs for communities to nutrition programs for working families, the Farm Bill affects every American citizen in some form or fashion every single day. It takes lots of time and compromises to craft a bill of its size, and everyone seems to be competing for smaller pieces of the pie every time we debate a new bill. That’s no excuse for giving up, though.

Farmers Union has outlined its Farm Bill priorities and has linked arms with other influential agricultural groups to share a common goal of passing a Farm Bill that works for everyone. After eight long years, it’s time for Congress to get back to work and pass this important piece of legislation that can add certainty to the marketplace for both farmers and consumers.

At NFU’s annual convention in New Orleans last March, delegates passed a Special Order of Business titled “Family Farmers and the Roots of Our Democracy.” It reads: “We believe our grassroots are the anchor that holds us together, not only as an organization but as a society. For farmers to have a voice, we must be active and vocal in our local communities, at the national level, and everywhere in between. Farmers – all farmers – must come together to cooperate and be heard if we are to best set public policy. To sustain our democracy, we must engage in conversations and deliberations with one another, especially when we disagree. Those conversations help make informed decisions when making policy that is effective for farmers and ranchers.

“Much like we strive to be excellent stewards of land and water, plants and animals, and all other resources entrusted to our care, we must give equal care to the stewardship of our democracy.”

Much like we strive to be excellent stewards of land and water, plants and animals, and all other resources entrusted to our care, we must give equal care to the stewardship of our democracy.

We must encourage each other to engage locally in our democratic processes, whether it is participating in school board meetings, running for local elections, or exercising the right to vote. Cultivating community is as much a part of the democratic process as exercising our civic duty. Local chapters must lean into creating spaces for neighbors to connect and support one another now more than ever. Farmers Union members have the incredible power to build, unite, and engage communities across the United States.”

This is a time when we can’t let “politics as usual” get the best of us. The November election is just around the corner, and voter sentiment is low. We can’t let what is and is not happening in D.C. or Topeka get in the way of participating in the electoral process. I encourage all who read this article to educate themselves on the issues and the candidates, then plan to vote in the general election on Tuesday, Nov. 3.

There may not be a lot we can do to change things on other days of the year, but your vote has the power to make real change happen on Election Day.

Cooperatively,

THE NEXT *Generation*

KFU member selected as Next Generation rep to NFU board

Emporia area farmer Matthew Fowler has been selected as the Next Generation Advisory Representative on National Farmers Union’s Board of Directors.

Fowler is a sixth-generation resident of Lyon County, Kansas, where his family has farmed since 1855. A third-generation Farmers Union member, he is passionate about strengthening family agriculture, advocating for rural communities, and ensuring the next generation of producers has a voice in shaping the future of American agriculture.

He also operates Cottonwood Valley Farm near Emporia, Kansas, where he and his family grow vegetables for local markets and direct consumers. As a beginning farmer, he understands firsthand the opportunities and challenges facing young and beginning producers, including access to markets, profitability, and long-term farm sustainability.

“I am honored to be selected to serve as one of the National Farmers Union’s Next Generation Advisory Representatives for the next three years. I look forward

to learning from producers across the country, building lasting relationships, and helping ensure the voice of family agriculture continues to be represented as we prepare for the next generation,” Fowler said.

“Matt is a fine young man who will represent rural Kansas, and Kansas Farmers Union, well on the board of directors of National Farmers Union,” KFU President Donn Teske said. “The NextGen program offered by NFU, which chooses only one applicant nationally each year, is an excellent

**“I look forward to learning from
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program to help young leaders with natural leadership traits to help those traits refine and mature. And it is special that Matt comes from a three-generation Kansas Farmers Union family. Matt’s grandfather, Ray Fowler, served on the KFU board of directors for many, many years,” Teske said.

In addition to farming, Fowler serves as Director of Visit Emporia, leading efforts to strengthen the region’s economy through tourism, events, and community development. His background in communications, media production, and public engagement has allowed him to work with local, state, and national organizations to promote rural communities, build partnerships, and advocate for initiatives that support economic growth and quality of life in rural America.

Through Farmers Union, Fowler has participated

in leadership development programs, agricultural policy discussions, and advocacy efforts on behalf of family farmers and ranchers. He is particularly interested in issues affecting beginning farmers, rural economic vitality, market opportunities, and the long-term sustainability of family agriculture. He believes strongly in Farmers Union’s principles of Education, Cooperation, and Legislation and is committed to helping ensure family farmers remain at the center of agricultural policy and rural development.

Matthew lives in Emporia with his wife, Madeline, and their daughter, Kennedy, where they continue a family tradition of farming, service, and community leadership that spans more than 170 years.

IN THE PHOTO MATTHEW FOWLER WITH HIS WIFE, MADELINE, AND DAUGHTER, KENNEDY



Homegrown Prosperity

A RURAL COOPERATIVE DEVELOPMENT INITIATIVE

By **KARA WALKER**, Cooperative Engagement & Outreach Specialist

**"When communities work together,
we can compete in a challenging
economy."**

Our childcare providers need more support." "Residents need affordable housing." "We want to keep jobs in the community." "There aren't a lot of places to buy groceries." These are sentiments I have heard from people across Kansas and Missouri. I have also heard: "We have people who want to work together to solve the problem." Cooperative businesses are an exciting way for people to come together to solve these shared challenges.

