



CENTER *for* RURAL AFFAIRS

YOUR RURAL NEWS FOR OVER 45 YEARS | LYONS, NEBRASKA | POPULATION 851 | JANUARY & FEBRUARY 2019

FARM BILL COMPROMISE REACHED

BY ANNA JOHNSON, ANNAJ@CFRA.ORG

Congress's compromise farm bill secures several victories for conservation, beginning farmers, and rural communities, while failing to cap payments to the largest farms or secure long-term funding for working lands conservation.

We are encouraged to see meaningful investment in beginning farmers, conservation, and programs that support rural vitality.

At the same time, we are deeply disappointed that Congress disregarded bipartisan reforms to cap payments to the largest farms and address consolidation in agriculture.

—SEE **FARM BILL** ON PAGE 4



Justino Borja loves working the land alongside his wife, son, and twin daughters. He serves as a farmer leader, sharing his knowledge in the Center for Rural Affairs' learning circles. | Photo by Lucia Schulz

JUSTINO FARMS BY CREATING OPPORTUNITIES

BY LUCIA SCHULZ, LUCIAS@CFRA.ORG

Inside this issue

- 2 Note from the editor
- 2 Farmers deserve fairness in the livestock industry
- 5 Omaha Nation is working hard to improve health and economic outlooks
- 6 Medicaid expansion is a win for rural health care
- 7 Staff spotlight: Variety is the spice of life for Jordan
- 8 From the executive director: looking forward to the new year

Justino Borja's tenacity grows from deep roots. He comes from a developing country in Central America, a family of farmers, and a history of working the land. No doubt, that's where Justino developed his determination and his love for family and land.

Since he has been in the U.S., Justino has always wanted to have his own farm. At first, he had the support of his three brothers, but little by little he found himself alone in his desire to farm his own land.

One day, the Schuyler, Nebras-

ka, resident heard about classes the Center for Rural Affairs offers, and he decided to attend. What began with a dream started to take shape as a possibility and a reality.

Justino learned that if he continued going to the classes, he would get the help required to own his farm. He needed land if he was going to grow crops, so he asked people around his community where he might farm. Center staff also helped Justino with the search. Any lead he received, Justino would immediately follow

—SEE **OPPORTUNITIES** ON PAGE 3

NOTE FROM THE EDITOR

BY RHEA LANDHOLM, RHEAL@CFRA.ORG

Since its inception, the Center for Rural Affairs has chosen to advance a set of values that reflect the best of rural America. This month's newsletter focuses on "PROGRESS that strengthens rural communities, small businesses, and family farms and ranches."

In this edition, you will read about Latino farmer Justino Borja who is making progress toward his dream of owning land.

We are excited that Congress

has finally advanced the farm bill. Together, we secured several victories for conservation, beginning farmers, and rural communities. Unfortunately, the bill fails to cap payments to the largest farms or secure long-term funding for working lands conservation.

We are hoping that progress can be made with USDA's Farmer Fair Practices Rules. The rulemaking process will re-open this spring.

Other progress can be seen in Nebraska as they voted for Medic-



aid expansion and on the Omaha Reservation as they look toward their future of food independence. Additionally, our executive director talks about progress the Center has made this year. Progress we couldn't have done without you.

CORPORATE FARMING NOTES

FARMERS DESERVE FAIRNESS IN THE LIVESTOCK INDUSTRY

BY CORA FOX, CORAF@CFRA.ORG

You may have heard that the U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) Grain Inspection, Packers and Stockyards Administration (GIPSA) now functions under the purview of the Agricultural Marketing Service, but that's not all. According to USDA, the rulemaking process for Farmer Fair Practices Rules will re-open in spring 2019.

Originally introduced by USDA's GIPSA, the Farmer Fair Practices Rules would have afforded contract producers in the poultry and livestock industries with basic fairness protections.

In brief, the rules would have:

- Allowed producers to protect their rights without having to prove that a processor's actions hurt the entire livestock industry;

- Provided protections for producers, should processors limit producers' legal rights in livestock or poultry contracts, or require unreasonable capital investment in their operations; and

- Required poultry processors to use greater fairness and transparency when purchasing birds from several producers.

