

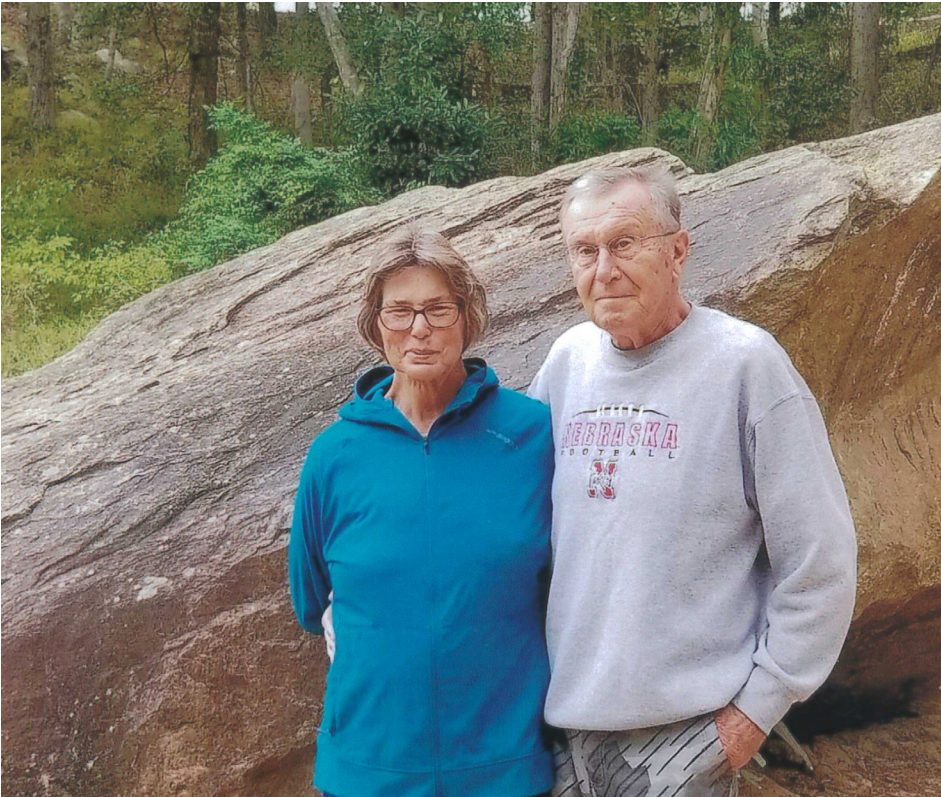


CENTER *for* RURAL AFFAIRS

YOUR RURAL NEWS FOR MORE THAN 45 YEARS | LYONS, NEBRASKA | POPULATION 851 | JULY AND AUGUST 2021

KAREN TIKALSKY CHAMPIONED WOMEN, FAMILY FARMERS, AND LOW-INCOME COMMUNITIES

BY NICK BERGIN, NICKB@CFRA.ORG



Karen and Jim Tikalsky have been honored with the 2020 Seventh Generation Award for their lifetime of service to the Center for Rural Affairs. | Photo submitted

As a child, Karen Tikalsky believed good would prevail over evil. As an adult, she learned that creating opportunity and meaningful life in rural America requires hard work, embracing responsibility, civic action, and advocating for those who cannot advocate for themselves. She hung onto the belief that good would prevail and devoted her life to building a rural America where all families can earn a living and enjoy fairness, peace, and social justice.

To acknowledge Karen and her husband, Jim, for their lifetime of service, the Center for Rural Affairs presents them with the 2020 Seventh Generation Award. The award honors people who have made significant contributions to improving rural life and protecting our land and water.

—SEE [KAREN TIKALSKY](#) ON PAGE 3

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PUBLIC HEALTH WORKER ENCOURAGES RURAL VACCINATIONS

BY LIZ STEWART

During the fight against COVID-19, there have been countless members of society who have stood up and, in many cases, sacrificed their own health to protect the health of others, or to care for those who might not be able to care for themselves.

