



CENTER *for* RURAL AFFAIRS

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

REMEMBERING JEFF REYNOLDS

BY BRIAN DEPEW, BRIAND@CFRA.ORG

With a heavy heart, I write to share the news that Jeff Reynolds passed away unexpectedly on April 20, 2017. Jeff directed the Center's small business development program, the Rural Enterprise Assistance Project, or REAP, as it is widely known in Nebraska. He was a veteran staff member, having worked for the Center since 1994.

We will miss his dedication, his good spirit, his can-do attitude, and his uplifting presence.

Jeff was always willing to step up to a new challenge, and I turned to him for wisdom and advice many times during my time at

the Center. Nearly all who worked for Jeff over the years praise him for being a coach, a mentor, a friend, and someone who always believed in them. He was all of those things. He was also a proud father, devoted husband, and dedicated leader in his local community.

Jeff was committed to rural small business development and to each and every small business owner we ever worked with. Since becoming program director in 2000, Jeff led a dramatic expansion of the Center's small business lending, training, and technical assistance work. The future of the Center for Rural Affairs has been

—SEE JEFF REYNOLDS ON PAGE 3



Jeff Reynolds

IMMIGRATION, OPPORTUNITY, AND RURAL AMERICA

STATEMENT OF THE CENTER FOR RURAL AFFAIRS, APRIL 2017

Amidst the turbulent political times for immigrants in our country, the Center for Rural Affairs reiterates its commitment to advancing a set of values that reflects the best of rural America. Among those values are RESPONSIBILITY placed upon each of us to contribute to our community and society, genuine

OPPORTUNITY for all to earn a living, raise a family, and prosper in a rural place, and FAIRNESS that allows all who contribute to the nation's prosperity to share in it.

Based on these values, we are committed to equity and inclusion for all residents of rural America. From the first Native people in North America to the present, waves of newcomers have shaped

rural America into the place we are proud to call home. Today, immigrants, refugees, and US-born folks with roots all over the world are living their American dreams in rural America. As in generations past, shifting demographics bring challenges and change alongside tremendous opportunity and benefits.

—SEE IMMIGRATION, OPPORTUNITY ON PAGE 2

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NOTE FROM THE EDITOR

BY RHEA LANDHOLM, RHEAL@CFRA.ORG

Honoring our spring tradition of recognizing graduates close to our organization, we offer our best wishes to Brock Vetick, son of Shawn and Pat Vetick. Shawn is our accounting clerk. Brock will graduate from Lyons-Decatur Northeast High School. He plans to attend the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, and major in plant biology. His goal is to become a plant geneticist.



THIS EDITION

This edition of our newsletter focuses on citizen INVOLVEMENT and action to shape the future.

You can participate in the future of rural America and affect

change. Together we can commit to equality and inclusion for all newcomers to our rural communities. We can urge our lawmakers to support conservation, beginning farmer and rancher programs, small businesses, and

medicaid expansion.

Read about high school students who have taken initiative and are feeding their peers with veggies grown in their classroom, and learn about one group of farmers and ranchers who are looking at their impacts on the land and planning for the future.

We remember Jeff Reynolds, who was a driving force in advocating for small business development. His impact is felt in rural communities across America.

You can shape the future of your community. Step up with an idea or phone call. Just a little bit can go a long way in our communities.

IMMIGRATION, OPPORTUNITY, CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

We work through the challenges and embrace the changes because we know that diversity makes us stronger and more resilient. New ideas grow when we live in diverse communities. Rural economies thrive when new arrivals join. Towns become more stable and more vibrant when young families move in.

Across rural America, there are examples of small-town schools that are full again thanks to immigrants. We have seen towns once experiencing steep population loss that are stable or even growing as new immigrants arrive. With these new arrivals, many successful small businesses and even new farms are popping up. As new leaders emerge, they help make their towns stronger. All of

this brings renewed opportunity to rural America.

The Center for Rural Affairs will continue on as we have always done: fighting the good fight for everyone, in small towns and rural areas across the country. This includes Native Americans, the first residents of this land. It includes the descendants of all those who have come to rural America over the centuries. And it includes those who have arrived here recently in search of a new life.

The Center leads several initiatives to include rural America's newest residents in advancing our shared values. We are working with new Latino-owned businesses. Our New American Loan Fund is helping Latino entrepreneurs

access the credit they need to succeed. Our bilingual and bicultural farmer training programs offer skill building to Latino farmers in production, business, and marketing to launch successful farms. Our intercultural leadership programs help leaders of all ethnicities and backgrounds in newly diverse towns build inclusivity into the fabric of thriving rural communities.

