



# CENTER *for* RURAL AFFAIRS

YOUR RURAL NEWS FOR OVER 40 YEARS | LYONS, NEBRASKA | POPULATION 851 | MAY & JUNE 2018

## FARM BILL FOR RURAL AMERICA

BY ANNA JOHNSON, ANNAJ@CFRA.ORG, WITH THE ASSISTANCE OF POLICY PROGRAM STAFF

**T**he farm bill debate has begun. The Center's farm bill priorities, released in November 2017, continue our work of addressing the real needs of rural communities: supporting family farms, preserving natural resources for our children and grandchildren, creating opportunity for the next generation of beginning farmers, and fostering rural economic opportunity.

### CONSERVATION

*Support farmers in practicing conservation*

- Preserve full funding for Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP) and Environmental Quality Incentive Program (EQIP).
- Support farmers and ranchers in expanding conservation practices by making the transition from EQIP to CSP clear and easy.
- Support farmers enrolling in conservation by reserving 40 percent of Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) acres for continuous CRP and the Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program.
- Strengthen conservation monitoring to allow for tracking conservation program impacts.

*Help farmers manage risk through conservation*

- Offer higher crop insurance premium subsidy rates to farmers implementing conservation plans.



Jim French, Center senior policy advisor, (left) checks out Gene Albers' (right) field of cover crops near Cunningham, Kansas, in March. One of the Center's farm bill priorities is to eliminate crop insurance rules that treat planting cover crops differently than other farming practices. | Photo by Rhea Landholm

- Eliminate crop insurance rules that treat planting cover crops differently from other farming practices, forcing farmers to terminate cover crops by a certain date to qualify for crop insurance. Planting cover crops should be treated like every other farming practice, from cultivating to spraying.
- Offer lower subsidies for crop insurance premiums when farmers plant in native sod, to incentivize its protection.

—SEE FARM BILL PRIORITIES ON PAGE 4

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**THE CURRENT FARM BILL EXPIRES  
SEPT. 30, 2018**

# 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 "ACTION to shape the future."

Throughout this edition, you will see this value in rural residents forming food policy councils; in Nebraskans as they seek to put Medicaid expansion on the November ballot; and in our own Veronica Spindola as she assists

rural entrepreneurs.

Although the U.S. Department of Justice is allowing Bayer and Monsanto to merge, we've heard from many of you who took action, by submitting comments against the merger.

Action is also found in our executive director's essay as he tells us about the Center's work with immigrants to expand their involvement in leadership, businesses, and farms.

And, finally, we ask you to take



action while lawmakers in Washington work on a new farm bill. For more, visit [cfra.org](http://cfra.org).

## CORPORATE FARMING NOTES

# BAYER AND MONSANTO ALLOWED TO MERGE

BY ANNA JOHNSON, ANNAJ@CFRA.ORG

A major wave of consolidation that kicked off in 2016 continues to move forward with the U.S. Department of Justice allowing chemical producer Bayer to acquire the U.S. based seed company Monsanto, reported April 9.

As giant, transnational corporations increase their power over the market, independent farmers are left with fewer options and suffer from less competition among input providers.

For nearly two years, this proposal has worked its way through both domestic and international boards for approval. In March, the European Union released their consent of the \$62.5 billion buy, after Bayer agreed to sell assets to rival BASF. The newly-merged



The merger of Bayer with Monsanto creates a company with control of more than a quarter of the world's seed and pesticide market. | Photo by Rhea Landholm

company will have control of more than a quarter of the world's seed and pesticide market.

Fewer and fewer companies producing seeds and chemicals for farmers spells fewer choices and higher prices in return. The vast majority of the globe's seed is developed by private companies, which means their profits come first – before the health of rural communities or natural resources.

With lax enforcement of existing anti-monopoly laws, it is increasingly clear that legislative action will be required to preserve competition in the marketplace.

This is the latest in a trio of mega mergers of seed companies. Other unions include Dow and Dupont, and ChemChina and Syngenta.

The sale of Monsanto to Bayer is anticipated to close during the second quarter of 2018.

## 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](http://cfra.org), or email us at [info@cfra.org](mailto:info@cfra.org).

Editing and layout by Rhea Landholm

Printed at West Point News,  
West Point, Nebraska

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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.