Among those often unsung heroes are our frontline workers, essential workers, medical personnel, health care workers, and public health workers. Most of these individuals have been vaccinated or are in the process of receiving vaccinations in an effort to protect

—SEE [PUBLIC HEALTH WORKER](#) ON PAGE 4

EDITOR'S NOTE

BY RHEA LANDHOLM, RHEAL@CFRA.ORG

Throughout this issue, we focus on one of our organization's core values: "CONSCIENCE that balances self-interest with an obligation to the common good and future generations."

Karen Tikalsky, who served as a Center Board member for several decades, devoted her life to the common good. She advocated for all rural families, especially women, family farmers, and low-income communities. Unfortunately, we lost her to cancer in early 2020. You can read more about her life's work in the front page feature.

In our other front page story, Molly Herman, a public health

worker, explains what a rural health department is doing to distribute vaccinations. A related story explains efforts by Center staff member Nina Lanuza to help with the language barrier at vaccination clinics. Molly, Nina, and other health workers have set their own interests aside to help as many as they can during the pandemic.

We tell you about students at Nebraska Christian Schools who are growing fresh produce for their fellow students and setting their community up for success. They are the recipients of our first ever Greenhouse to Cafeteria award.



We summarize our successful state policy efforts focusing on the future of small meat processing, rural broadband, food access, and more.

And, finally, our executive director talks about our organization's focus on diversity, equity, and inclusion. Check it out.

LATEST PAPER FOCUSES ON HUNGER AND ECONOMY

BY TERESA HOFFMAN, TERESAH@CFRA.ORG

Across the country, states have been innovative in finding ways to integrate the goals of eliminating hunger and strengthening local food systems, according to a white paper released by the Center for Rural Affairs.

"Hunger and the Local Economy: Integrated State-Level Approaches to Food Access," authored by Nathan Beacom, explores the role of local grocery stores, gives examples of state policies designed to make food more accessible, and offers lawmakers recommendations on ways to address the broader causes of food access and food insecurity in

rural areas.

"Food access policy can also be economic development policy; these goals work hand in hand," Nathan said. "A strong local food system means more employment, better jobs, a stronger economy, and more access. This kind of win-win policy addresses the immediate needs, as well as the underlying causes of food insecurity."

Among the recommendations is expansion of the Double Up Food Bucks program. Offered in 28 states and funded privately and publicly, Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) beneficiaries use these incentives to buy fresh produce. The program

matches vouchers up to \$20 for \$20 of SNAP funds.

"Double Up Food Bucks has been successful in changing the diets of SNAP users, increasing the amount of fresh food they eat, and, ultimately, leading to better health outcomes," Nathan said. "At the same time, the program supports local retailers and local producers."

Other recommended actions for states to consider include supporting farm to school programs and offering tax credits for the development of cooperative food ventures.

Read the white paper at cfra.org/publications/hunger-and-local-economy.

PAPER & E-NEWS

This newsletter is available both electronically and in print. To receive it online, sign up at the Center's website, cfra.org, or email us at info@cfra.org.

Editing and layout by Rhea Landholm
Additional editing by Liz Stewart,
Teresa Hoffman, and Catharine Huddle
Printed at West Point News, West Point, NE

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KAREN TIKALSKY, CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

Karen joined the Center Board in 1986 and served until her death on Jan. 26, 2020, at age 67. She presided as Board president from 2001 to 2004, a tenure that included construction of the Center's current main office building in Lyons, Nebraska.

"She was an advocate for others, for those that couldn't advocate for themselves," Jim said.

Karen and Jim lived among the rolling Nebraska hills near Niobrara on a farm homesteaded by Jim's great-great-grandfather and his son in the late 1870s.

As a boy, Jim gathered eggs, milked cows, walked fields with a hoe to root out weeds, and helped thresh hay years before he was old enough to drive.

Karen grew up in Great Falls, Montana, and as a young woman volunteered with organizations that helped give a step up to families who struggled.

She and Jim met in 1972 at the University of Montana in Missoula. They were married in 1973, and lived in San Francisco and Oregon.

In the late '70s, a new opportunity opened: Jim's parents wanted to retire.

Jim and Karen knew farming would mean hard labor, pig manure, knee-deep mud, and narrow profit margins. But, it also would

The self-proclaimed "voice of history" on the Center's Board of Directors, Karen offered common-sense advice and opinions on the problems rural America faces.

