



CENTER *for* RURAL AFFAIRS

YOUR RURAL NEWS FOR OVER 40 YEARS | LYONS, NE | POPULATION 851 | JULY & AUGUST 2016

FROM THE DESK OF THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

WORLD-CLASS VINEGAR, IN A TOWN OF 150

BY BRIAN DEPEW, BRIAND@CFRA.ORG



George Johnson's story illustrates why the Center works on entrepreneurship, policy and community. | Photo by Brian Depew

George Johnson makes world class vinegar in the small town of Cody, Neb. George's story is a powerful example of how the values that our work stands on can lead to vibrant small towns.

I was lucky enough to visit George and his wife Karen on a recent trip through the Nebraska Sandhills. I stopped over for conversation and lunch in the community of 150 people they call home.

When I arrived, George was in

the vinegery behind their house, a strawbale building that he built in 2007. An aroma of fruit and vinegar wafted through the building where George, with the help of his daughter Emily, has been perfecting the craft of making vinegar following old world traditions.

While commercial vinegar can be made in a span of a few hours, George's vinegar takes months to make. Only when Emily, the resident quality controller, approves a

—READ MORE ABOUT [WORLD-CLASS VINEGAR](#) ON PAGE 7.

STOREFRONT THEATER HONORED NATIONALLY

BY ELISHA SMITH, ELISHAS@CFRA.ORG

The Storefront Theater located in Lyons, Neb., has been selected and recognized as part of the Americans for the Arts 2016 Public Art Network (PAN) Year in Review program. This is the only national program that specifically recognizes the most compelling public art.

—SEE [STOREFRONT THEATER](#) ON PAGE 2.

The Center for Rural Affairs and artist Matthew Mazzotta (middle) developed the idea for a storefront theater from the stories of Lyons residents. | Photo by Kat Shiffler



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Works were chosen from 260 entries across the country. They were recognized at Americans for the Arts' 2016 Annual Convention in Boston.

"These Public Art Network Year in Review selections illustrate that public art has the power to enhance our lives on a scale that little else can," said Robert L. Lynch, president and CEO of Americans for the Arts. "Whether subtly beautiful or vibrantly jolting, a public artwork has the singular ability to make citizens going about everyday business stop, think, and through the power of art appreciate a moment, no matter how brief."

The Lyons Storefront Theater, one of 38 outstanding public art projects honored, is site-specific community artwork developed by the Center for Rural Affairs and artist Matthew Mazzotta. It came from the stories of Lyons residents and was built by Lyons' skilled craftspeople and community volunteers during the summer and fall of 2015.

The storefront theater is an outdoor movie theater that uses a formerly empty storefront on Main Street. What looks like an ordinary storefront facade, opens up and folds down over the sidewalk onto Main Street.

The front of the building has been modified with two hydraulic pump arms so the awning and false front of the building are one unit and can fold down with the push of a button. Cushioned bleacher seats (seating up to 80 people) pull out from inside the structure for people to sit and watch a performance or a movie on the other side of the street.

The idea was born from interest in revitalizing the downtown core of this 850-person town. Both the seats and the screen can disappear when not in use giving the impression that there is nothing unusual about the space, with only word of mouth accounts to keep people interested.

Lyons Storefront Theater is part of the Byway of Art project, a network of four community-specific art-

“ Too often we think that you have to go to the big city to get your arts and culture fix.

This project is about demonstrating that we can and do have interesting arts and cultural infrastructure in small towns. If we can do this in Lyons, Neb., it can be done anywhere. ”

-Brian Depew, Executive Director

works in northeastern Nebraska. The regional project is a collaborative effort between the communities of Decatur, Lyons, Macy and Oakland, and the Center for Rural Affairs, and is made possible with funding from ArtPlace America.

Interest in using the theater is growing. During summer 2016, the theater will feature a play, music concerts, and video game nights as well as films and documentaries.

In addition to the exciting news of being recognized by the Americans for the Arts, the Center for Rural Affairs was recently contacted by an international, award winning filmmaker who plans to come to Lyons in August 2016 to do a short documentary on the project.



The idea of the Storefront Theater was born from interest in revitalizing the downtown core of an 850-person town. Both the seats and screen can retract and disappear when not in use. | Photo submitted

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.

You may also correct your mailing address and fax the back page to 402.687.2200, or call the Center for Rural Affairs at 402.687.2100.