I have been working on the Homegrown Prosperity project over the past few months to bring free education about cooperative business structures to rural Kansans and Missourians and to let people know about the resources available

to support new and existing co-ops.

Co-ops are defined by the International Cooperative Alliance as an "autonomous association of persons united voluntarily to meet their common economic, social and cultural needs and aspirations through a jointly owned and democratically-controlled enterprise." Co-ops are democratically operated, made up of members who each get one vote and elect a board to represent their interests and steer the business. Co-ops are organized on the values of self-help, self-responsibility, democracy, equality, equity, and solidarity, and these values are used to inform business decisions and engagement with membership and the

community. Thanks to these organizational foundations, co-ops can be a great way for folks in rural communities to work together and solve shared challenges.

WHY CO-OPS NOW?

As we watch the news unfold on our phones and TV screens, it's easy to be overwhelmed by the state of things. But when we step back and take a breath, we might recognize that we share challenges with our neighbors. Whatever problem you're trying to solve, it's likely that someone in your own community has the same issue. In the face of economic uncertainty, consolidation, and income inequality,

cooperation improves market access for small businesses.

NOT YOUR GRANDPARENTS' CO-OPS

Lots of us remember our parents or grandparents using co-ops, including agricultural co-ops started by farmers unions. Co-ops can be a great option for improving the viability of small farms. But did you know that co-ops can be used in industries besides agriculture? Here are some exciting examples.

Grocery Stores

During the natural foods boom of the 1970s,

HOMEGROWN PROSPERITY



people could pool their time and money to buy specialty foods and sell them as a co-op. This model still works for rural communities to bring grocery stores selling staples or specialty goods to their towns. It can also help improve access to local foods and provide an outlet for farmers and producers to sell their goods.

Electric Co-ops

Rural areas were slowly electrified, often years after nearby cities. Electric co-ops were formed when rural residents joined together to bring infrastructure to their homes, schools, farms, and businesses, and they still provide power to members today. Utility co-ops use democratic principles to ensure they are serving customers' needs.

Childcare and Homeschool

Instead of several small businesses trying to access the same thing, like food, health insurance, or accounting services, childcare providers or homeschool families can form a co-op to improve their purchasing power and decrease the amount of repeated labor. The co-op model can also be used to hire employees and solve other logistical problems, allowing businesses to expand their capacity and care for or educate more children.

Worker-Owned Business

When a business owner is ready to move on or retire, it can be hard to decide what to do. The business may have dedicated employees and be an important part of community life, and the owner certainly poured a lot of energy into building the business. One solution is transitioning the business

to a worker-owned business, which is a type of co-op. Employee-owned stores, restaurants, and farms can be a great way to keep jobs in the community, while still allowing the original owner to move into the next chapter of their lives.

Food Hubs

Smaller farms may not have enough produce to fulfill larger orders from schools, restaurants, or institutions. Food hubs allow producers to aggregate produce and sell in higher quantities. This model makes it easy for businesses looking to purchase local food without having to contact several local farms.

Co-ops can be a modern solution that brings people together to pool resources and share risk. These businesses can improve access to needed resources and provide good jobs. When communities work together, we can compete in a challenging economy.

WHAT CAN HOMEGROWN PROSPERITY OFFER?

The Homegrown Prosperity project can offer education for rural counties and provide technical assistance to groups considering the co-op model. Education can be an introduction to co-ops and how they work, or it can be tailored to the needs of your group. We also offer co-op readiness assessments, which is an in-depth conversation with me to see where you're at as you develop your business. After that, we can determine if you're ready for tailored technical support covered by the Homegrown Prosperity project and match you to a provider.

I would love to hear more about your community and your business idea! Please email me to chat more.



CHAT WITH KARA AT
kara@kansasfarmersunion.org

STATEMENT ON DATA CENTERS

KFU BOARD OF DIRECTORS STATEMENT

Since 1907, Kansas Farmers Union has worked to protect and enhance the economic interests and quality of life for family farmers, ranchers, and their communities.

The moral and ethical decisions made by individuals and governments have an impact on our daily lives, and on the lives of future generations.

Farmers Union's policy strives to ensure those decisions maintain a just and ethical basis. Our policy also addresses the use of our natural resources and environment with the same fervor.

With that in mind, Kansas Farmers Union's Board of Directors unequivocally supports National Farmers Union's (NFU's) 2026 Policy and Action Statement

on data centers, which calls for local oversight over data center development proposals requiring an affirmative vote from impacted voters prior to any approval or permitting.

The policy opposes:

- The development of data centers that increase local electricity rates, cause brownouts, contaminate or deplete water supplies, or exacerbate contamination of water supplies;
- The siting of data centers on productive soils;
- Subsidies or tax credits/breaks for construction and operation of data centers; and
- Nondisclosure agreements regarding data centers.



IN THE PHOTO CONSTRUCTION AT A GOOGLE DATA CENTER CAMPUS IN NORTHLAND KC, BRIAN LINTON/41 KSHB



20 YEARS TOO MANY *(For Donn)*

By **CLAIRE GEIGER**, Sweet Land Creative

When Donn Teske was convinced to run for the Kansas Farmers Union (KFU) presidency in 2001, his condition was that he would hold the office for only five years. What followed was a 25-year career that saw KFU stabilize financially, emerge on the national stage, and, to Donn's great surprise, be sued only once.