"Things get better when ordinary citizens embrace their responsibility to make things better, by the actions they take in their personal lives, communities, organizations, and government. I am thankful I was able to do some of that, and my wish is those of you reading this or here today will continue to appreciate nature, family, and friends," Karen wrote in a 2012 letter to her friends and loved ones.



Karen and Jim Tikalsky wanted to farm in a way different from the conventional row cropping mentality. Karen is pictured here in summer 1990. | Photo submitted

bring bountiful harvests, meaningful work, and community.

Moving to northeast Nebraska's steep rolling hills to work the farm took adjusting for both of them. Luckily, Jim's parents stayed close to act as a sounding board.

"That is always a challenge for families where one has been in charge and (must) relinquish decision making," Jim said. "That transition took a while."

He raised farrowing pigs and had a cow and calf operation. In the fields, he rotated oats, corn, alfalfa, and grass hay.

Karen found work with the Knox County social services department disabilities division, and the Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services.

Karen and Jim put down roots and grew them deep. They wanted to farm in a way different from the conventional row cropping mentality espoused by former Secretary of Agriculture Earl Lauer Buttz: "Get big or get out." They took a long-term, generational view of farming. They cared about the highly erodible hills of their farm and the neighbors who made up their community.

Jim and Karen participated in early Center programs, including the Small Farm Resources Project, which inspired Jim to begin rotational grazing, eventually restore his pastures to grassland, and implement a rotational grazing system as a tool to maintain it.

"The Center has been dear to my heart since we started farming in 1978. It was during the farm crisis of the '80s that I became a Board member," Karen had said. "In the '80s, the Center was instrumental in proposals to change the farm bill and the way farmers were paid for being in farm programs and to add conservation measures."

Karen represented and championed women, family farmers, and low-income communities. During her life, she encouraged others to support the Center to help convey the ever-changing dynamics in rural America.

Karen and Jim have a daughter, Jacque (Mychajlo) Eliaszeskyj of Fort Benning, Georgia; son, Alan Tikalsky of Lincoln, Nebraska; and three grandchildren, Lydia, Natalia, and Viktor Eliaszeskyj.

PUBLIC HEALTH WORKER, CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

them more completely while they put their lives on the line each day.

Molly Herman, a rural public health worker at a health department in Nebraska, stepped into her role in this field not long after the coronavirus spread throughout the nation. She received both doses of the vaccine, and says she had plenty of reasons to do so.

“Since I’m part of the team working at public vaccination clinics, I need to be vaccinated so that I am protected and can continue to do the ‘public’ work of public health,” Molly said.

Personally, she was more than happy to be vaccinated in hopes of returning to some kind of normalcy in her everyday life.

“Being vaccinated is the first step in getting to hug my parents again, going out to eat, and having family meals and gatherings, none of which I had done in the previous 12 months,” Molly said.

ANSWERING QUESTIONS ABOUT THE VACCINE

Though many people are fully on board with getting vaccinated, many others are hesitant. Molly assures those in doubt that these



Molly Herman, a public health worker, says all are encouraged to get vaccinated—rural Americans especially. | Photo by Liz Stewart

thoughts are understandable, and offers advice.

“The first thing I tell people is that it’s totally normal to have concerns and questions about something new—that’s part of the human condition,” she said. “Make sure you seek out a reliable source like your main health care provider or your local public health department to get answers you need.”

She also recommends looking beyond local resources to state-wide and national outlets.

In addition, there have been concerns about the speed in which the vaccines have been developed, something those working in public health have researched in depth.

“While authorization of mRNA vaccines is new, the technology, that is to say the development of mRNA vaccines, has actually been around for more than a decade,” Molly said.

She said scientists around the world who study infectious diseases spend their lives and careers creating vaccines for future, unknown viruses and have been working with a sense of urgency to develop more effective vaccines for quite some time.

KNOWING WHERE THE VACCINE IS AVAILABLE TO YOU

There is no cost for the vaccine. Vaccine providers (wherever someone receives their shot) are allowed to charge an injection fee, so if someone has health insurance, Medicare, or Medicaid, providers might ask for an insurance card and bill that company. However, federal law prohibits vaccine providers from denying someone the vaccine if they cannot pay the injection or any administrative fees.