The rules were released in late 2016 by the Obama administration, but were shelved by the Trump administration. A recent lawsuit filed by the Organization for Competitive Markets encouraged USDA to re-open the rulemaking process, giving farmers, ranchers, and organizations representing them the opportunity for their voices to be heard.

For decades, the Center has advocated for fairness in the livestock industry—most recently

supporting the rules by submitting comments to USDA in March 2017.

As the agriculture industry continues to become more consolidated, producers deserve protection from anti-competitive and unfair treatment. Poor policy has allowed a small number of powerful corporations to dominate the poultry and livestock industries. They control the industry from top to bottom, often dictating the price individual producers are paid and how they will raise their poultry and livestock.

Without common sense regulations in place to promote fairness in the agriculture industry, the livelihoods of America's family farmers and ranchers will continue to deteriorate at the hands of big agribusiness.

PAPER & E-NEWS

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

Editing and layout by Rhea Landholm
Additional editing by Liz Daehnke

Printed at West Point News, West Point, NE

The Center for Rural Affairs is
an equal opportunity employer and provider.

Address corrections:
You may correct your mailing address by faxing the back page to 402.687.2200, or call the Center for Rural Affairs at 402.687.2100.



“IF YOU HAVE LOVE AND KNOWLEDGE ON HOW TO WORK THE LAND, FARMING IS THE RIGHT CHOICE.”

—JUSTINO BORJA



Justino Borja, kneeling right, found land and a mentor to accomplish his dream of farming. He works the land alongside his family. | Photo by Lucia Schulz

OPPORTUNITIES, CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

up and investigate.

Around this time, Justino was attending English as a Second Language (ESL) classes. His instructor Virgil was a retired farmer. When Justino learned of Virgil’s background, he asked about finding land. By this time, Virgil had learned of Justino’s background and strong interest in agriculture. They found that they shared a chemical-free approach to farming, so it didn’t take long to negotiate that Justino could farm some of Virgil’s land for free if he did not use chemicals on his produce.

After three years of working Virgil’s land, Justino is benefiting from Virgil’s mentorship. For example, Virgil and his son Frank planted some tobacco plants for Justino. When tobacco leaves are soaked in water and a little soap, the resulting liquid is sprayed on produce to reduce pest damage.

Virgil has allowed Justino to use more land so he can expand his

business. Justino added a parcel where he grows green beans and herbs native to El Salvador. Following business and marketing advice from Center staff, Justino has developed two marketing avenues for his high quality, specialty produce: local restaurants and his coworkers, who are hungry for flavors from the home country.

“If you have love and knowledge on how to work the land, farming is the right choice,” Justino said.

As a Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education (SARE) farmer leader, Justino has grown and benefited from his involvement in learning circles. Hosting peers has helped his confidence and knowledge level increase. What he loves most is working the land alongside his wife, son, and twin daughters.

“I love teaching my children that farming is just as productive as any other profession,” he said.

Justino’s parents visit every

year and encourage him to continue with his farming dream. This coming season, Justino is hoping to grow cantaloupe and watermelon. His brothers are starting to show interest in farming once again, especially after seeing Justino’s enthusiasm, positive attitude, and the expansion of his business to include produce other than tomatoes and several varieties of chilies.

He will not give up on finding his own land to farm. He needs tenacity—and he has tons of it.

ONE-ON-ONE ASSISTANCE

The Center for Rural Affairs offers one-on-one technical assistance to farmers in networking, education, and leadership, as well as learning circles and group trainings on business and finance, production, and marketing. These services are offered in both Spanish and English.

FARM BILL, CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

CONSERVATION

Farm bill conservation programs provide support and pathways for farmers and ranchers to improve their stewardship of soil and water resources on their land.

We are pleased that Congress has maintained the Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP) in the final bill, and included many policy changes to strengthen the program. These include increased support for key practices such as cover crops, resource-conserving crop rotations, and advanced grazing management.

