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The current crop insurance program has problems that need to be fixed to ensure it is actually fostering family-farm agriculture and stewardship of land, water and communities. | Photo by Wyatt Fraas

IDEAS FOR CROP INSURANCE REFORM

BY TRACI BRUCKNER, TRACIB@CFRA.ORG

We believe a crop insurance program backed by the federal government is a necessary component of an effective farm safety net. However, we also believe the current program has problems that need to be fixed to ensure it is actually fostering family-farm agriculture and stewardship of land, water and communities.

Federal crop insurance is the major farm safety net program. It is also the costliest program outside of the nutrition title of the federal Farm Bill. Unlike most other Farm Bill programs and other federal entitlement and mandatory programs outside of agriculture, there are no limits on crop insurance subsidies and only minimal conservation requirements.

This makes the program ripe for reform. We predict action on federal crop insurance will be among the most contentious issues during the 2018 Farm Bill debate.

In our view, crop insurance should ensure a farmer who experiences a significant price or yield loss can survive and continue to farm the next year. However, subsidized crop insurance should not remove so much risk that it serves to discourage alternative production methods that shore up profitability, reduce risk, and enhance natural resources. In other words, the absence or presence of crop insurance should not drive production practices, nor should it create barriers to more sustainable farming systems.

We believe the federal crop insurance program should do the following:

- Provide a basic safety net without disproportionately benefiting the largest farms, encouraging the big to get bigger, or distorting farmland values.
- Encourage advanced conservation systems and practices to reduce risk and protect the environment.

—SEE CROP INSURANCE REFORM ON PAGE 5.

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BUILDING SMALL BUSINESS IS A GLOBAL AFFAIR

BY JUAN SANDOVAL, LATINO BUSINESS CENTER DIRECTOR, JUANS@CFRA.ORG

You know you are passionate about work when someone invites you to attend the Global Entrepreneurship Congress in Medellin, Colombia, while on vacation, and you still think about attending.

That is exactly what happened while I was visiting relatives on my trip to South America last March. The event that grouped 15 nations and several international organizations facilitated discussion on four key pillars: creating jobs, building international collaboration, facilitating trade, and promoting gender equity.

It was even more appealing after I realized Maria Contreras-Sweet, the head of the U.S. Small Business Administration (SBA), was part of this selective group.

“We all understand the important role of entrepreneurship in creating the dynamic social fabric of our societies,” said Contreras-Sweet. “If you can’t get a job, entrepreneurship allows you to create your own. And small businesses not only create most of the jobs in our global economy, they also create a sense of pride in local neighborhoods and contribute tax revenues that can help fund better services and better schools.”



Juan Sandoval

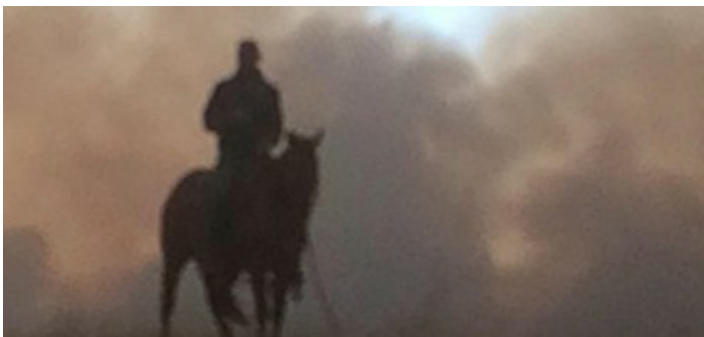
Contreras-Sweet was in Bogota to announce the Colombian government will adopt the SBA’s Small Business Development Center model. In the U.S. the model is comprised of 1,100 federally funded counseling centers staffed with experts providing ongoing business and technical support for aspiring entrepreneurs.

This type of event makes you realize just how important our work is in rural communities across the country. For instance, the Center’s REAP Latino Business Center staff trained 266 Latino microentrepreneurs, counseled 126, and provided 22 loans totaling \$373,100 in the second half of 2015. At the end, this is not “small” business.

LATEST IN RURAL AMERICA

IF IT WERE EASY, EVERYONE WOULD BE DOING IT

BY ELISHA SMITH, ELISHAS@CFRA.ORG



“If it were easy, everyone would be doing it.” That’s what my father, Bill Greeley, a rancher from Imperial, Nebraska, had to say after blizzard Selene foiled his plans of swiftly transporting newly acquired cows home from the Ogallala Livestock Market.

The storm hit just as he left the sale barn, the trailer filled with pregnant cows. Bill had hoped to get the cattle home before the storm got worse. An hour and 30 minutes later, he had only made it 19 miles down the road to the small town of Grant...