Failing to expand access to insurance forces health care providers to offer uncompensated care. Providers and insurers ultimately shift this cost to all patients and policyholders, and place the viability of rural hospitals and clinics in peril. | Photo by Rhea Landholm

## PETITION DRIVE UNDERWAY TO EXPAND MEDICAID

BY JORDAN RASMUSSEN, JORDANR@CFRA.ORG

Nebraska is seeking to join 32 other states and the District of Columbia in expanding Medicaid. A petition drive is underway to pose the question to voters in the November general election.

The Midwest state is following Maine's lead. In November 2017, Maine was the first state to expand Medicaid by ballot box, passing with 59 percent approval. The circumstances surrounding Maine's referendum mirror concerns in Nebraska with similar rural and aging populations and ardent opposition to expansion from the executive branch.

Additionally, Idaho and Utah are in the midst of Medicaid expansion ballot initiatives.

Insure the Good Life, a coalition of stakeholders, residents, and organizations, including the Center for Rural Affairs, leads the effort to gather 85,000 signatures by July 6, adding Medicaid expansion to the ballot.

Furthermore, the Center's

Board of Directors voted to back the ballot campaign at their recent quarterly meeting.

Medicaid expansion in Nebraska will extend coverage to nearly 90,000 Nebraskans who have fallen into the health insurance coverage gap.

These neighbors – seniors, parents, and hard-working residents – are employed on farms and ranches or in local businesses and nursing facilities. Yet, they earn too little to qualify for subsidies to purchase insurance from the Health Insurance Marketplace while also earning too much to qualify for Medicaid.

This increased coverage is critically important. More than a quarter of Nebraska's uninsured residents who would qualify for the expanded health care coverage reside in rural counties.

People in rural communities are already at a disadvantage. The limited availability of health care providers and facilities, greater travel distances, and limited

financial resources make access challenging.

Rural Nebraska's economy is built on small businesses. Of businesses with 50 or fewer employees, only 18.8 percent offer insurance coverage. The majority of workers pay premiums and other out-of-pocket costs, or forego coverage altogether.

Failing to expand access to insurance forces health care providers to offer uncompensated care. Providers and insurers ultimately shift this cost to all patients and policyholders, and place the viability of rural hospitals and clinics in peril.

As provided under the Affordable Care Act, expansion of Medicaid protects health care services of all Nebraskans and benefits our state, our communities, and our residents.

Now is the time for Nebraskans, and residents of the 17 states that have not expanded Medicaid, to have a voice in deciding the future of health care. The job is not done until all 50 states have expanded Medicaid.

To learn more or to get involved in the Insure the Good Life ballot initiative, visit [insurethegoodlife.com](http://insurethegoodlife.com).

TO LEARN MORE OR GET INVOLVED,  
VISIT [INSURETHEGOODLIFE.COM](http://INSURETHEGOODLIFE.COM)



U.S. Reps. Roger Marshall and Ron Estes complete a simulation on the effects of heavy rainfall on bare soil (Marshall) as opposed to soil under cover crops (Estes), or continuous vegetation, at an event on March 28 in Wichita. Attendees heard about success of conservation in the Cheney Lake Watershed from two farmers who participate in working lands conservation programs, Center for Rural Affairs, Cheney Lake Watershed Inc., City of Wichita, Kansas Natural Resource Conservation Service, Kansas Association of Conservation Districts, and the Environmental Protection Agency. | Photo by Rhea Landholm

## FARM BILL MARKER BILLS

Bills have been introduced to be included in the final farm bill. The Center for Rural Affairs supports:

- Give our Resources the Opportunity to Work (GROW) Act,
- Strengthening Our Investment in Land (SOIL) Act,
- Crop Insurance Modernization Act of 2018,
- American Prairie Conservation Act of 2017,
- Next Generation in Agriculture Act,
- Beginning Farmer and Rancher Opportunity Act,
- Local Food and Regional Market Supply (FARMS) Act, and
- Healthy Fields and Farm Economies Act.

## FARM BILL PRIORITIES, CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

### CROP INSURANCE REFORM

*Support rural communities by crop insurance system reform.*

- Cap crop insurance premium subsidies at \$50,000 per operation. (Only applies to multi-peril policies since they are subsidized, and would not apply to crop-hail policies, which are not subsidized.)
- Set a limit of one crop insurance subsidy per operation.
- Apply a \$900,000 Adjusted Gross Income limit on eligible crop insurance premium subsidies.
- Eliminate the Harvest Price Option subsidy, which allows farmers to hedge against future prices at the taxpayers' expense.
- Disallow established farmers to transfer yield data from their existing land to newly acquired land, supporting beginning farmers.