THE FOUNDATION

Early on, the fifth-generation farm boy from Pottawatomie County was active in FFA and the National Young Farmers Educational Association. His dedication to service has seen him hold leadership positions in the National Farmers Union, Kansas Farmers Union, Kansas Rural Center, North Central Region SARE, Farmer Veteran Coalition, and an Obama-era EPA advisory committee.

Off the farm, he worked with Kansas farm families for five years as a farm analyst for K-State and then another five years as a fieldman for the Kansas Rural Center's Clean Waters Farm Project.

Donn's impact reaches far beyond the United States. In 2010, Donn joined an NCBA CLUSA farmer exchange, where he helped the village of Keur Ali Gueye in Senegal develop a millet production program and form a cooperative to sell excess production. He and his wife Kathy have also hosted international farmer guests from Thailand, Germany, and Wales on their own farm.

Over the years, Donn has remained a staunch advocate for the family farmer. He's appeared in news articles, documentaries, books, and hearings across the country, giving a voice and face to the issues Kansas farmers struggle with every day.

PHOTO DONN RECEIVED THE "NCR-SARE HERO" AWARD FOR HIS LIFELONG WORK AS A SUSTAINABLE AGRICULTURE ADVOCATE, CREDIT: NCR-SARE

TAKING THE REINS

By the time Donn was taking over KFU as president, the organization was a long shot from the vitality of the 1920s, when it boasted a membership of 110,000.

"There were major problems at the time with stagnation and financial crises, and they were afraid we would be closing our doors sooner rather than later," Donn said.

"I'm proud of the friendships and

networking that have evolved as

we administered our duties, and of

keeping the organization honorable

and serving with integrity."

For years, Donn and the KFU board fought to climb back from that precipice. Through strategic investments in the Farmers Union Midwest Agency (FUMA) and sound financial practices, KFU kept its doors open, better served its membership, and fostered significant growth for FUMA.

During this time, KFU also emerged as a thought leader in Kansas agriculture, often exploring non-traditional farming practices not yet widely accepted.

"The opportunity we viewed in KFU was that there are niche opportunities for education in practices that at the time were not considered appropriate - rotational grazing, cover crops, stream stabilization, value-added agriculture, agritourism, etc.," Donn said. "We have had a blast trying to help rural Kansas explore those kinds of opportunities."

**“I often refer to KFU as the
'Conscience of Agriculture,'
and although it's lonely, I'm
very proud of that role. ”**

However, like his career, the focus of Donn's presidency has always been based on KFU's true legacy- its people. Showing up for KFU members and representing Kansas farmers on the national stage with integrity has defined Donn's term as president.

“[I'm proud of] the friendships and networking

that have evolved as we administered our duties, and of keeping the organization honorable and serving with integrity,” Donn said.

Along the way, Donn participated in the dedication of the National Farmers Union memorial in Point, TX; witnessed the dedication of the Washington, D.C. WWII Memorial; participated in Former President Barack Obama's first inauguration; and testified before Congress many times.

THE FUTURE OF KANSAS AG

Today, Donn sees many challenges facing Kansas agriculture.

Divisive politics and the disappearance of the mid-size full-time farmer continue to define the

industry.

“Politically, our values are too often considered to be the minority position. Too often, it's us against the establishment,” Donn said. “The other farm organization advertises itself as “The Voice Of Agriculture;” I often refer to KFU as the “Conscience of Agriculture,” and although it's lonely, I'm very proud of that role.”

Donn has continually invested in the next generation of KFU members to address these challenges. He considers the nurturing of younger, intelligent leaders who will carry KFU forward one of his greatest accomplishments as president.

COMING HOME

While Donn has graced airports, hotels, and offices across the country, home has always been near Wheaton, Kan., where his family has farmed since 1869.

At the same address he's lived his whole life, Donn and wife Kathy share their little slice of “Teskeville” with two of their four children and 9 of their 13 grandchildren.

“Most weekends we have a pretty full house,” Donn said. “We are blessed.”

**“Now it's up to the kids.
Don't screw it up... ”**

The Teske land has a long history of pork, dairy, beef, and grain production. Today, the Teskes run a cow-calf operation on the native Bluestem prairie of their Flint Hills land.



IN THE PHOTO DONN SPEAKS AT NATIONAL FARMERS UNION CONVENTION

THE SHORT AND THE SHORT OF IT

For Donn, summing up a successful 25-year presidency is quite simple.

“I'm proud that we have kept the doors open and grown a little more financially secure base through my time. Now, it's up to the kids. Don't screw it up...”



IN THE PHOTO DONN POSES WITH THE LATE FORMER SENATOR NANCY LANDON KASSEBAUM

KFU MEMBERS ATTEND NFU CONVENTION IN *New Orleans*

Fifteen Kansas Farmers Union (KFU) members were among the 500 farmers and ranchers from throughout the nation who gathered in New Orleans March 7-9 for the 124th anniversary convention of National Farmers Union (NFU) to set the organization's 2026 policy.

The finalized policy priorities approved by NFU's delegates include three special orders of business on timely topics: Family Farmers, the Farm Crisis and the Future of Food and Farm Policy; Family Farming and the Roots of Our Democracy, and Family Farming and Dairy Policy Reform.