At the Center for Rural Affairs, our values guide us to come together despite our differences and to work together for a better future. We invite you to join us in putting the values of responsibility, opportunity, and fairness into action in our shared work on behalf of strong rural communities.

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
Printed at West Point News, West Point, Neb.

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State climatologists work with farmers and ranchers to provide a better understanding of future climate and weather pattern projections. Farmers and ranchers can then study their impacts and prepare for the future. | Photo by Rhea Landholm

FARMERS AND RANCHERS APPLY CLIMATE DATA

BY SANDRA RENNER, SANDRAR@CFRA.ORG

For farmers and ranchers, climate and weather are not “new trends” as much as they are experiences of day-to-day reality. There is quite a lot of data available on climate change and no lack of controversy over that same data.

Here at the Center for Rural Affairs, we support farmers and ranchers who work in an ever-changing climate. Our recent conservation learning circles for women farmers and landowners have included guidance in sorting through climate data and making it applicable. Farmers can then study their impacts and prepare for the future.

“You have to make climate change relevant to people, and I think we do that,” said Martha Shulski, state climatologist and director of the Nebraska State Climate Office at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln School of Natural Resources.

Shulski’s service organization acts as a translator of climate data and conditions. Staff members assist with putting current weather and climate conditions into perspective. They also localize data to provide a better understanding of future climate and weather pattern projections. Then, the public can apply the information to everyday use.

In the Midwest, states partner with university extensions at workshops and presentations to address mitigating future impacts of weather with farmers and ranchers. A key piece of what they present is how to apply the latest scientific information by adapting current conservation practices for a more resilient and “weather-ready” farm.

“High Plains states experience what is considered a ‘highly continental climate’ when it comes to weather and climate,” Shulski said. “This means it’s highly

variable and mitigating impacts is even more relevant in ever-changing conditions.”

Part of state climatologists’ responsibilities is looking at current conditions, past trends and future projections. They then create a set of scenarios to show actions that can be taken to predict weather and climate models for the future. This allows farmers to see what will happen in a variety of ways, whether they keep status quo or apply new practices to change future outcomes.

So, what is most important to know about the future climate on the High Plains? Shulski said according to model projections, it’s going to get warmer. Cold seasons will be wetter. Farms will be drier.

“A lot of opportunity exists to take what we’ve learned in the past and apply it to the future,” Shulski adds. “We learn how to better prepare.”

JEFF REYNOLDS, CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

indelibly shaped by Jeff’s vision and hard work.

Jeff fundamentally believed in small business development as a strategy. He helped design, campaign for, and win both state and federal programs that now provide resources to other small business

development organizations. His impact, therefore, extends far beyond the Center and far beyond Nebraska.

I imagine many of you have your own memories of working with Jeff. If you send your memories or condolences along to our office,

we will share your words with his family.

Please keep Jeff’s family and friends in mind in the days, weeks, and months ahead. Jeff, we miss you and are proud to have worked alongside you.

CONTACTING YOUR POLICY MAKERS: BE POLITE, INSISTENT, AND CONSISTENT

BY ANNA JOHNSON, ANNAJ@CFRA.ORG

With your help, the Center for Rural Affairs has a long history of working with lawmakers to help advance policies with big impacts on rural communities. We encourage you to get involved and make sure your representatives support the issues you care about.

TAKE ACTION

Elected officials work on a great deal of legislation impacting rural communities. To have a say, make sure you know your representatives. Each voter is represented by three members of Congress: two senators in the U.S. Senate elected by the people of your state, and one representative in the U.S. House elected by neighbors in your district. Senators hold six-year terms, while House members hold two-year terms.

Each official has an office in Washington, D.C., and at least one office in your state or district. Addresses and phone numbers can be found on their official websites. Mailing lists are useful to stay informed. To make contacting them easier, you can save phone numbers in your cell phone or put the numbers someplace prominent, like on the fridge.

CALL YOUR REPRESENTATIVE

While there are many ways to contact your policy maker, taking part in a “call your representatives” campaign is a useful and effective way to make your voice heard. You can join others ringing in on a particular day about a certain issue.

To help you engage on rural issues, we will sometimes send “action alerts” asking you to con-



Mark Peterson (middle), a farmer near Stanton, Iowa, testified at the Iowa statehouse in April. He is pictured with staff members Anna Johnson and Stephanie Enloe. Testifying is just one way to work with lawmakers to help advance policies. | Photo submitted

tact representatives. Action alerts are emails or postcards that give a summary of an issue and why it is urgent. (In most cases, you may already know about the issue from reading our newsletters, emails, blogs, or social media updates.) We generally send alerts on funding or appropriations bills, or items such as the farm bill.