All are encouraged to get vaccinated—rural Americans especially, as they could potentially face dire complications if they contract COVID-19.

“Rural Americans experience greater health disparities than urban Americans when it comes to serious underlying health conditions, including several of the ones which put people at greater risk for severe COVID-19, like obesity, type 2 diabetes, cardiovascular disease, and high blood pressure,” Molly said. “The vaccine trials showed that the available vaccines prevent severe COVID-19 and death in the majority of people who get them.”

—SEE PUBLIC HEALTH WORKER ON PAGE 5

VACCINATION TIPS

- You are considered fully vaccinated about two weeks after you receive your second dose of vaccine. Your body takes a little time after the second shot to develop peak immunity.
- After you have been fully vaccinated, continue to wear your masks when around people you don’t live with and practice physical distancing.
- Don’t wait for what you might have heard is the “best” vaccine. Take whatever U.S. Food and Drug Administration-authorized vaccine is available to you, when it is available to you. This is the best strategy to get protection for yourself as soon as possible and will help slow the pandemic.

CENTER JOINS IN VACCINATION EFFORT

BY RHEA LANDHOLM, RHEAL@CFRA.ORG

With more than 36 languages spoken in Schuyler, Nebraska, population 6,211, community organizations, businesses, and volunteers have pitched in to assist at the weekly COVID-19 vaccination clinic.

Staff from the Center for Rural Affairs and other area nonprofit organizations were on hand week after week this spring to help people fill out the registration paperwork and to make sure they understand what is needed.

“People in the community know us and trust us,” said Nina Lanuza, Center for Rural Affairs staff member, who speaks Spanish and English. “We want to make sure everyone has access to the infor-

mation no matter what language they speak.”

Additional interpreters, who speak various languages, are a phone call away.

Schuyler is home to meatpacking plant workers, and Nina said certain companies are encouraging all employees to get vaccinated. They are also sending support staff to help with translations.

“Meatpacking plants across the country became COVID-19 hotspots early in the pandemic and continue to pose a risk,” she said. “We want to ensure these employees and their families have the opportunity to get vaccinated.”

Nina said nonprofit organizations are uniquely positioned to help these kinds of emergency operations succeed.



Nina Lanuza, Center for Rural Affairs staff member, has provided translation services at the vaccination clinic at the Schuyler Ballroom week after week this spring. | Photo by Kylie Kai

PUBLIC HEALTH WORKER, CONTINUED FROM PAGE 4

Rural health care systems are also shrinking, which means there is less available care for those who need to be hospitalized.

“People who get sick enough from COVID-19 to require hospitalization often need highly specialized care, which, depending on local hospital capability, could require travel,” she said.

ACCESSING THE INFORMATION IN MULTIPLE LANGUAGES

Part of working in public health means Molly advocates for all residents in the district she serves, including those who may encounter a language barrier.

As more of rural America becomes home to new immigrants, public health departments are doing all they can to ensure those communities are just as well-served as any English-speaking communities.

“We want to do everything in our power to make sure we provide equitable vaccine distribution,” Molly said. “This is where working with our local medical and social service partners is crucial. They have knowledge and resources that will assist in reaching this community and providing the logistics to get them informed and vaccinated.”

Many health departments translate their vaccine messaging and post it on social media. They also have bilingual staff who are on-site for vaccine clinics where it is known there will be Spanish-speaking individuals. Access is available to a call-in language line, and the vaccine sign-up website is now available in Spanish as well as English.

GETTING THE VACCINE

When people get the chance to take the vaccine, Molly says the

experience, while it differs from person to person, is nothing to fear.

Molly reminds everyone this is a constantly evolving situation, and things continue changing because we are being presented with new information all the time.

“I know it might seem like what was said yesterday is different to what is being said today,” she said. “Part of that is because science is a process of building and organizing knowledge—we are learning things every day about this virus and how vaccines work to fight it. The other part is the U.S. has never before undertaken a mass vaccination campaign for adults, so there is no blueprint for this. There will be some kinks to work out. In the meantime, we are all trying to give everyone a little extra grace while we do our best to get shots in arms.”