"It was a very good convention," KFU President Donn Teske said. "New Orleans was a new experience for Kathy and me. There wasn't a lot of drama in the policy discussion, and we did what needed to be done to continue the proud heritage of Farmers Union."

Teske was reappointed Chair of the Farmers Union Midwest Agency (FUMA) and to the NFUSA, Foundation, Budget/Audit, Education & Cooperative Committees. Teske also serves as the NFU representative on the Farmer Veteran

Coalition's executive board.

Teske, his wife Kathy, and daughter Lisa Teske Spevacek (Pottawatomie County), Tom & Sheryl Giessel (Pawnee County), Kate Giessel & Brad Everett (Kansas City), Sheila Kjellberg (Saline County), Amanda Lindahl (Dickinson County), James Bowden (Saline County), Donna Pearson McClish (Sedgwick County), Jazelle Thomas (Sedgwick County), Scott Kohl (Pottawatomie County), incoming Farmers Union Midwest Agency General Manager Rob Fisher, and Nick Levendofsky (Republic County) were all participants representing KFU.

"Grassroots democracy starts in rooms full of people who put aside their differences to move toward the greater good," said Saline County member Sheila Kjellberg. "It was an honor to represent Kansas Farmers Union and be part of that process."

Republic County Farmers Union member and KFU Executive Director Nick Levendofsky served on the NFU Policy Committee along with members from several other states.



PHOTO HILTON NEW ORLEANS RIVERSIDE, NEW ORLEANS, LA

“The committee was made up of a group of passionate farmers, ranchers, and agriculture advocates from all over the country with diverse backgrounds, viewpoints, and operations,” Levendofsky said. “It truly was a subsection of the organization, and I feel we cooperatively addressed many of the major issues facing family farmers and ranchers now and into the future.”

Pawnee County Farmers Union member Tom Giessel received NFU’s Bruce Miller award, which recognizes individuals who display a passion for family farming and rural America while promoting the work of the Farmers Union. Giessel, who also serves as NFU’s honorary historian, gave a breakout presentation with his daughter, Kate, about Farmers Union in the South to a standing-room only audience.

“As a fifth-generation family farmer who recently

**“Grassroots democracy
starts in rooms full of
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their differences to move
toward the greater good.”**

returned to the farm, attending the 124th NFU convention was especially meaningful to me,” said KFU board member Amanda Lindahl. “I was happy not only to meet many other Next Generation producers, but also to hear their inspiring stories of hard work, dedication, and hope as they tend the land and work to produce food for consumers locally and globally.”

“Convention is an incredible time to learn from one another and work cooperatively to revise and advance our policy agenda on behalf of family farmers across the country,” she added.

“The challenges facing family farmers and ranchers continue to grow more complex,” said NFU President Rob Larew. “But through it all, Farmers Union continues to do something Washington too often struggles to achieve: bringing people with diverse viewpoints together, working through tough issues and emerging with solutions they built collectively. That unity is our greatest strength.”

NFU’s 125th Anniversary Convention will be held March 7-9, 2027, in San Antonio, TX.



PHOTO KFU DELEGATE JAZELLE THOMAS SPEAKS AT NATIONAL CONVENTION



UPPER PHOTO FRONT ROW (L TO R) JAZELLE THOMAS, DONNA PEARSON MCCLISH, NICK LEVENDOFSKY, SHERYL GIESSEL, TOM GIESSEL, AND SCOTT KOHL. BACK ROW (L TO R) DONN TESKE, KATHY TESKE, LISA TESKE SPEVACEK, KATE GIESSEL, SHEILA KJELLBERG, JAMES BOWDEN, AND AMANDA LINDAHL.



LOWER PHOTO (L TO R) AMANDA LINDAHL, DONN TESKE, JAMES BOWDEN, SHEILA KJELLBERG, JAZELLE THOMAS, AND DONNA PEARSON MCCLISH

The Youngest Farmhands

BUILDING A CULTURE OF SAFETY FOR RURAL FAMILIES

By **TAWNIE LARSON**, Kansas State University



As the school year ramps up and families settle into busier routines, life on the farm keeps moving. Chores still need to be done, equipment still needs tending, and fall's cooler weather often brings both renewed energy and increased activity. For many, growing up on a farm is a cherished American experience — wide open fields, crisp mornings, and the chance to learn responsibility early. But behind that idyllic image lies a reality that demands attention: farms can be dangerous places for children.

Every day in the United States, an estimated 33 youth suffer a serious injury on a farm or ranch, according to the National Children's Center for Rural and Agricultural Health and Safety. Many of these incidents involve large machinery, which remains the leading cause of injury and death for people of all ages in agricultural settings.

THE HIDDEN RISKS BEHIND FAMILIAR TASKS

Farm children often learn to drive tractors or operate equipment at a young age. To many families, it feels like a natural part of growing up. Yet the greatest risk isn't the basic operation of the machine — it's the unexpected moments. Children and teens may not yet have the cognitive maturity to respond quickly and safely when something goes wrong. A stalled engine, a sudden shift in terrain, or a distracted moment can escalate into a serious accident.