For example, an action alert might say: “Please call Sen. Grassley at 202.224.3744 to let him know you support full funding for conservation programs.”

When you call, a legislative aide will answer the phone and record your message. Remember: give your name and zip code so they know you are a constituent; stay short and to the point; and stick with one issue per call, per day.

If you forget or lose your representative’s phone number, you may call the Capitol switchboard at 202.224.3121 and operators will forward your call to the appropriate office.

Be sure to thank your representative when they do something you like.

MEET IN PERSON

Representatives periodically have public town hall meetings that provide opportunities to ask about issues you care about, and to meet other people who share your concerns.

Another option is to request a meeting. At the Center for Rural Affairs, we often arrange meetings between constituents and their representatives (or their representatives’ staff). We welcome you to join us.

BUILD RELATIONSHIPS

Your representative will not always vote in your favor or change their position. However, this relationship is similar to others in your life. If you are polite, insistent, and consistent, you can build and maintain a good working relationship.

If you would like to learn more about an issue or how to get involved, contact me at annaj@cfra.org or 515.215.1294.

FROM GREENHOUSE TO CAFETERIA

East Butler Public Schools serves as a pilot for Center for Rural Affairs' Greenhouse to Cafeteria program. Students grow vegetables in a greenhouse and deliver the food to the cafeteria. And, Instructor Shane Hennessy serves as a resource for other schools.

"I like that this activity is not ordinary, it's outside of the classroom."
-Morgan Osmera, sophomore



Morgan Osmera waters blooming plants. Students are responsible for weeding, cleaning, and watering beds, and harvesting vegetables.

"It's cool to have a connection with our lunch. We're able to eat the food we've grown."
-Brittany Timoney, senior



"The food comes straight here to the cafeteria, there is no in-between. The kids like the lettuce, the big bag of lettuce will go fast."
-Kathy Pelan, head cook



Head Cook Kathy Pelan receives lettuce from Brittany Timoney and Alex Christiansen. She then distributes the greens to grades kindergarten through 12th during lunch.

Students Illyana Hamicksburg, Alex Christiansen and Brittany Timoney cut lettuce for the day's lunch and learn tips from Kirstin Bailey, Center for Rural Affairs project organizer. The greenhouse contains raised beds and a hydroponics growing system.

"We brag it up at lunch that we took care of their food. It's great seeing something you did."
-Illyana Hamicksburg, junior



Instructor Shane Hennessy helps students weigh lettuce before taking it to the cafeteria. The two bags totaled 3.25 pounds, which was the largest harvest so far in the school year. | Photos and story by Rhea Landholm



DEAR AGRICULTURE SECRETARY SONNY PERDUE,

BY ANNA JOHNSON, ANNAJ@CFRA.ORG

We congratulate you on your nomination and confirmation as Secretary of Agriculture. We write to you emphasizing United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) programs that support economic growth and environmental health in rural communities. We hope you recognize these opportunities to impact rural communities.

CONSERVATION

Agriculture can have a big impact on water quality. Many farmers and ranchers concerned about soil and water health turn to conservation practices to do their part in stewarding natural resources. USDA administers several programs that support conservation on working lands, including the Environmental Quality Incentive Program and the Conservation Stewardship Program.

CROP INSURANCE

Many farmers rely on crop insurance to buffer the impact of bad years, and we hope you will continue to support an effective and targeted safety net for farmers and ranchers.

BEGINNING FARMERS AND RANCHERS

Our rural communities shrink and suffer when small and mid-size farmers consolidate or leave their farms. Many beginning and socially-disadvantaged farmers and ranchers start out with smaller operations. Supporting these rural entrepreneurs is a way to energize the economies of rural communities.

We ask you to lift up and support programs that benefit beginning and socially-disadvantaged farmers and ranchers.



Stephanie Bertognoli could benefit from a USDA program intended to provide outreach and assistance to women farmers. She raises hogs and bees and is starting an orchard. | Photo by Rhea Landholm

VALUE-ADDED PRODUCER GRANTS

Through the Value-added Producer Grant Program, USDA gives grants to farmers to create or develop value-added and producer-owned businesses. Many farmers and ranchers can no longer make a living on the same number of acres that supported past generations. Diversifying income and entering into value-added enterprises can be a smart economic decision for some producers.

With this program, USDA can help out rural communities by keeping more farmers and ranchers in business.

OUTREACH AND ASSISTANCE

One of USDA's legacies is serving black, Native American, women, and Hispanic farmers. Outreach and Assistance for Socially-disadvantaged and Veteran Farmers and Ranchers Program is one of the few USDA policies that was intended to provide programming exclusively to these populations. Congress renewed

this program in the last Farm Bill, expanding the scope to include veterans. However, they also cut funding in half. We urge you to support and highlight this important work.