While we also appreciate that overall conservation title funding was maintained, we are concerned that the funding for CSP is structured such that it and other conservation programs will enter the next farm bill debate at a funding disadvantage. Future funding for conservation will remain a top priority for the Center.

PAYMENT RULES WILL FURTHER FARM CONSOLIDATION

We are deeply disappointed that Congress did not step up to fix provisions that drive farm consolidation and funnel taxpayer dollars to the largest operations. Sadly missing from the final bill are Sen. Chuck Grassley's (R-IA) bipartisan proposals to strengthen "actively engaged" provisions, which would have closed loopholes in farm programs that allow many (loosely defined) "managers" to receive payments of taxpayer dollars every year.

Congress chose instead to take a step in the opposite direction and expand these loopholes. The existing payment limitation of \$125,000 can now be multiplied not only via spouse and immediate family members, but also by adding nephews, nieces, and first cousins.

This will effectively allow mega farms to continue to collect un-



The farm bill was passed in December, with several victories for conservation, beginning farmers, and rural communities. | Photo by Rhea Landholm

limited payments and perpetuate misuse of taxpayer dollars. We will continue our decades-long campaign to rein in these unlimited payments.

BEGINNING FARMERS AND RURAL VITALITY

We praise the bill's provisions for programs that support new farmers and rural vitality.

Several valuable programs for beginning, socially-disadvantaged, and veteran farmers; value-added agriculture; and local foods are combined into two new programs that will permanently preserve their functions. These are the Farming Opportunities Training and Outreach Program, and the Local Agricultural Marketing Program.

In addition, Congress increased funding for the Conservation Reserve Program - Transition Incentive Program to \$50 million. This change will do important work to facilitate beginning, socially-disadvantaged, and veteran farmers working with retiring farmers to access land. We deeply appreciate that Congress has chosen to invest in beginning farmers and rural communities through these programs.

Another program that stimu-

lates rural small businesses development, the Rural Microentrepreneur Assistance Program (RMAP), was reauthorized but, unfortunately, not funded in the final bill. RMAP's support for loan funding and technical assistance to rural entrepreneurs will not continue unless Congress takes separate action to restore its funding, which we encourage them to do.

A final bright note in the bill is the restoration of the position of Undersecretary of Rural Development at the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA). Maintaining Rural Development as a Mission Area within USDA keeps rural programs on equal footing with the other functions of USDA.

OVERALL

Congressional action on this bill is long overdue. This compromise bill secures important victories for beginning farmers, programs that support rural vitality, and conservation.

But, over the next five years, Congress will have a responsibility to keep funding strong for conservation and rural microenterprise development, and boldly address the policies and incentives that reward only the largest farms and drive farm consolidation.



In a recent report, the Center for Rural Affairs found 82 percent of residents on the Omaha Reservation in northeast Nebraska indicated they would be willing to devote time and energy to learning about food traditions. Here, tribal members attend a workshop on Indian corn processing. | Photo by Rhea Landholm

OMAHA NATION IS WORKING HARD TO IMPROVE HEALTH AND ECONOMIC OUTLOOKS

BY RHEA LANDHOLM, RHEAL@CFRA.ORG

The majority of people in the Omaha Nation express a desire for greater local access to fresh produce, according to a report released by the Center for Rural Affairs and the Omaha Nation community.

“Digging In: Supporting a Healthy, Sustainable Food Future in Omaha Nation,” examines the state of the food system on the Omaha Reservation in northeast Nebraska.

The report identifies strategies toward realizing a food system that meets the needs of its people and includes details on the study area; data relating to health, economics, culture, and the food system; and input from community members.

“The Omaha Nation community is working hard to improve health and economic outlooks,” said Kathie Starkweather, Farm and Community director at the Center for Rural Affairs. “By asserting a desire to rebuild a self-sufficient food system, they will create a healthier community, revitalize traditional foods, and develop a more resilient Nation.”

Key findings of the report include:

- In Macy, 61.1 percent of all families and 66.2 percent of all people live below the poverty line.
- More than 80 percent of respondents travel on average 62 miles roundtrip to do the majority of their grocery shopping.

- More than 54 percent of participants expressed a desire for greater local access to fresh produce, with 78 percent of respondents indicating better food would improve health for their families.

