



CENTER *for* RURAL AFFAIRS

YOUR RURAL NEWS FOR OVER 40 YEARS | LYONS, NEB. | POPULATION 851 | JANUARY & FEBRUARY 2017

FROM THE DESK OF THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

WHAT IF THE WORKERS OWNED IT?

BY BRIAN DEPEW, BRIAND@CFRA.ORG

The sale and closure of a midsize manufacturing plant in a nearby small town got me thinking.

The business was home-grown, but no one in the next generation was interested in taking the helm. The owners were ready to retire, and they needed to sell the business.

The buyer was from out of state. The business was profitable, but the new owner had no ties to the local community.

You know how this ends.

The new owners soon realized that they could increase profits by merging their operations. After just a few years, they shuttered the local plant. They took the brand and the sales accounts with them. They left the small town with an empty building.

Are there alternatives to this common story? What if the employees were able to buy the business?

Worker-owned co-ops and employee stock ownership plans are a rural development strategy that could address this challenge.

Rural people have a long history of coming together to form cooperatives to solve challenges. Rural electric co-ops strung wires in sparsely populated areas where

for-profit utilities were slow to show up. Farmers banded together to form milk co-ops, seed co-ops and fuel co-ops.

Some small towns have seen new co-ops spring up to run a grocery store or a cafe.

Why not bigger businesses? The lumber yard, the local manufacturing plant or even a labor intensive farm operation like dairy or vegetable production are all candidates. In these cases the co-op members could be the workers themselves.

Businesses at any scale can be structured as co-ops or through employee stock ownership plans.

Worker-owned co-ops allow a broad base of people to share in an ownership stake and build equity over time. The worker-owners are unlikely to shutter the operation and send the jobs out of town.

In rural Maine, 60 workers bought the set of small-town businesses in which they worked. The worker co-op now owns and oper-



Rural people have a long history of coming together to form cooperatives to solve challenges. Why not band together for bigger businesses? | Photo by Rhea Landholm

ates the local grocery store, pharmacy and hardware store. The project included financing from several local development groups.

This model could be replicated in your community.

Are you a business owner who one day plans to sell the business? You might consider if selling to your employees could work for you. Do you live in a town where an important employer will change hands in coming years? You might consider what support the local community might offer to help the business stay in local hands.

It is time to dust off the handbook on forming co-ops and get to work.

INSIDE THIS ISSUE

2 Note from the editor

2 Small business needs identified in report

3 Gardens keep Santee Sioux traditions alive

4 Big issues for Nebraska and Iowa in 2017

6 Think beyond biases to create welcoming communities

8 Fairness in the livestock industry

Insert: Thank you 2016 donors

NOTE FROM THE EDITOR

BY RHEA LANDHOLM, RHEAL@CFRA.ORG



In December, I had the opportunity to visit some of you on a two-day road trip. One of my fellow staff members appropriately named the trip “Rhea on the Road.”

In just a couple of days, I did seven interviews and took hundreds of photos. I got sidetracked in almost every rural community I drove past, taking photos of downtowns, churches, courthouses, post offices and libraries.

I am so excited to share these stories and more with you this year. Check out our blog at cfra.org for these features and the latest Rural News.

THIS EDITION

Thank you, donors. We couldn't do our work without you. Check out our special insert that includes all of our 2016 donors.

By donating to the Center for Rural Affairs, you take a step toward one of our values, ACTION to shape the future.

In this issue, you can see individuals living this value. You will also read about opportunities to take your own steps toward shaping the future of rural America.

I'll let you read on for more.

Remember, this is just a sample of what we're up to. Check out our website for more.