NEBRASKA CHRISTIAN SCHOOLS CULTIVATES SUCCESS, WINS FIRST GREENHOUSE TO CAFETERIA AWARD

BY LIZ STEWART AND
JUSTIN CARTER, JUSTINC@CFRA.ORG

During this past year, students at Nebraska Christian Schools in Central City have been eating fresh, delicious vegetables in their school lunches—vegetables they grew in their school greenhouse.

Not only have they gotten to enjoy and taste the fruits of their labor, these students have also been rewarded for their hard work.

Schools around Nebraska applied for and competed to be recognized for their agricultural efforts and the first Greenhouse to Cafeteria award.

The Center for Rural Affairs, in collaboration with Nebraska FFA, began the program to acknowledge schools for exemplary greenhouse education. Applicants were judged on diversity and quantity of produce grown, water and input management, student involvement, and community involvement.

Nebraska Christian Schools was chosen as this year's Greenhouse to Cafeteria award winner.

From sophomores to seniors, 21 students spent time in their greenhouse in exchange for school-based service hours during the spring transplanting season. They learned about general plant knowledge; prairie ecosystem/prairie restoration and management; plant propagation, growth, and maintenance; landscape basics; plant-based marketing and entrepreneurship with an emphasis on the growth, marketing, and sale of ornamental plants; and plant display and design.

They grew tomatoes, cilantro, radishes, cucumbers, lettuce, green beans, a lemon tree, and pineapple plants. The students also used their hydroponics sys-



Students at Nebraska Christian Schools, in Central City, are the recipients of the first Greenhouse to Cafeteria award. | Photo submitted

tem to grow bok choy plants, and marigolds to keep aphids at bay. They grew garlic plants as insect deterrents. Their harvested produce was then used by the school's cafeteria.

Dee Flynn, science instructor at Nebraska Christian Schools, guided students through the process of greenhouse setup and operation.

"The students were very proud of their hydroponics system and learned so much about insect control, controlling algae growth, starting seeds effectively, and cutting at the proper time to ensure regrowth to keep the system producing," Dee said.

Justin Carter, Center project associate, helped create the award and select the winners.

"Nebraska Christian Schools has done a fantastic job of letting their students run with greenhouse projects," he said. "The creativity on projects is exceptional, and they also have great collaboration with assistance from local

organizations and produce going into the community. We hope their success can inspire other schools to be adventurous with their greenhouse programs and think outside the box."

Nebraska Christian Schools partners with local businesses and organizations to use their greenhouse as a community learning project in addition to the curriculum-based learning during school hours.

Dee said the students are very encouraged by receiving the Greenhouse to Cafeteria award.

"It's our hope that the Greenhouse to Cafeteria award will become a staple of the many agriculture awards handed out to schools each year," said Justin. "We want to inspire food production throughout Nebraska and cultivate a new generation of farmers."

The award will be offered again in 2022. For more information, contact Justin at justinc@cfra.org.

NEW LEGISLATION PROVIDES SUPPORT FOR SMALL MEAT PROCESSORS, RURAL BROADBAND IMPROVEMENTS

BY NATHAN BEACOM, NATHANB@CFRA.ORG, CODY SMITH, CODYS@CFRA.ORG, AND HEIDI KOLBECK-URLACHER, HEIDIKU@CFRA.ORG

The passage of bills supporting small meat processors and livestock producers was a common theme as the 2021 legislative sessions

in Nebraska, Iowa, and South Dakota came to an end. Lawmakers in all three states approved new legislation and programs aimed at helping producers and processors clear obstacles exacerbated by the coronavirus pandemic. They also addressed rural broadband issues, another need heightened by the global pandemic.

Here's a look back at this year's sessions:

NEBRASKA

The 2021 Nebraska legislative session was a successful one for the Center, with many of our priority bills passed. Chief among these were Legislative Bill (LB) 324, which makes it easier for consumers to buy meat from livestock farmers and supports local, independent meat processors.

Another success was LB 366, a bill the Center developed in partnership with Sen. Tom Briese, to expand the Microenterprise Tax Credit Program by extending it for 10 years and increasing the size of the credit. This is the state's only incentive program targeted to businesses with five or fewer full-time

equivalent employees.