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Nearly 100 people attended the Midwest Regional Breakout session at the National Farm to Cafeteria Conference in Wisconsin in June. The Center for Rural Affairs has the distinct honor of leading the National Farm to School Network's Midwest Region and working with state leads in Iowa, Kansas, Missouri, Nebraska, North Dakota, Oklahoma and South Dakota.

NOT EVERYONE IS EATING THE RAINBOW

BY SARAH SMITH, SARAH@CFRA.ORG

The National Farm to Cafeteria Conference in Madison, Wis., was themed Moving Forward Together. The real impact I walked away with was: Who are we leaving behind?

At the Center for Rural Affairs, we tend to speak our minds. Because of this, we win some, we lose some. But when opening plenary speaker and National Farm to School Network Advisory Board member Ricardo Salvador basically said, start telling the truth, I was almost surprised by the transparency and impact in his words.

Tweets rolling through during his talk help contextualize the meaning behind those words (find Ricardo at the handle @cadwego).

1. "We need to improve the food system so that it's fair, doesn't exploit and isn't unjust."
2. "Justice needs to be the screen through which we do all of our work."
3. "Inequities are no accident. Disparities are historical roadkill on the way to creating our modern food system."
4. "Our food system is abundant but makes us sick."
5. "We live in a country where our food system is built to generate wealth not health."

Sometimes I like to play it safe, make friends, and stay politically correct. But these changemakers who spoke at the conference are pushing back on that mentality.

LaDonna Redmond, closing plenary speaker and

founder of The Campaign for Food Justice Now, dismantled the term "food desert." She maintains that a desert is a viable ecosystem, and what we in modern times are facing is a "food mirage." We live amid the appearance of abundance.

Note the parallel in food mirage environments with the urban and rural settings. Urban environments offer corner liquor stores, fast food joints, convenience foods that lack nutrients. Rural environments, surrounded by agriculture, do not abundantly offer us a rainbow of fresh foods.

Lack of availability of real food in our current system doesn't provide cultures and communities with the dignity each deserves. We see disparity. Others experience that disparity.

As an example, Salud America! provides a report, *How to Achieve Better Food in the Neighborhood for Latino Kids*, laying out ways to address the disparity. It finds Latino communities often have less access to healthy affordable foods. Marketing of foods, beverages and restaurants disproportionately focuses on promotion of unhealthy foods, especially among Latino kids. Extensive marketing increases demand for and consumption of these foods. Regulation of marketing to kids has not been effective thus far.

It's important that we face these disparities and speak up and speak loudly.

Bravo, National Farm to School Network, for bringing equity to the center of the table at the national conference.



The United States has lost grasslands to cropland at accelerated rates in recent years. By maintaining grasslands, landowners can enhance wildlife habitat, improve watershed health, and prevent the release of carbon into the atmosphere. | Photo by Wyatt Fraas

NEW GRASSLANDS CONSERVATION OPPORTUNITY AVAILABLE FOR INTERESTED LANDOWNERS

BY BRAD MOHRMANN, WITH K COE ISOM, A CONSULTING FIRM WITH ROOTS IN RURAL COMMUNITIES

A new type of carbon credit program designed for long-term conservation initiatives, such as conservation easements on grasslands, is beginning to enroll landowners this year. The goal of this effort is to develop a pilot project designed to conserve grasslands and reduce potential greenhouse gas emissions from land conversion. The program could potentially pay landowners who are avoiding crop cultivation activities in concert with easement activity.

The United States has lost grasslands to cropland at accelerated rates in recent years. This conversion can lead to a number of environmental issues including loss of habitat, soil erosion, water pollution, and release of greenhouse gases. By maintaining grasslands, landowners can enhance wildlife habitat, improve watershed health, and prevent the release of carbon into the atmosphere.

The new grassland protocol program is important because:

1. The program rewards producers and landowners for implementing long-term measures to conserve grasslands.
2. Producers and landowners can potentially generate a new revenue stream through carbon credits while still maintaining livestock production.
3. Important grassland habitat will be maintained.

The conservation easement component in the pilot program is different from previous carbon payment programs, which offered 5-year segments. Also, long-term carbon storage will be addressed through a permanent conservation easement that prevents tillage.

What are project eligibility requirements?