Because of this, safety experts emphasize that only youth with proper training and experience should operate large equipment. Early exposure to safe habits helps, but formal tractor-safety training becomes increasingly important as children take on more responsibility.

MENTAL MATURITY MATTERS MORE THAN MUSCLE

Before a child climbs into a tractor cab or handles a piece of equipment, parents must consider their mental readiness. Physical size can be misleading. A tall or strong child may appear capable, but may still struggle with judgment, impulse control, or following complex instructions — all essential for safe farm work.

Farm children are not miniature adults. They may look ready for certain tasks, but their ability to assess risk and make quick decisions is still developing. Assigning jobs based solely on physical appearance can put them in harm's way.

BUILDING A SAFER ENVIRONMENT

Parents and producers can reduce risk by creating a work environment that supports safe behavior. This includes providing specialized equipment and removing distractions that interfere with focus.

- ROPS (rollover protection structures) should be installed on tractors without cabs to protect operators in case of a tip-over.
- Seatbelts should be used consistently.
- Phones, loud music, and extra riders should be eliminated when equipment is in use.

Modern tractors often include a "buddy seat" designed for training. But exceeding passenger limits — especially in tractors without cabs — is a major cause of injuries and fatalities. Extra riders without a proper seat are at significant risk.

SAFETY STARTS WITH THE ADULTS

Children learn by watching the adults around them. On farms, where work and family life blend together, parents’ habits become children’s habits. When adults cut corners, children notice. When adults prioritize safety, children absorb that mindset.

Safe behavior must be modeled consistently — not only after an accident or close call. Demonstrating tasks, explaining the reasons behind safety rules, supervising children as they practice, and offering guidance all help build a culture where safety becomes second nature.

A safer environment leads to fewer incidents. When safety is woven into daily routines, children grow up understanding that caution is part of responsible farm work.

PROTECTING NON-WORKING CHILDREN

Not all children on farms are workers. Younger kids — toddlers, preschoolers, and early elementary-aged children — often play nearby or accompany parents into the field. This group faces some of the highest injury and fatality rates related to large farm equipment.

Hazards arise when there are no physical barriers around machinery or when children wander into areas where work is underway. During busy seasons, parents may bring young children along in tractors or combines, but the environment inside a cab can be harmful. Dust, debris, loud noise, and constant vibration pose risks to developing bodies and brains.

Whenever possible, producers should provide ear, eye, and respiratory protection for everyone in the field — especially infants and small children. But the safest option is often arranging childcare off the farm during hazardous activities. Older siblings, grandparents, or trusted community members can provide supervision away from

equipment and work zones.

SAFETY STRATEGIES FOR NON-WORKING CHILDREN

- Designate safe play areas far from equipment sheds, chemicals, water sources, and livestock.
- Use high-visibility clothing such as blaze orange or yellow to make children easier to spot.
- Mark unsafe areas clearly for visiting children and families.
- Wait until children are at least six years old before assigning any farm tasks.
- Keep non-working children out of tractor cabs and large machinery.
- Arrange off-farm childcare.

The Kansas Agriculture Safety and Health Program at Kansas State University is available to assist individuals and organizations by providing safety and health information.



LEARN MORE AT
www.k-state.edu/kash/
OR EMAIL TAWNIE LARSON AT
tawnie@ksu.edu





YOUR LAND, *Your Say*

QUAIL & PHEASANTS ON THE KANSAS LANDSCAPE

By BHAVYA IYER, University of Georgia

If you’ve filled out your share of government surveys and paperwork, this is something different.

Researchers at the Warnell School of Forestry and Natural Resources, University of Georgia, in collaboration with the Kansas Department of Wildlife and Parks, want to hear directly from Kansas landowners and leaseholders about what helps (and what gets in the way) when it comes to managing working lands for wildlife.

At the heart of the study are bobwhite quail and pheasants—species that have long been part of Kansas farms, grasslands, hunting traditions, and rural communities. The survey asks landowners and leaseholders about their interest in managing habitat for these birds and what makes that kind of management practical on working lands. We want to understand the

real-world factors behind wildlife and game bird management decisions. What motivates landowners to manage for quail and pheasants? What gets in the way? And what could make voluntary habitat conservation programs work better for Kansas landowners?

You do not need to currently manage for quail or pheasants, or participate in a conservation program, to take part. Hearing from landowners who are interested, unsure, or not interested in wildlife and game bird management is all valuable. Responses are confidential, and the findings will be used to help provide recommendations to the Kansas Department of Wildlife and Parks.



COMPLETE THE SURVEY AT
[uga.questionpro.com/
kansaslandownerssurvey](http://uga.questionpro.com/kansaslandownerssurvey)



Kansas LEGISLATIVE UPDATE

By **SEAN GATEWOOD**, KFU Contract Lobbyist

SB20

SB20 is the Pharmacy Benefit Manager bill. PBMs negotiate drug costs and approve formularies for patients but often require the use of mail-order pharmacies and manipulate rates paid to pharmacies. PBMs, in the name of efficiency, will often require patients to use mail-order pharmacies or go to their brick-and-mortar pharmacies as opposed to independent pharmacies. This bill attempts to rein in some of these practices.

The bill allowing pharmacists some prescribing powers failed. I believe this sort of expanded practice is very beneficial to a rural community in which licensed providers can be in short supply.