The community has worked with Nebraska Indian Community College (NICC) and the Center for Rural Affairs since 2011 through a community foods project, with a goal of bringing fresh foods and healthy eating back to the Omaha Reservation, including the communities of Macy and Walthill.

For more information and to view “Digging In: Supporting a Healthy, Sustainable Food Future in Omaha Nation,” visit cfra.org/publications/DiggingInOmaha.

MEDICAID EXPANSION IS A WIN FOR RURAL HEALTH CARE

BY JORDAN RASMUSSEN, JORDANR@CFRA.ORG

On Election Day, voters in Idaho, Nebraska, and Utah, approved the expansion of Medicaid. This expansion will extend health insurance coverage to more than 300,000 low-income residents. When implemented, no longer will residents earning less than 138 percent of the federal poverty level be left without insurance coverage because they earn too little to qualify for subsidies to purchase coverage from the insurance marketplace and too much to be eligible for Medicaid.

For the thousands of rural residents who currently fall in the coverage gap, this vote means they will now be able to get the health insurance they need.

In Nebraska, the Center for Rural Affairs, coalition partners, and the state's voters accomplished what the Legislature could not—the expansion of Medicaid coverage for 90,000 Nebraskans. Initiative 427 passed statewide by a 53 percent to 47 percent margin.

Nebraskans in the state's rural counties have much to gain with Medicaid expansion. Of residents estimated to be in the Medicaid coverage gap, adults between the ages of 18 and 64, earning less than \$17,000 a year, nearly 36 percent live in rural counties.

Even for rural residents who are employed, insurance coverage is not always a benefit offered or accessible, because of income limitations.

U.S. Census Bureau data finds a greater percentage of those employed without insurance reside in the Nebraska's most rural counties: 12.32 percent compared



Melissa Smith and her family, of Denton, Nebraska, teeter on the edge of the health care coverage gap. Medicaid expansion helps offer assurance. | Photo courtesy of Wildfire Contact

to the state's average of 11.42 percent. Expansion will provide insurance coverage for thousands of working rural residents.

Expansion will help defer a significant portion of uncompensated care costs currently shouldered by rural clinics and hospitals and ultimately passed on to consumers. For many rural hospitals, reimbursement for services provided to expansion eligible patients will help hospitals remain viable and able to provide care for all community members.

Implementation now rests in part with the Nebraska Legislature. During the upcoming session, lawmakers will determine how to fund the state's share of Medicaid expansion. States are responsible for 10 percent of the costs of expansion. The federal government will cover the remaining 90 percent. For legislators, it will be imperative to act in an expedient manner, seek a funding mechanism that is sustainable,

while also protecting funding for education, property tax relief, and other critical services.

Passage of the initiative also requires the Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services to submit a State Plan Amendment to the federal government by April 1, 2019. Additional staffing and infrastructure are also required to effectively implement the expansion. Enrollment in this new Medicaid eligibility category is anticipated to begin in 2020.

Similar implementation efforts are required in Utah. Idaho's ballot initiative included a pay for and enrollment will begin in April 2019.

Voters in these three states helped bring health care coverage to more than 300,000 of their neighbors. Now, it is up to state legislatures and administrations to see through this call for health care coverage.

STAFF SPOTLIGHT

VARIETY IS THE SPICE OF LIFE FOR JORDAN

BY LIZ DAEHNKE, COMMUNICATIONS CONSULTANT

The daily work grind for many people consists of doing the same thing over and over. Jordan Feyerherm, however, spends his days doing everything from teaching cooking classes to writing grants. No day is the same for him, and he wouldn't have it any other way.

For the last two and half years, Jordan's position as a community organizing associate for the Center for Rural Affairs has given him the chance to take on a wide variety of responsibilities, though he says it comes down to the people.

"At the heart of my work is connecting with people in rural communities," Jordan said. "I go all over the state to help create robust networks of passionate, community-minded individuals."

Though he was born and raised in Nebraska, Jordan's mother and brother moved to the U.S. from Bogotá, Colombia. Jordan graduated from culinary school, then worked for a small Persian restaurant. He also has an education in global and Latin American studies.