- Landowners must have either recently placed a conservation easement on their land or be considering a conservation easement. An existing easement must have been in place no earlier than July 22, 2013.

- Your land will be matched to an analysis done by our project team to determine eligibility at

no cost. Eligibility factors include NRCS Major Land Resource Area components, soil texture, past land use resulting in significant soil carbon loss when converted to cropland, less than 10 percent tree canopy, and other factors.

- Land has been grasslands for at least 10 years.

If you are landowner interested in learning more about this opportunity, have questions, or are wondering if this project is a right fit for you, please contact me, Brad Mohrmann with K Coe Isom at 307.673.4535 or brad.mohrmann@kcoe.com.

This project is funded by a Conservation Innovation Grant through the USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service and is implemented by the Climate Action Reserve along with their project partners. The Climate Action Reserve is a nonprofit carbon offset registry, which has adopted a carbon project protocol to allow for the creation of carbon offset credits from the conservation of grassland threatened by conversion to cropland.

VICTORY, CONTINUED FROM PAGE 8

achieve this victory goes unnoticed.

Thank you Mark Watne, for your leadership of North Dakota Farmers Union. And to your board, your members, and your staff for all you do for North Dakota family farmers and ranchers. A special note of thanks to Kayla Pulvermacher, of your staff, for her tireless work and for helping us help you whenever we could.

Thank you Sarah Vogel, for bringing your voice into this fight. Your experience as a former North Dakota Commissioner of Agriculture and a lifetime of fighting for family farmers and ranchers was indispensable. And thanks for helping bring our friend Willie Nelson into the fray as well. Willie and Farm Aid have also spent decades fighting these fights, and their voice also made a difference.

Thank you Alison Beutler. Alison lives (and votes) in North Dakota. And when I urged her through a Facebook comment to remember to vote #NoOnMeasure1, she responded, “I voted early so I could vote NO on Measure 1... NO, NO, NO.” Your vote mattered Alison, and your determination to make that vote count is representative of how clear North Dakotans were in sending a message on corporate farming - NO, NO, NO.

ing from corporate farming apologists about “picking winners and losers.” In truth, they want to be the ones picking winners and losers, and they want to pick corporate mega-farms over family farmers and ranchers.

THE CENTER FOR RURAL AFFAIRS WILL NEVER GIVE UP

We don’t buy the argument that the voters of North Dakota cannot be trusted because they might allow their emotions to play a part in their voting decisions. The hopes, dreams, doubts and concerns of the citizens of North Dakota should play a vital role in shaping public policy in their state. Just because 75 percent of North Dakota voters have more doubts than hope when it comes to corporate farming, doesn’t mean they should be discounted.

North Dakota Attorney General Wayne Stenehjem indicated his office is preparing to defend the state’s laws, saying “We have defended the corporate farming law before.” And North Dakota Farmers Union will fight on. “It’s going to be a long fight. We’re not going to be done with this issue for a while,” said Farmers Union spokesperson Kayla Pulvermacher.

She’s probably right, and the Center for Rural Affairs is going to stand by our friends and with the people of North Dakota in defense of their corporate farming law for as long as it takes.

THE FIGHT IS NOT OVER

Before we celebrate the victory of commonsense over corporate farming in North Dakota too much, we must report that the North Dakota Farm Bureau filed suit in federal court on June 2, challenging the constitutionality of the state’s entire anti-corporate farming law.

Daryl Lies, president of the North Dakota Farm Bureau, announced the filing of the lawsuit against the state of North Dakota less than two weeks before North Dakotans went to the polls to vote on Measure #1.

“At the heart of the issue is the simple question of whether the state of North Dakota should be able to pick winners and losers,” said Lies. “Our court system is the only appropriate place to settle this question without the issue being derailed by emotion.”

Frankly, I’ve had enough whin-



On June 14, the people of North Dakota voted against corporate farming by a 3-to-1 margin. However, the North Dakota Farm Bureau filed suit in federal court challenging the constitutionality of the state’s entire anti-corporate farming law. | Photo courtesy of USDA

TRACI BRUCKER: 'IT HAS BEEN A GREAT RIDE'

BY TRACI BRUCKNER

Good times, bad times, happy times, sad times... and now, time to say farewell! May 20 marked my last day in the Center for Rural Affairs office as the senior policy associate.

I had the pleasure of working with the Center for Rural Affairs for the past 15 years. I started as an intern, fresh out of college as a non-traditional student.