SMALL BUSINESS NEEDS IDENTIFIED IN REPORT

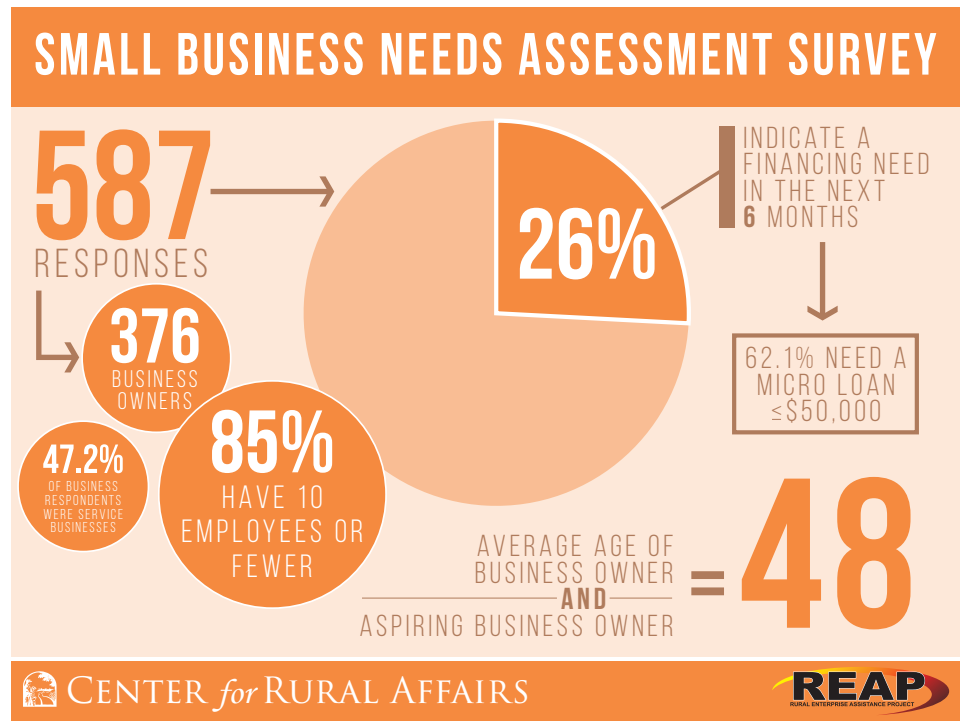
BY RHEA LANDHOLM, RHEAL@CFRA.ORG

The opinions of 587 business owners, resource providers and lenders will help shape the future of our Rural Enterprise Assistance Program.

Responses are compiled in “Their needs and thoughts: Results of the fifth biennial Small Business Needs Assessment,” by Dena Beck, Rural Enterprise Assistance Program senior project leader.

The results will also be used by policymakers, lenders and other business resource providers for focusing, planning and developing strategic partnerships.

The full report can be found at cfra.org/their-needs-and-thoughts.



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.

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Left: Mari James shows us her garden on the Santee Sioux Reservation in North Central Nebraska. Right: Les Rave and his granddaughter, Heaven, have been putting in gardens for five years in their backyard in Santee. | Photos by Rhea Landholm

GARDENS KEEP SANTEE SIOUX TRADITIONS ALIVE

BY RHEA LANDHOLM, RHEAL@CFRA.ORG

For the past three summers, our community food specialists have been hard at work alongside members of the Santee Sioux and Omaha Tribes improving access to fresh food grown in their own backyards.

They provide demonstrations with garden tilling, seeds and starter plants and support the farmers market. They also regularly make garden visits throughout the growing season.

We visited Santee last June, when most of the community was gathered at a health fair. Booths, bouncy castles, entertainment and food brought people out, and we felt a great sense of community among residents.

LeAnn Red Owl, a community food specialist, lives just across the street from the health fair, so she took us to see her garden.

"I'm growing corn for my grandma," LeAnn said. "She managed to keep the tradition of growing corn even while living in the city, with an itty bitty backyard."

LeAnn then took us to Mari James' garden. Mari started to garden when her daughter

brought home a pumpkin seed from school for Mother's Day. That seed, a nice green vine, was happily growing near the house.

On the other side of town, Les Rave and his granddaughter Heaven have been putting in gardens for five years. When we visited, Les identified tomatoes and peppers that were almost ripe.

Just down the street from Les, we identified Vern Cross' yard by the beautiful tiger lilies surrounding the house. Vern told us he has been gardening since he was 8 years old. He said his mother taught him how to garden and how to can the extra produce.

"My favorite part is working in it, it gives me something to do," Vern said.

He makes salsa and taco sauce, so he planted a large amount of tomatoes and onion.

We then visited a demonstration garden behind Nebraska Indian Community College, where our staff planted tomatoes, carrots, eggplant, kale, squash, herbs and more. Community members can visit the space to learn about planting and see crops that can grow in the region.

This year, staff also planted Indian corn. The work is helping to keep traditions of the Santee Sioux alive.

"If you take care of the plants, they'll take care of us," LeAnn said.

CENTER'S IMPACT

Our staff members work in these communities year-round. They assist and train on gardening techniques and preparing produce, food products and artwork for market.

On my visits, it wasn't hard to find the impact of our garden and market projects over the past three years. We spotted gardens in several yards; but didn't have time to tour all 50 gardens in Santee and 100 gardens in Walthill, Macy and Rosalie.