HOUSE BILL 2595

House Bill 2595 establishes a scholarship program for students at Kansas's two law schools, provided they commit to practicing law in rural Kansas. It passed both chambers and was funded, so this will become law and students will be eligible this fall.

SB 2700

SB 2700 establishes the Kansas Digital Right-to-Repair Act, which gives consumers and independent repair providers the legal right to access the tools, documentation, and replacement parts needed to diagnose, maintain, and repair digital electronic equipment. Original equipment manufacturers are required to make these resources available on fair and reasonable terms within one year of first selling a product in Kansas. The law applies to digital electronic equipment sold or leased to consumers in Kansas with a wholesale price of at least \$50.

The bill includes an extensive list of exemptions. Products excluded from the law's requirements include motor vehicles, medical devices, aircraft, train equipment, video game consoles, home appliances with embedded digital electronics, safety and life safety communication equipment, lighting, toys intended for children under 14, and critical infrastructure information technology equipment, among others. This means the law is primarily focused on everyday consumer electronics and similar digital products.

Manufacturers are not required to divulge trade secrets and are protected from liability when an independent repair provider or the owner themselves performs

repairs using the provided materials. Manufacturers also cannot be held responsible for data privacy breaches or equipment damage resulting from independent or owner-performed repairs. As an alternative to providing repair resources, a manufacturer may instead offer the original purchaser a full refund or an equivalent replacement product.

Enforcement authority rests exclusively with the attorney general, who must give an alleged violator at least 30 days' written notice and an opportunity to correct the problem before taking action. There is no private right of action, meaning individual consumers cannot sue manufacturers directly under this law. Any contract provision that attempts to waive a manufacturer's obligations under this act is void and unenforceable.

The law applies only to digital electronic equipment made available for sale in Kansas on or after July 1, 2027, and existing agreements between manufacturers and authorized repair providers entered into before that date are not affected.

CALL TO *Convention*



OFFICIAL NOTICE REGULAR ANNUAL MEETING OF DELEGATES OF THE FARMERS' EDUCATIONAL AND COOPERATIVE UNION OF AMERICA KANSAS DIVISION

Notice is hereby given, pursuant to the Articles of Incorporation and By-Laws and the proper actions of the Board of Directors, that the regular Annual Convention of Delegates and Members of The Farmers' Educational and Cooperative Union of America - Kansas Division will be convened at 9:00 a.m., **Monday, November 30, 2026**, at the Drury Plaza Broadview Hotel, 400 W Douglas Ave, Wichita, KS 67202, for the purpose of consideration of the action upon any and all matters which may lawfully come before said Convention; and said Convention shall continue in session and will conclude **Tuesday, December 1, 2026**.

➤ **Hotel Booking Link:** www.druryhotels.com/bookandstay/newreservation/?groupno=10177012



➤ **Convention Registration:** Available soon at kansasfarmersunion.org OR call Kami at (620) 241-6630 to register.



TENTATIVE CONVENTION SCHEDULE

Sunday, November 29

Staff Setup
NextGen Social

Monday, November 30

8:00 AM Registration Opens
9:00 AM Registration Closes
9:00 AM Welcome, Flag Salute, Call to Order
9:10 AM Clean/Renewable Energy on Farm and Ranch Lands - Kerry Gooch & Allison Thoman
9:40 AM Ag Economy Update & Outlook - Greg Ibendahl, KSU Ag Economist
10:40 AM North & South District Caucusing & Nominations
President, North Director, South Director, NFU Convention Delegates
11:00 AM Homegrown Prosperity Update & Co-ops Panel
12:30 PM Lunch - Speaker: KFU President Donn Teske
Farmers Union Midwest Agency (FUMA) Update - Rob Fisher
1:30 PM International Year of the Woman Farmer & NextGen Ag Tech Panel Discussion
2:30 PM "Pulling Together" with Tom Mosgaller
5:30 PM Convention Recesses
5:30 PM Drury Broadview Kickback Social
7:30 PM Dessert Reception & "The Donn Radio Hour" - a storytelling event to honor retiring KFU President Donn Teske
NextGen Live Auction

Tuesday, December 1

7:00 AM Registration Opens
8:00 AM Registration Closes
8:00 AM NFU Washington Update - Why Food & Farm Policy Matters to You & How You Can Be An Influencer - Layla Soberanis
8:45 AM Kansas Legislature Update & Outlook - Sean Gatewood & Ashley Beason
9:30 AM Ross Janssen - KWCH Meteorologist
10:30 AM Break
10:40 AM Elections
11:00 AM Consideration & Adoption of 2027 KFU Policy
12:30 PM Farm Stress Survey Findings - Blue Valley High School Students
1:30 PM Consideration & Adoption of 2027 KFU Policy
KFU Board reorganization meeting upon adjournment of convention

2026 CONVENTION ELECTIONS

KFU PRESIDENT, BOARD OF DIRECTORS, AND NFU DELEGATES UP FOR ELECTION

KFU members will elect North and South District Board of Directors and a new President at the organization's upcoming 119th Anniversary Convention at the Drury Plaza Broadview Hotel in Wichita, KS, November 30 - December 1, 2026.

Amanda Lindahl of Enterprise currently holds the North District Director position and Ryan Goertzen-Regier of Newton currently holds the South District Director position. Current KFU President Donn Teske has announced his retirement, and a new president will be elected at the convention.