My husband, Brian, and I were farming near Osmond, Neb., when we first engaged with the Center's policy work. We had experienced some incredible financial challenges on the farm. We went through the consolidation of the hog market, and finally threw in the towel when prices dropped to 17 cents.

The Center for Rural Affairs was one of the organizations who stood out on this issue; working with farmers and fighting like hell to get the Clinton administration to do something about the unequal playing field the packers were building and profiteering.

I met Chuck Hassebrook at Wayne State College. He had come to deliver a keynote speech to the Nebraska LEAD program, at the college for some educational sessions ahead of their international trip. One of my professors asked me to think about joining the Nebraska LEAD program as part of an honors project. I did not join LEAD, but I sure signed up with Chuck to engage in federal farm policy advocacy.

I also met John Crabtree at Wayne State College when he gave a presentation to one of my public policy classes. John was leading the Center's livestock market structure work. Then, as today, he just made so much sense. Around the same time, Jon Bailey was writing a lot about poverty in the Great Plains and Midwest, really shifting the dialogue on persistent poverty.

All of those forces led me to engage with the Center, and eventually work here for 15 years.

I can remember when I received the Center for Rural Affairs newsletter in the mail each month. I would stop whatever I was doing and read it cover to cover. It resonated with me in so many ways.

It was so empowering to get the newsletter and to know we were not alone in the struggle over structure of agriculture issues and the policy that was driving agriculture consolidation. The Center was there standing with us and working in the interest of people like me and so many others.

The Center for Rural Affairs was, and is today, an organization that helps people find their ability to fight for a better way, better policy, and the future of their communities. I have learned ever so much during my tenure, and I would never have been able



Traci is never happier than when she is out mixing with people. Here she staffs a table for the Center at an event hosted by the Kansas Rural Center. On behalf of the entire organization, thank you, Traci, for your years of dedication to the cause.

to do all things I have done had it not been for this organization.

The Center matters to farmers, ranchers, rural, and urban people alike. It has made an incredible impact on my life, one that I will never forget.

I have had the opportunity to meet so many hard-working, dedicated, and fantastic people all across the country through this work. We have worked side-by-side to create a strong and forward-looking rural future.

We have won some great policy together, and we have lost some tough battles too. There is more to be done, and while I will not be here, I will continue to add my voice, along with all of yours, to the debate over family farm and ranch and rural community issues.

I will be moving on to a new position with the Women's Fund of Omaha, where I hope to continue to make a difference and empower people to shape policy to improve and level the playing field. I wish you all the very best.

Thank you for everything. It has been a great ride!

YOUNG SANTEE SIOUX ARTIST GROWS HOBBY INTO INCOME

BY ELISHA SMITH, ELISHAS@CFRA.ORG, AND VERONICA EHRENBERG

Shaylana Lewis, a proud member of the Santee Sioux Tribe of Nebraska, learned to bead at age 11. Now 19 years old, Lewis is still beading. She says the activity brings her to a calm and positive state. She beads jewelry - earrings, necklaces, rings, headbands - and does custom orders.

What started as a hobby has turned into an opportunity to make a small income, as Lewis displays and sells her work at the Santee Sioux Unci Maka (Grand-Mother Earth) Public Market.

Do you have a support system?

I receive a lot of support from my family and friends. Family members gift me with beads and other materials to encourage me to keep creating. My artwork is evolving. I'm moving from beaded gem earrings to Santee's floral beaded design. This design is more intricate and detailed.

Who are your customers?

I'm selling mostly only to my

village and immediate family members and friends. As more artists take on beading, unique designs and a diverse marketing plan are increasingly important.