Finally, LB 108, a bill to improve the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program so beneficiaries don't lose their assistance before making enough to replace it, overcame a veto to become law on May 26. Further successes were seen with the establishment of a state Farm to School Network, an extension to the Beginning Farmer Tax Credit, and improving high-speed rural broadband. We are grateful for our Nebraska supporters, whose input was crucial to such a positive session.

IOWA

While many challenges faced by rural Iowans remain unaddressed, the Center is proud of the work we have done together to achieve more investments in rural communities.

This session, our supporters sent 165 emails to state lawmakers in support of solar energy, small meat processors, and water quality. There were also 20 messages of support from small meat lockers, farmers, and landowners in favor of House File 857, which included an amendment by the Center to target new state resources to small meat processors that employ fewer than 50 people.

Additionally, more than a dozen solar customers and advocates met with or called their legislators

to advocate for House File 221 to fix the Iowa Solar Tax Credit.

By the session's end, the support helped secure an investment of \$750,000 for small meat processors, \$100 million in rural broadband expansion, the granting of more tools to county officials to address flooding concerns, and expanding options for livestock producers to reduce their environmental footprint.

SOUTH DAKOTA

South Dakota's Legislature took up several of the same topics we engaged with in Nebraska and Iowa.

The Center supported Senate Bill 34, which allocated funding to expand rural broadband access in the state. The final version of the bill passed with an allocation of \$75 million and another \$25 million through CARES Act funding.

We also supported House Bill 1040, which appropriated \$5 million to create a grant program for small meat processors to expand their operations. The bill was tabled at the request of the South Dakota Department of Agriculture after Gov. Kristi Noem approved the use of coronavirus relief funds to support the program. The Department of Agriculture has already rolled out the grants program, and the deadline for applications was May 1.

EQUITY AND DIVERSITY PRINCIPLES, CONTINUED FROM PAGE 8

grams in community, but also our internal affairs. The new principles prompt us to consider matters of Board and staff recruitment, equitable hiring and advancement,

how our fundraising and communications promote equity, and our commitment to monitoring our progress and holding ourselves accountable.

The work is ongoing. We invite you to join us.

To read the Center's new principles in full, please visit cfra.org/history-mission-values.



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145 MAIN STREET, PO BOX 136 | LYONS, NE 68038-0136

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Inside: Seventh Generation Awardees

Karen and Jim Tikalsky devote lives to rural

FROM THE DESK OF THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

BOARD ADOPTS EQUITY AND DIVERSITY PRINCIPLES

BY BRIAN DEPEW, BRIAND@CFRA.ORG

Center staff and Board spent the past year developing a set of principles to help guide our commitment to equity, diversity, and inclusion. In adopting these principles at our recent Board meeting, the Center commits to deepening our work to address the legacy of racism and inequality in rural communities.

While small towns in our part of the country are often characterized as mostly white, the reality is that the communities where we work are more diverse than many acknowledge. New immigrants continue to join long-time Indigenous, Black, and Brown people as fellow rural Americans.

Over the past decade, the

Center has built new alliances with our Indigenous neighbors and supported their vision of food sovereignty through our work. We also engaged new immigrants, and supported them as they seek to become full participants in civic, economic, and community life. Over the past decade, our staff has come to more closely reflect the communities we serve. We are proud of this work.

In adopting our new guiding principles, we also acknowledge these are only first steps.

No matter where we come from or what color our skin is, most rural people work hard and value family and community. But, for too long, certain powerful interests have tried to keep us divided

from one another by sowing hate and division. We envision a future where rural people are able to join together across differences to achieve equity and opportunity for everyone in our communities.

Our new guiding principles commit the Center to prioritizing community input, acknowledging the histories of underrepresented groups, valuing their insights, and being a reliable partner to achieve shared goals. In addition, we commit to advancing conversations about equity and diversity in rural communities, and to being an accessible organization for everyone who seeks to engage with us.

Finally, we understand that the work includes not only our pro

—SEE [EQUITY AND DIVERSITY PRINCIPLES](#) ON PAGE 7