SMALL RURAL BUSINESSES

USDA administers the Rural Microentrepreneur Assistance Program that allows organizations (including the Center for Rural Affairs) to give loans and technical assistance to small rural businesses. While agriculture is one driver of rural economies, small businesses are often the glue that ties a rural community together.

This program helps create jobs in rural communities and supports rural entrepreneurs who would otherwise lack access to the capital and information they need to be successful.

Note: Sonny Perdue was confirmed by Congress on April 24 to serve as the Secretary of Agriculture for the USDA.



Health care access remains a challenge for rural residents. Staffing shortages, insufficient mental health services, the costs of caring for an aging population, and the threat of hospital closures all stand as limitations to care. | Photo by Rhea Landholm

RURAL AREAS BEAR BRUNT OF PROPOSED HEALTH LAW CHANGES

BY JORDAN RASMUSSEN, JORDANR@CFRA.ORG

Rural America has once again taken its place in the national health care debate. Across America, analysis shows that rural counties would have shouldered much of the cost shift of the proposed and now dead American Health Care Act.

On average, people in rural counties tend to be older, have lower incomes, and have less choice when it comes to providers and insurers.

Under the proposed legislation, in rural pockets in Nebraska, Arizona, and Tennessee, those aged 60 and older and earning less than

\$30,000 would have seen out-of-pocket premiums rise by at least \$1,000 per month. In some Arizona counties, premiums would have increased by 966 percent. This increase would be cost-prohibitive for low-income, older, rural adults and inhibit their ability to purchase sufficient coverage to meet preventative and maintenance care needs. Many would simply forgo coverage.

Despite the withdrawal of the vote on the American Health Care Act and the indefinite postponement of discussion on replacing the Affordable Care Act, health care access remains a challenge

for rural residents. Staffing shortages, insufficient mental health services, the costs of caring for an aging population, and the threat of hospital closures all stand as limitations to care. Additionally, insurance is a mirage for millions who remain in the coverage gap due to the decisions of a preponderance of rural states not to expand Medicaid coverage.

While the realities of rural America continue to garner nationwide interest, it is time for rural states to also take interest and take a step toward improving access to care by expanding Medicaid.

SMALL TOWN HOUSING, CONTINUED FROM PAGE 8

economic development incentives, but slow to invest in housing development. For a small town, cash incentives for new home construction may make a lot of sense. A \$5,000 or \$10,000 incentive will pay back directly (in property taxes, utilities, and fees) and indirectly (in new residents in town and

new kids in the local school).

Change policy — Most public policy around housing seeks to address low-income housing. By banding together to expand policy to address workforce housing, local advocates can direct additional resources to this challenge. A bill introduced in the Nebraska legisla-

ture would establish a competitive grant process to address workforce housing needs.

Those are a few of the ideas we are thinking about at the Center for Rural Affairs to address rural housing. What are you seeing work in your town? Get in touch.



From greenhouse to cafeteria
Inside: Fresh greens on lunch plates

FROM THE DESK OF THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

NEW APPROACH NEEDED FOR SMALL TOWN HOUSING

BY BRIAN DEPEW, BRIAND@CFRA.ORG

Housing in small towns would take care of itself, or so I used to believe.

If we could get employment, education, health care, and quality of life right, the market would surely solve housing. In many rural areas, I figured, decades of population decline left more housing stock than people. Certainly a lack of houses wasn't stopping people from moving to our small town.

I was wrong.

Now I understand the real story. I've heard from employers, from young families, and from recent college graduates. We're interested in moving to your small town, they say, but we can't find housing. More often than not, they end up living in a nearby larger town with

more housing options.

Consider what you can do locally to address this challenge.

Financing — A growing number of banks have stopped writing mortgages for less than \$50,000. Where property values are low, this effectively blocks low and middle income workers out of home ownership. What can you do to counter this trend? Community-centric lenders such as local development agencies, nonprofit lenders, and community-oriented banks could fill the gap.

Rethink Construction — Have you ever noticed how every new home looks the same and costs \$200,000 to build? Rural Studio, a group of architects at Auburn University in Alabama, has developed a house that costs just \$20,000.

Their price point is competitive with a trailer home. By thinking differently about materials and construction methods, their designs can help expand your thinking about what is possible.

Get deliberate about repairs — Epicenter, a nonprofit in Green River, Utah (population 929), launched Fix It First, a program that provides low-interest loans and technical assistance to help homeowners fix minor problems (e.g. roof leak) before they become major problems. Dealing with issues early helps keep local housing stock in good repair and saves residents money.

Put cash on the table — We're quick to invest public money in