KFU members will also elect delegates to the 120th Anniversary National Farmers Union Convention, which will be held in San Antonio, TX, March 7-9, 2027. NFU Convention delegates must be members in good standing.

To file for any of these positions, please email KFU Secretary Kami VanCampen (kfu.kamiv@gmail.com) or mail notice to P.O. Box 1064 McPherson, KS 67460 **AT LEAST THIRTY (30) DAYS PRIOR TO THE OPENING OF THE STATE CONVENTION.**



FILE FOR A POSITION BY
EMAILING KAMI VANCAMPEN AT
kfu.kamiv@gmail.com



IN THE PHOTO 2025 KFU STATE CONVENTION DELEGATE ED REZNICEK SPEAKS DURING CONVENTION POLICY DEVELOPMENT

ELIGIBILITY

From the Kansas Farmers Union Bylaws, approved by the membership at the 2024 Kansas Farmers Union State Convention:

Eligibility of Board Officers & Board Members: To qualify as a director, each member must be a resident of the State of Kansas and the district they represent, a member of the organization in good standing, and identified with farming as their current or prior long-term occupation either as an owner, operator, tenant, or other agricultural professional who is in sympathy with the program and objectives of the Kansas Farmers Union. No person shall be eligible for officer or director if they have a conflict of interest or are affiliated with any enterprise that may have a conflict of interest with this cooperative.

1. Any regular member shall be eligible for election to President, Vice President, or board director who has filed a notice with the Secretary at least thirty (30) days prior to the opening of the State Convention at which elections are to be held. Anyone filing for the office of KFU President or Vice President must have been a member for a minimum of 25 months continuous for President and 13 months continuous for Vice President, prior to the election. This notice shall identify the member and the office for which the member intends to run. The Secretary shall then, within twenty (20) days of the opening of the convention, cause to be delivered to each member of the Board of Directors the names so filed the corresponding office for which election is sought.
2. All other board positions require membership in good standing for six (6) months continuous and participation in a previous state convention.
3. If no member files as required above or if a member having so filed withdraws or is otherwise unable to serve, then, and only then, a regular member in good standing shall also be eligible for election by filing a petition signed by a majority of the delegates in good standing at the state convention.

INTERNATIONAL YEAR OF THE *Woman Farmer*



SAT. SEPT. 12, 2026
9 AM CHECK-IN
LUNCH PROVIDED

1835 Parallel Rd., Palmer,
KS 66962

Driving directions on KFU
website.

- PASTURE GRAZING SYSTEMS
- FENCE & WATER DEVELOPMENT
- GOATS GRAZING SERECIA LESPEDEZA
- VARIOUS GRASSES, FORAGES & COVER CROPS
- CATTLE WORKING & CALVING FACILITIES
- WILDLIFE, POLLINATOR & BIRD HABITATS

Lucinda Stuenkel's Sunny Day Farms Tour



**Registration
requested:**
**kansasfarmersunion.
org/news**
**Questions? Call Mary
Howell 785-562-8726**

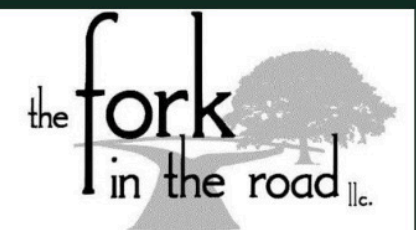
SPONSORS:
KANSAS FARMERS UNION
KANSAS GRAZING LANDS COALITION
CLAY COUNTY CONSERVATION
DISTRICT
KANSAS SOIL HEALTH ALLIANCE

Fall FARM TOUR SERIES

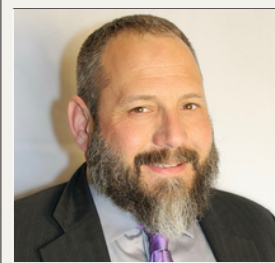


Riley, KS Farm Tours

WEDNESDAY
OCT. 14, 2026
2:00 – 6:00 PM
SUPPER PROVIDED



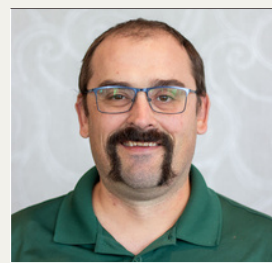
**Details and required
registration:**
**www.kansasfarmers
union.org/news**



Jeff Kindel
Concordia, KS 785.243.1571



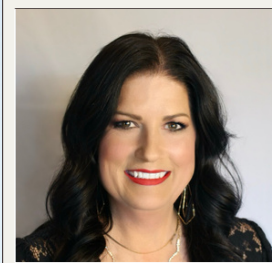
Hanna Hertzig
Wamego, KS 785.456.9077



Brandon Spevack
Marysville, KS 785.619.6125



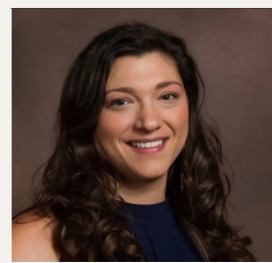
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Nicole Faulconer
Garden City, KS 620.275.6741