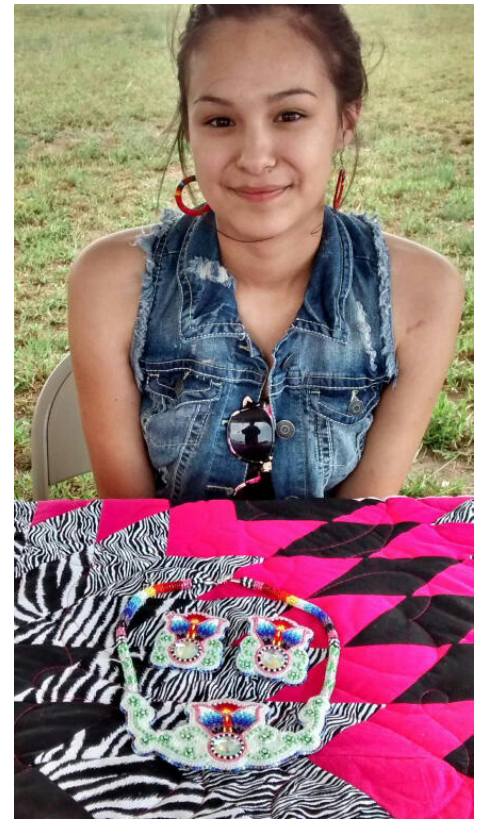
I plan to branch out and sell my artwork across the U.S. I plan on using social media to spread the word about my art.

The GrandMother Earth Public Market has been a great starting point and has provided a great opportunity for me to build a stronger customer base. It is a great place for an artist to get initial exposure and then expand.

Any advice for other beaders?

My advice for other beaders is to keep it original, if it keeps you happy, just keep doing it!

The Santee Community Foods Project is a joint effort of the Center for Rural Affairs and the Nebraska Indian Community College. Working together and building on grassroots interest and support, the project is bringing fresh foods and healthy eating back to Santee.



Shaylana Lewis, 19, beads jewelry, and as her work improves, would like to bead apparel and jewelry for dancers and others at powwows. | Photo submitted

WORLD-CLASS VINEGAR, CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

batch, is it bottled for sale. Handcrafted 3-ounce bottles sell for between \$10 and \$45 each.

They have never spent a dollar on advertising. The product sells itself, and word of mouth from satisfied customers means George now ships vinegar daily to points from coast to coast. Customers tell them the product rivals the best traditional vinegars from Italy.

Key to their success was an entrepreneurial spirit, appreciation for an artisan craft, and patience. Along the way, George applied for and received a Value Added Producer Grant. That's a program the

Center for Rural Affairs helped to write and win.

The story illustrates why the Center works at the nexus of entrepreneurship, policy and community. The Johnson family's entrepreneurial spirit, supported by public policy, led to a new enterprise in a very small community, enabling more families to remain on the land and in the community.

It's no surprise that the entrepreneurial spirit runs in the family. Their daughter works in the vinegar business and also runs her own letterpress and design shop. One son owns and operates

the family ranch north of town. Their other son is leading an effort to develop wind energy in the state.

If the Johnson family can make a world class, hand-crafted product in a central Nebraska town of 150 residents, you can do it anywhere.

Embrace your inner entrepreneur; look around for community, state and federal support; and get to work today creating new enterprises that can help your small town thrive for future generations.

To learn more, or to order vinegar, visit georgepaulvinegar.com.



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07/16



VICTORY IN NORTH DAKOTA!

BY JOHN CRABTREE, JOHN@CFRA.ORG

On Tuesday, June 14, North Dakotans went to the polls in a primary election to decide, among other things, the fate of North Dakota's long-standing anti-corporate farming law. Since 1932, North Dakota law has prohibited corporations from engaging in farming and ranching or owning farm or ranch land.

That law, a child of depression-era, progressive reforms birthed by North Dakota's Non-Partisan League, stood up to multiple legislative assaults over the decades. But on March 19, 2015, the North Dakota Legislature passed SB 2351, which would have created exemptions to the law allowing corporate ownership of swine and dairy operations.

LET THE PEOPLE DECIDE

One week later, the North Dakota Farmers Union state board voted unanimously to pursue a referen-

“ Thank God for the calm, enduring wisdom of the people of North Dakota. ”

-John Crabtree, Media Director

dum to put the repeal of SB 2351, and the future of their state's corporate farming law, to a vote of the people. They quickly gathered the necessary signatures and they worked diligently, with their members and other allied organizations, to win the vote.

And on June 14, the people of North Dakota gave that victory, hands down. By a 3-to-1 margin, North Dakotans voted to repeal SB 2351 and preserve North Dakota's corporate farming law. Thank God for the calm, enduring wisdom of the people of North Dakota.

MANY JOINED THE FIGHT AGAINST CORPORATE FARMING

We owe a special debt to a lot of people in North Dakota over this vote against corporate farming, too many to mention here. But I'll offer these words of gratitude, and hope that no one who worked to

—SEE [VICTORY](#) ON PAGE 5.