Suzi French, community food specialist, expressed feelings of gardeners in both communities.

"We are doing it! We are growing our very own fresh food," she said. "We are eating it, sharing it and some are selling it. We are teaching our children about growing food. We are changing our food system."

BIG ISSUES FOR NEBRASKA AND IOWA IN 2017

BY JOHNATHAN HLADIK, JOHNATHANH@CFRA.ORG

Elected representatives in Nebraska and Iowa will debate a host of contentious issues during the 2017 legislative session. Important items to be debated include budget and tax, health care, energy and environment, and food and agriculture. Here is a preview of select topics that will receive our attention.

We'll keep you informed as debates occur. Relevant developments concerning priority legislation will be shared via the emailed Center for Rural Affairs Legislative Update.

If you have an interest in any of these bills and would like to share your support, concerns, insights or opposition by providing testimony in-person, via letter or by visiting with your senator, please contact Jordan Rasmussen at jordanr@cfra.org or 402.687.2100 x1032.



ENERGY AND ENVIRONMENT

In 2015, we helped pass LB 824, which eliminated a requirement that wind developers acquire special regulatory approval to sell power on the wholesale market or export the energy they generate. This was the result of several years of hard work.

Energy and climate remain a top priority in 2017. After helping to secure passage of LB 824, we turn our attention to defending that progress. We also look for ways to improve on LB 1012, a bill we supported in 2016. That legislation enabled municipalities to create clean energy assessment districts. This opportunity has yet to be utilized.



BUDGET AND TAX

Insufficient progress in 2016 means that property tax will again be a pressing issue in 2017. Concurrently, Gov. Ricketts and others are advocating for an income tax cut. This debate is taking place against the backdrop of sustained revenue declines and an expected \$910 million (6.6 percent) shortfall. Because of this, we expect development and approval of the biennial budget to be the primary focus of the 2017 session.

We will defend against tax shifts that result in cuts to education and other social services important to low-income individuals. We will support bills that meaningfully address the property tax burden suffered by rural Nebraskans, restore balance to the "three-legged stool" of sales, income and property tax, and make the overall tax system less regressive. We will oppose reform attempts that are contrary to those principles.



ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

2016 saw passage of LB 1083. This bill, among other things, created a Venture Development and Innovation Task Force. Members of the task force spent much of the interim traveling to different parts of the state to learn about opportunities and challenges in economic development. Inadequate access to broadband in rural areas emerged as a top task force priority. We intend to work alongside key partners to address this issue in 2017.

Economic development remains a core element of our work. In addition to securing broad opportunity, it is our responsibility to defend against cuts to effective rural economic development programs. We also have a role in encouraging innovative approaches to rural business development and helping communities modernize in a changing economy.



FOOD AND AGRICULTURE

In 2016, we led an effort to defeat LR 378 CA, a proposed amendment to our state constitution. This amendment would have prevented state and local governments from passing any law or regulation which may "abridge the right of citizens and lawful residents of Nebraska to employ agricultural technology and livestock production and ranching practices without a compelling state interest."

It is anticipated that proponents may seek to achieve the stated goals of a Right to Farm amendment through statutory means in 2017. If proposed as a bill to amend an existing statute, we will carefully consider the consequences of such legislation and weigh these against the values of our organization. We are committed to working against any legislative effort that will violate our core principles.



Nebraska residents gather at the Unicameral on Feb. 24, 2016, to talk with senators about a proposed health care bill. If you have interest in any of the bills listed, please contact Jordan Rasmussen at jordanr@cfra.org or 402.687.2100 ext. 1032. | Photo submitted

BIG ISSUES, CONTINUED FROM PAGE 4



HEALTH CARE

Election results at the national level have left the Affordable Care Act in peril. Many expect Congress to repeal some provisions related to Medicaid expansion by March 2017. Nebraska is unlikely to pass an expansion bill under such a scenario. However, our organization and others have developed significant momentum over the past four years.

We will support Medicaid expansion again in 2017. Failing this, we will support an interim study to explore health care challenges in Nebraska in the face of a changing federal landscape. We will also consider legislation meant to incorporate critical provisions of the Affordable Care Act into state law. Our primary goal will be to enable more health insurance coverage for low-income Nebraskans, especially those who have fallen into a coverage gap caused by lack of Medicaid expansion in Nebraska.



IOWA LEGISLATIVE POLICY

The 2016 election brought significant changes to the Iowa legislature. As in Nebraska and elsewhere, our primary task is to defend against legislation that will undermine past successes.