Roy McCoy
Chanute, KS 620.431.4234



Kris Narvaez
Chanute, KS 620.431-6290



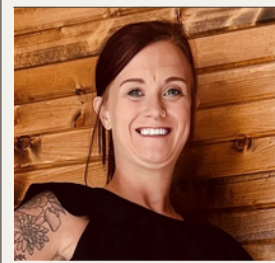
Todd Whitehill
McPherson, KS 620.241.1918



Mandy Trout
Russell, KS 785.324.2772



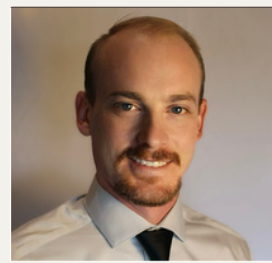
Shirea Higgs
Lakin, KS 620.521.4557



Kelsie Shanhan
Yates Center, KS 620.228.7365



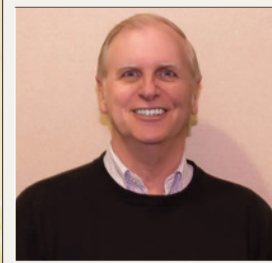
Karrie Watts
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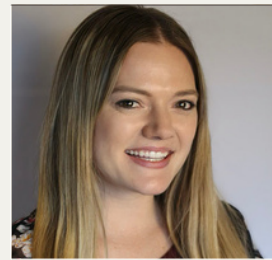
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Jim Gierhan
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Trina Smith
Great Bend, KS 620.617.9977



Staci Foreman
Phillipsburg, KS 785.543.3103



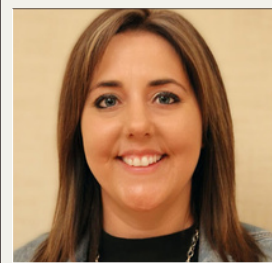
Greg Frank
Smith Center, KS 785.282.6658



Kyle Petrik
Smith Center, KS 785.282.6658



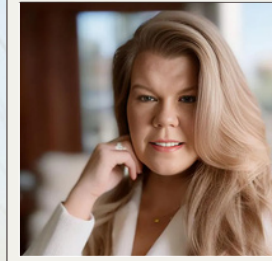
Will Clark
Oakley, KS 785.462.6708



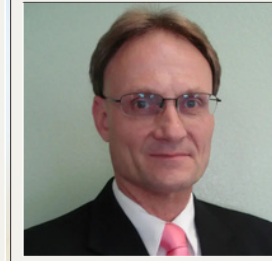
Nicole Schaller
Kinsley, KS 620.659.2011



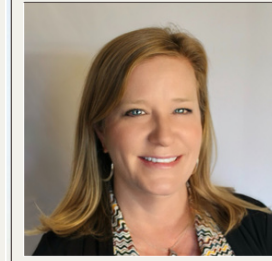
Tanner Samuelson
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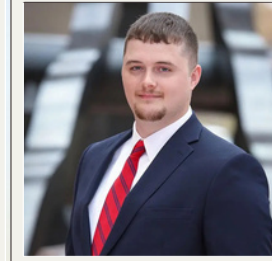
Haley Helzer
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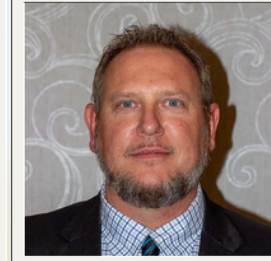
Jerry Nolte
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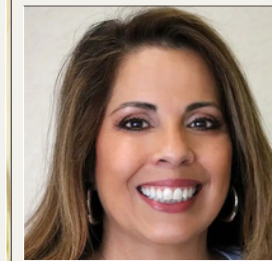
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Matt Anderson
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Yvonne Guy
Topeka, KS 785-266-2708



Roger Blanken
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Zach Teske
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Tom Clark
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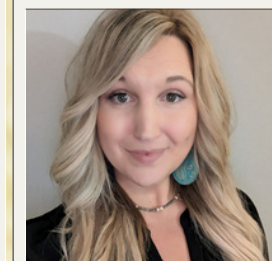
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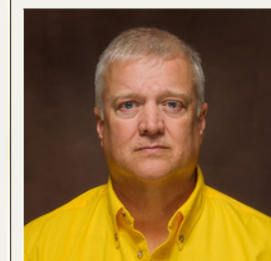
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Sara Stucky Valley Center, KS
Financial Services 620.295.0542



Samantha Almquist
Hutchinson, KS 620.259.7400



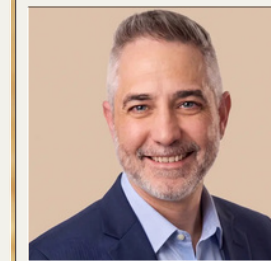
Steve Yearout
Wellington, KS 620.326.2021



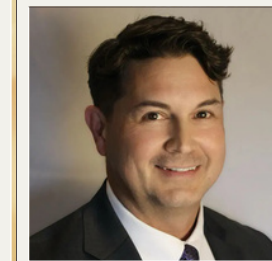
Krystal Lind
Regional Marketing Director



Andy Hopper
Kansas State Manager



Josh Nordin
Regional Production Manager



Rob Fisher
General Manager



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2027

National Farmers Union Convention

SAN ANTONIO, TX | MARCH 7-9, 2027

Find more information at www.nfu.org/convention