*Fairer use of taxpayer dollars for crop insurance*

- Remove the requirement that the Standard Reinsurance Agreement be budget neutral, allowing

the Risk Management Agency to negotiate a better deal for the American people.

- Reduce crop insurance companies' target rate of return to 12 percent and reinvest the savings into crop insurance program improvements.
- Require annual release of data from crop insurance companies on profits, losses, and other activities.

*Support all farmers in accessing risk management tools*

- Support Whole Farm Revenue Protection (WFRP) usage for farms with community-supported agriculture.
- Offer additional compensation to insurance agents for time to write WFRP policies.

### BEGINNING, SOCIALLY-DISADVANTAGED, & VETERAN FARMERS; RURAL DEVELOPMENT; AND LOCAL FOODS

*Support beginning farmers*

- Improve the CRP - Transition Incentives Program (CRP-TIP) by

removing the current funding limitation, allowing any CRP contract holder to participate, and provide additional funding for outreach.

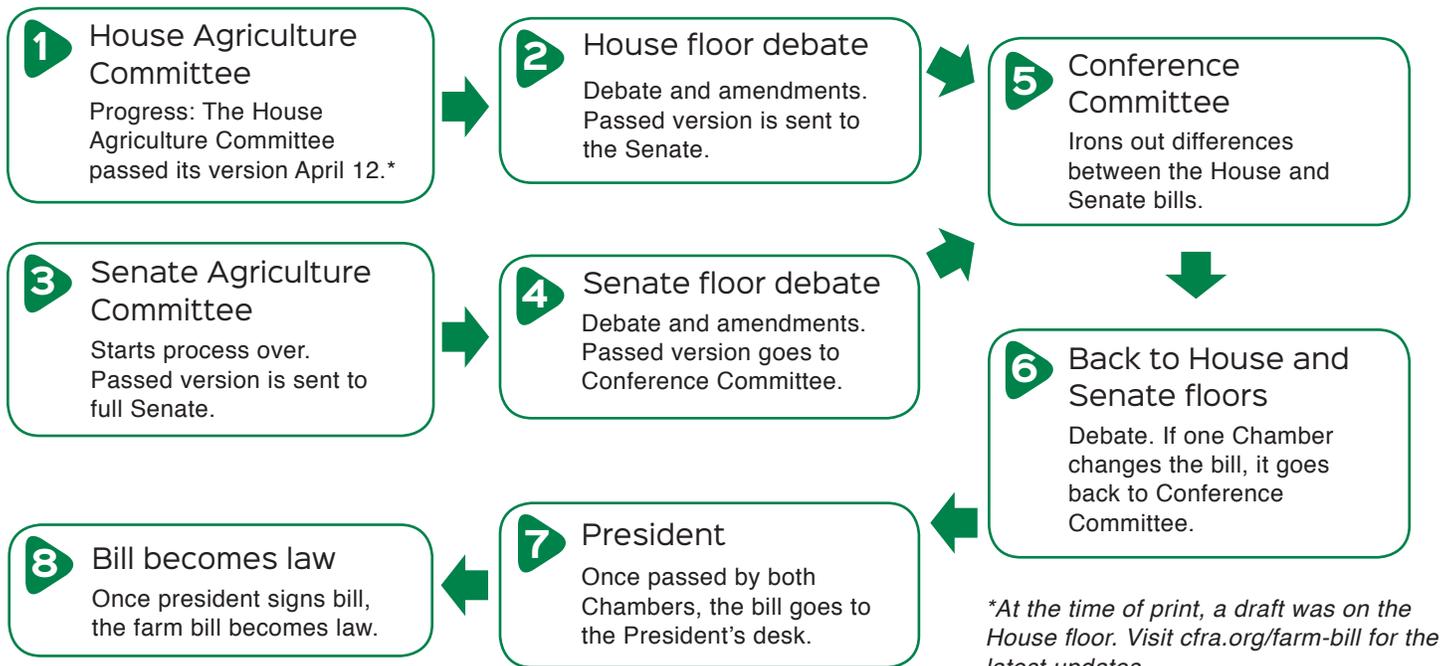
- Increase beginning farmers' access to conservation programs.
- Permanently fund the Beginning Farmer and Rancher Development Program at \$50 million per year.
- Raise the cap on direct ownership loans to \$500,000 to help beginning farmers better access land and credit.
- Expand access to crop insurance for beginning farmers.