We will balance this with a need to proactively move key issues.

Gains made in protecting and encouraging clean energy development in particular must be protected. We oppose legislation that limits the expansion of clean energy transmission. However, we support property rights and effective inclusion of communities and landowners in the siting process.

Iowa continues to struggle with water quality challenges. This puts considerable stress on rural community infrastructure and forces farmers to develop cost-effective ways to reduce pollution. It is anticipated that many will see this session as an opportunity to address this issue. We support smart tax policy to fund Iowa's Natural Resources and Outdoor Recreation Trust Fund.

OTHER ISSUES IN NEBRASKA

Adverse Possession - Nebraska law does not require that an adverse possessor prove payment of property tax in order to satisfy a claim. The law also does not make payment of property taxes an affirmative defense. We support legislation to a) require that property tax be paid by the adverse possessor over the statutory period in order to satisfy an adverse possession claim and b) require that any adverse possessor compensate the original owner for property tax paid during the statutory period.

Right to Repair - Many manufacturers withhold diagnostic and repair information, technical updates and software corrections from the general public. This is especially prevalent in newer farm machinery. As a result, it is impossible for individuals and independent repair providers to maintain equipment without the help of the original manufacturer. We support efforts that require the original manufacturer to make available for purchase by the owner or an independent repair provider any information or equipment required for repair upon fair and reasonable terms.

THINK BEYOND BIASES TO CREATE WELCOMING COMMUNITIES

BY KATHIE STARKWEATHER, KATHIES@CFRA.ORG

We all discriminate. It does not matter if you are a person of color or not, female or male, young or old, gay or straight. We all discriminate.

I'm not talking about intentional discrimination, like denying housing based on gender or the color of skin. I'm talking about nonconscious discrimination that is caused by the way our brains work; and we are completely unaware.

We started as a species living in pretty dangerous and volatile situations. We had to know fairly quickly if our neighbors showed up to eat us for dinner or if they came to join us for dinner. We learned to react immediately. Once we made connections between what was safe and what was not, the non-conscious part of our brains made that decision and reacted accordingly.

Our brains still function in the same way. The system is similar to a filing cabinet with two major sections. The first section is gender and the second is race/ethnicity.

The problem with this brain structure is that when we react, we immediately pull out the "information" we have stored in our nonconscious. Often times, this is not correct information.

Some of the information comes from socialization, experiences and the media. We can't help but absorb what we hear. This information creates our intuition, or first impression.

Consequently, we make assumptions about our new Asian neighbor or the retired man who moved into town. And without realizing or intending to, we treat that person based on the "information" we have in our nonconscious.

This has profound impacts on community cohesion and success.



In rural communities across the nation, immigrant families from various ethnic backgrounds have meant a change in population. Center for Rural Affairs staff works with community leaders to confront challenges when language, religion and ethnic backgrounds are so diverse. | Photo submitted

The Saturday Night Live skit "Pat" (if you aren't familiar, ask anybody over 50) is a perfect example of nonconscious bias. Pat was an androgynously dressed person and nobody could tell if Pat was male or female. The other characters spent their time trying to figure it out, and also struggled with how they should interact.

The characters were not able to reach into their filing cabinet and react to what they "know" about a male or female. They were blocked from their reality of how to interact with a male compared to a female. We all do the same, but in "Pat," there was a bump in the road that did not allow them to get that "information." They focused on trying to determine Pat's gender before they could really interact. Crazy, huh? But true.

Why is this information important to you and your community? When we allow hidden biases to take hold, we make instant decisions about people. We could miss

opportunities to add a richness to our communities that is otherwise overlooked.

Create a welcoming community that strives to look at the person and not the stereotype. New people bring new ideas, new families and new economic growth.

Welcome diversity. Lack of diversity in our towns has been identified as one of the reasons youth do not want to return.

Starting today, try putting your own bump in the road. When you see someone who does not look like you, stop for just a second and ask yourself, "So what?" Take just a moment to see that person as a person, and not as a man, woman, Latino, Latina, old, young, community outsider, etc. It's not easy, but by recognizing our own biases, we take a step toward not acting on them.

Having biases is normal, we all have them. Challenging ourselves to think beyond those biases will make our communities better.



Proposed rule Unfair Practices and Undue Preferences impacts cattle, hog and chicken farmers. If finalized, this rule would return legal rights to the producers. | Photo by Erin Frank

FAIRNESS, CONTINUED FROM PAGE 8

1

'HOUSE FIRE,' AN INTERIM FINAL RULE

This rule's official name is "Scope of sections 202(a) and (b) of the Packers and Stockyards Act." We call it the "house fire" rule.