He says experiences like these have taught him to learn about and share culture through food.

"I became aware, and very interested in, how different and similar people were from all parts of the world," Jordan said. "While I sometimes struggled with my own identity, or in what in-group



Jordan Feyerherm, left, leads a salsa workshop in Macy, Nebraska. At the heart of his work is connecting with people in rural communities. | Photo by Rhea Landholm

I 'belonged,' I was also left with a deep curiosity and appreciation for learning about and connecting with other cultures."

He has been able to use the knowledge he's acquired as a first generation American to help make positive changes through his work in community inclusion and food access. He says working at the Center has afforded him the opportunity to combine these different aspects into his everyday work, and the variety is part of what makes his job so interesting and enjoyable.

"I absolutely love that rarely are two days the same," he said. "I can measure my success in connecting with people. I can approach situations in a creative way, but still have the support of a robust and diverse team. What I like most about working for the Center is the trust and support they place in

every employee."

In Jordan's eyes, there couldn't be a more rewarding and positive position.

"I'm inspired by meeting so many new people and assisting in building networks of leaders who all share a passion for making their communities stronger, more inviting places for everyone to live," he said. "Nothing is more satisfying than actively working toward the change you want to see in the world."

In his free time, Jordan loves to work in his garden, and put his culinary skills to the test in the kitchen as often as he can.

Jordan works from his home office, where his two dogs act as his secretarial assistants. He primarily serves central and eastern Nebraska, eastern Iowa, and the Omaha Reservation. He can be reached at 402.580.1516 or jordanf@cfra.org.

NEW YEAR, CONTINUED FROM PAGE 8

multi-year effort to reach full food security on two Native American reservations.

These are just a few of your achievements. Taken together with our full body of work and com-

bined with the work each of you is doing in your own community, we are shaping the future of rural America.

Our work may not always be easy, and the path forward may

not always be clear. What does remain clear is your collective commitment to advancing the values and mission of the Center.

I feel so lucky to do this work with each of you.



CENTER *for* RURAL AFFAIRS

145 MAIN STREET, PO BOX 136 | LYONS, NE 68038-0136
CFRA.ORG | INFO@CFRA.ORG

Address Service Requested

01/19



Farm bill compromise reached

Inside: Farm bill finally approved by Congress

FROM THE DESK OF THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

LOOKING FORWARD TO THE NEW YEAR

BY BRIAN DEPEW, BRIAND@CFRA.ORG

As we look forward to 2019, I am amazed what you—our staff, our board, and our supporters—have achieved.

The past year marked the Center's 45th anniversary. I am proud that the Center remains vibrant and relevant. That was true in 1973 at our founding, and it is true today.

Challenges—and we saw a few the last year—can test our patience and resolve. We persevere because we are guided by our pragmatic commitment to change and our clear and consistent values.

Consider a few highlights from the last year.

- The Center has always attracted a national constituency.

Increasingly, we are matching that with staff and contractors on the ground outside of Nebraska. In recent years, we've added staff and contract organizers in Kansas, South Dakota, and Iowa. Our work reaches even further through partnerships and through you, our supporters.

- Congress tested our patience and our resolve in 2018. As this goes to print, it appears that a stalemate on the five-year farm bill is broken. Many of you engaged in the campaign for a bill that invests in conservation, creates opportunity, and curbs corporate control.

- We expanded our work to serve new immigrants in Nebraska. A team of 10 staff now works in communities across the state providing business assistance, ca-

capacity building, and local organizing to create inclusive and vibrant communities for all residents.

- In our home state of Nebraska, the Center backed a ballot initiative to expand Medicaid. As a result, Nebraska joined three other largely rural states in expanding Medicaid at the ballot box. Low-income working adults across all four states gained access to critical health coverage.

- Our small business assistance work reached 1,349 businesses and assisted 126 of them with lending capital. We now make small business loans up to \$150,000 to generate small town economic development.

- Our staff and local partners helped 462 gardeners as part of a

—SEE **NEW YEAR** ON PAGE 7