*Support socially-disadvantaged and veteran farmers*

- Fund the Outreach and Assistance to Socially-Disadvantaged and Veteran Farmers and Ranchers Program at \$50 million.
- Improve the CRP-TIP program, which is available to beginning, socially-disadvantaged, and veteran farmers.



# Road to the 2018 farm bill



## FARM BILL PRIORITIES, CONTINUED FROM PAGE 4

### Support rural communities

- Fully fund Rural Development programs.
- Fund the Rural Microentrepreneur Assistance Program (RMAP) at \$5 million per year for both grants and loans.
- Continue funding the Value-Added Producer Grant Program and other programs that foster value-added and local foods systems.
- Preserve the position of Rural Development as a full mission area within USDA.

### Support local foods

- Help farmers reach new markets through outreach, cost-share, and technical assistance programs.
- Increase access to fresh, healthy, local food among low-income groups and communities in need.
- Develop new and strengthen existing infrastructure that connects producers to consumers.

## TAKE ACTION

- Make your voice heard. Call, email, or write your elected officials.
- Step up. Write a letter to the editor. Speak out in your community. Attend a listening session.
- Pitch in to support the effort. Your donation today helps ensure we have the resources to share your values with representatives in Washington. Please use the enclosed postage-paid envelope.
- Make sure you sign up for our email alerts for the latest farm bill news.

## LIVESTOCK

### Promote fairness for family farmers

- Require USDA to publish and finalize the Farmer Fair Practice Rules under the Grain Inspection, Packers & Stockyards Administration (GIPSA), and, in doing so, enact much needed protections for poultry and livestock producers.
- Restore GIPSA as an independent agency within USDA.

## ORGANIC AGRICULTURE

### Support organic agriculture

- Provide USDA's National Organic Program with increased funding and staff to match industry growth.
- Fund programs for farmers transitioning to organic, such as the EQIP Organic Initiative, and \$11.5 million per year for the Organic Cost Share Certification Program.

## NUTRITION ASSISTANCE

### Support nutrition assistance

- Maintain current levels of Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) funding, with no cuts.
- Maintain the current structure of the program. We do not support a shift to block grants.
- Keep SNAP in the farm bill.

For more information and updates, visit [cfra.org/farm-bill](http://cfra.org/farm-bill).

# STRONG REGIONAL FOOD SYSTEMS KEEP WEALTH WITHIN COMMUNITIES, HELP STUDENTS SEE FUTURE

BY SANDRA RENNER, SANDRAR@CFRA.ORG

**F**ood and economic security in rural communities is directly related to community development.

In many rural areas, food purchased at grocery stores is imported, and dollars spent for this food ultimately end up out of state.

For example, in our home state of Nebraska, our staff found residents spend nearly \$5 billion annually on food. Approximately 90 percent of that money leaves the state, as reported in a 2015 Center for Rural Affairs white paper.

In response, Center staff brought in Mark Winne, a national food policy council expert, and together hosted a public discussion.

The conversation centered on what makes strong regional food systems. Rural communities are strengthened by keeping the wealth within the community, specifically with local food producers and businesses. Students can see their future within their communities when they have a connection to their local food system. Healthy systems provide an avenue for communities to work together on issues they care about, and tend to be found in more engaged communities.

As a result of the dialogue, the Nebraska Food Council was formed. The working group contains seats for rural and urban producers, processors, wholesale markets, health care and nutrition, nongovernmental and religious organizations, public health and services, environmental and natural resources, food deserts, and food assistance recipients. There is a place for everyone at the table.

This diverse body of partici-



A 2015 Center for Rural Affairs white paper found Nebraska residents spend nearly \$5 billion annually on food. Approximately 90 percent of that money leaves the state. Our staff is working to combat that by leading community food efforts statewide and on the Omaha and Santee Reservations. Pictured is Luzena Tyndall, of Macy, Nebraska, who grew her first-ever tomatoes in 2016 with our help. | Photo by Suzi French

## WHAT IS A FOOD COUNCIL?

“Councils build connections across stakeholders and collaborate to improve health, food access, natural resource protection, economic development, and production agriculture for all its community’s members. Using this cross-sector approach, food councils solve broad food system issues and give communities more control over the food they consume.” - Community Food Strategies

pants strives to create equitable access and opportunity to all of Nebraska’s communities, producers, and small businesses through regional food systems.

A statewide food system assessment is now underway, led by the Nebraska Food Council. Results will be released during events designed to activate or inform local

councils across the state, and through learning opportunities offered to local food system leaders.