When a poultry or livestock farmer thinks a processor has done something to harm them, such as change contract provisions too quickly or too stringently, they can go to court. Previously, in order to get the court to rule in their favor, they had to prove something impossible: that the processor's actions hurt not only them, but the entire industry of farmers. That's like having to prove to your insurance company that your house fire hurt the whole neighborhood. We wouldn't require that of a homeowner, why should we require it of our farmers?

Another important item: USDA published two flavors of rules, interim final and proposed. This one is interim final, meaning it can be enforced immediately. USDA will accept comments on the rule for 60 days, and can change it by publishing an additional interim final rule or final rule.

2

POULTRY GROWER RANKING SYSTEMS, A PROPOSED RULE

Right now, one of the unfair circumstances that poultry growers face is how "live poultry dealers" contract with and pay them for the birds they raise. Poultry growers compete against other contractors who are also selling birds through a tournament system. The system isn't fair for producers: poultry dealers can play favorites or punish growers who've complained about the system.

The Poultry Grower Ranking Systems rule puts in place clearer and fairer guidelines for poultry dealers to follow when awarding contracts to farmers.

This rule is a proposed rule. USDA is accepting comments for 60 days, then will make changes, and publish a final rule before enforcing it.

3

UNFAIR PRACTICES AND UNDUE PREFERENCES, A PROPOSED RULE

The Unfair Practices and Undue Preferences rule applies to a

broader portion of the meat industry: impacting cattle, hog and chicken farmers.

USDA is proposing to more clearly define unfair business practices between meat processing companies and farmers. For example, delaying or trying to delay payment to farmers is an unfair practice. This rule would also return legal rights to the producers: the ability to take a processor to court, to go to court in their home district, or to ask for attorney fees if they go to court.

If this rule is finalized, it will restore these rights to farmers.

WHAT HAPPENS NEXT?

The 60-day comment period on these three rules ends on Feb. 21, 2017. The task of finalizing the two proposed rules and potentially modifying the interim final rule will fall to the new Secretary of Agriculture.

These rules should be an easy decision for the Trump administration. Trump campaigned on promises to help downtrodden small business people across America, and these rules do precisely that.

We'll keep you posted.



CENTER *for* RURAL AFFAIRS

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02/17



Thank you 2016 donors!
Inside: A list of our amazing donors

FAIRNESS IN THE LIVESTOCK INDUSTRY

BY ANNA JOHNSON, ANNAJ@CFRA.ORG

USDA took an important step in December to improve protections for farmers, when they introduced three “Farmer Fair Practice Rules.”

Much of the livestock industry is vertically integrated; meat processors enter into contract agreements with farmers to grow livestock. The processor owns the feed and animals, and sells them to the farmer at a set price.

A law has been on the books since 1921 that supposedly prevents processors from impacting the market to this degree. However, the law was vague enough that USDA did little to enforce

it. Provisions in the 2008 Farm Bill tightened up the law, requiring USDA to increase protections.

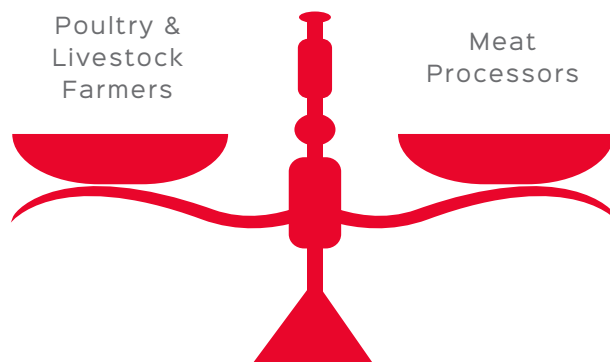
In preparation, USDA held listening sessions in 2010 with farmers across the country. Farmers, at great personal risk, described a number of ways meat processing companies write unfair con-

tracts, require expensive facility upgrades, and punish them when they complain.

USDA then released several draft, or “proposed,” rules to address these concerns and to protect farmers when doing business with meat processors. The backlash from the processing

companies was severe, and Congress stepped in. For several years, Congress forbade USDA from moving forward and finalizing the rules. USDA’s hands were tied.

Last year, Congress lifted that restriction, and USDA introduced the following three rules:



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Center 300 donors give a minimum of \$250 annually. Center 300 is named after Initiative 300, Nebraska's landmark anti-corporate farming law, and an early rallying point for Center supporters across the nation.

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