Are you interested in joining or supporting Nebraska’s efforts? Do you have a food council in your state? Contact me at 402.320.3444 or sandrar@cfra.org.

## STAFF SPOTLIGHT

## SPINDOLA FEELS PRIVILEGED TO WORK WITH BORROWERS

BY VERONICA SPINDOLA, VERONICAS@CFRA.ORG

**M**y goal is to help small towns stay vibrant places to live by creating new businesses, and assisting communities grow from the inside out. I want to keep small towns attractive for individuals to stay in or come back to their birthplace.

This job gives me an opportunity to provide assistance to individuals who are looking to start or expand their businesses. Part of my role as a Latino loan specialist is to help people with financing, technical assistance, and training.

I'm excited to develop and maintain meaningful relationships with borrowers before, during, and after their loan transactions. I feel privileged for the chance to work with people who have a dream, and to be part of and witness the moment when that dream becomes a reality.

Over the years, I've done work on a contract basis for the Center: as a Rural Enterprise Assistance Project (REAP) business coach for two years, and as an instructor for the Business Plan Basics training in Spanish for three years.



Veronica Spindola

My previous employment experiences have given me plenty of opportunities to prepare for my new role. In 2016, I joined the Central Community College Entrepreneurship Center as a business coordinator, and assisted the director of regional economic development agencies. In Venezuela, I worked for more than 10 years in small business development, then I was involved in international trading. I obtained a master's degree in business administration – man-

agement from Universidad de Carabobo in Valencia, Venezuela, and I have experience in marketing research and customer service culture.

My husband, Julio Reyes, and I live in Columbus, Nebraska, a place we feel lucky to raise our 3-year-old son and call our home. I'm originally from Venezuela, and grew up in Valencia, the industrial capital and third largest city in the country. Julio and I moved to Nebraska in 2013 to reunite with my parents and siblings who have lived here since 1998.

Rural Nebraska is one of the best places to grow and establish a family. The warmth and generosity of the people around my own family has made our transition into this amazing state so much easier.

I am grateful and feel privileged to have this job. I get to help people and communities, and I get to learn something new every day.

I can be reached at 402.942.1113 or [veronicas@cfra.org](mailto:veronicas@cfra.org).

*Veronica is a bilingual loan specialist who assists small businesses in northeast Nebraska.*

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## IMMIGRATION, CONTINUED FROM PAGE 8

Nevertheless, it cannot find political traction in D.C.

The Center continues to call on Congress to take action to address immigration policy. At the same time, we have recommitted ourselves to making progress in local communities. Our work is three-fold.

As demographics shift, we are working with both the receiving community and the new immigrant community to create more welcoming and inclusive towns. We embrace the change because

we know that diversity makes us stronger and more resilient.

We are also building local leadership capacity. Our staff work with local leaders (both new immigrants and long-time residents) to build skills and confidence for newcomers to serve as leaders within their community. We know our work must take root at the local level to be successful.

Finally, we are working with new immigrants on small business and new farm development. To be full participants in their commu-

nity, new immigrants must have the opportunity to start their own enterprises and become part of the local business fabric. We have expanded our business and farm training, coaching, and lending to serve new immigrants.

Throughout our work with new immigrants, 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 this shared work to create strong, welcoming, and vibrant small towns.



**Road to the farm bill**

Inside: Issues and marker bills we prioritize

FROM THE DESK OF THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

# IMMIGRATION RESHAPING SMALL TOWNS

BY BRIAN DEPEW, BRIAND@CFRA.ORG

Rural America is often characterized as mostly white and a place with few immigrants. Those of us who work in small towns across the country know this generalization is slowly being swept aside. Across the country, small towns are being reshaped by new waves of immigration.

Take Schuyler, in east central Nebraska, for example. This town once struggled to attract new residents, but the population is now more than 6,000 and is 65 percent Latino. As Mayor David Reinecke says, “Schuyler would be dead without Latinos.” Newcomers are breathing renewed life into the business sector and enhancing the cultural vibrancy of the town.

With these changes come chal-



As the dynamics of rural America shift, we are working with both the receiving and the new immigrant communities to create more welcoming and inclusive towns, like Hastings, Nebraska. | Photo by Rhea Landholm

lenges. Front and center for new immigrants today is a turbulent political landscape. Policies such as Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) are threatened. This despite a recent NBC poll that found 66 percent support for the policy, and a Washington Post poll

that found 87 percent support for the policy.

Comprehensive immigration reform continues to draw bipartisan support from the public, the business community, and lawmakers.