—READ THE WHOLE STORY AND FOLLOW OUR BLOG AT WWW.CFRA.ORG

PAPER & E-NEWS

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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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Local ordinances often do not address concerns with wind energy development. To examine what is being overlooked in wind energy ordinances, we authored *Respect and Restore: Reassessing Local Wind Energy Standards*. | Photo by Wyatt Fraas

NEW REPORT EXAMINES LOCAL WIND ENERGY ORDINANCES

BY LU NELSEN, LUCASN@CFRA.ORG

Wind energy is a valuable economic driver for rural communities. New development brings jobs to local areas, providing new customers for local businesses. Projects also provide direct annual payments to landowners who host turbines, giving them a new source of income.

Local communities and counties benefit as well. Projects add new property tax revenue – money to support essential services like schools, fire, and police.

Wind energy has grown into a thriving industry, especially in places like the Midwest and Great Plains with great wind energy resources. But this development has created new challenges for communities and landowners.

As developers continue to look for new project locations, small towns and counties are working to craft requirements for wind energy development. While ordinances can be effective, they often do not touch on some of the main concerns of community members.

To examine what is being over-

looked in wind energy ordinances, we authored *Respect and Restore: Reassessing Local Wind Energy Standards*.

Ordinances often give a developer setback, noise, flicker, and other requirements. But they leave out requirements for access roads, post-construction restoration, or ensuring public roads are repaired after a project is complete.

All of these issues are commonly mentioned by stakeholders, but are rarely addressed through local regulation. In fact, most restoration requirements focus solely on the decommissioning of projects at the end of their life, providing very few guidelines for prior restoration that may be needed.

Post-construction land restoration is an important issue to many landowners, as they want their land returned to them in good condition. Projects need to maintain access roads and an area around the base of a turbine.

But additional land is affected by the construction process, and without proper restoration, the land will not be as workable for a landowner as it previously was.

Similarly, heavy machinery can have a big impact on the condition of local roads, especially in rural areas where roads were not designed to handle heavy traffic.

Addressing these issues directly in local regulations will provide communities with peace of mind and give developers clear requirements for post-construction restoration. Developers should use local input early in the process to limit the need for restoration by using pre-disturbed areas or existing access roads.

It is important to identify solutions like these to improve the development process. As wind development continues to grow, it is essential that developers and local officials tackle the concerns experienced by people in the community.

Continuing to develop renewable wind energy brings real benefits to rural communities across the nation. To ensure these benefits aren't realized at the expense of landowners and community members, wind energy projects must address the challenges presented by the construction process.

LATINO RURAL POPULATION IS GROWING, BUT VOTER PARTICIPATION HASN'T KEPT PACE

BY JOHNATHAN HLADIK, JOHNATHANH@CFRA.ORG

While the white, working class and rural population continues to deal with the same issues they have faced for decades, a growing demographic of people is striving to find their place. Our home state has seen significant immigrant growth since the first wave in 1980s, and now has one of the fastest growing Latino populations in the nation. A recent report by the University of Nebraska projects the Latino population will reach 24 percent of the state's population by 2050.

Furthermore, 43 percent of this growth has occurred in rural Nebraska. The majority population in some towns has shifted to Latino. For instance, Lexington, Neb., is now 60 percent Latino, and Schuyler, Neb., is 65 percent Latino.

The story is similar in Iowa. There the Latino population grew by over 90,000 individuals – an increase of 110 percent – between 2000 and 2014. Latinos make up more than 10 percent of the current population in 11 of Iowa's 99 counties. In several of these counties, this population is as high as 25 percent. It is anticipated that by 2050, Latinos will account for 13 percent of the state's population.

To date, the significant population growth is not reflected at the ballot box. According to the Pew Research Center, only 48 percent of Latino eligible voters turned out in 2012. This compares to 66.6 percent of blacks and 64.1 percent of whites.

Though statistics aren't available in Iowa or Nebraska, we can look to Kansas and Indiana to better understand this trend as it applies to rural Midwestern states. Among



In Midwestern states such as Iowa and Nebraska, the Latino population is growing, yet opportunities for these individuals remain limited. Among Latinos in Kansas, only 35.9 percent of eligible voters participated in the 2012 election. In Indiana, participation was measured at 21.6 percent. Pictured are members of the *Comite Latino de Schuyler* in Nebraska, who have sponsored educational events this spring to help people learn more about voting and how to register. | Photo courtesy of *Comite Latino de Schuyler*

Latinos in Kansas only 35.9 percent of eligible voters participated in the 2012 election. In Indiana, participation was measured at 21.6 percent.

When these people aren't voting, their voice isn't heard by those who are elected. Those officials are the same ones new Americans look to for leadership and a better future. While this is important from the perspective of inequality and opportunity, there are also political

realities at play.

We are at our best when we participate equally. For small towns like Schuyler and others to continue to grow and adapt, more work is needed to promote inclusion in the business, political and social workings of the community. Achieving equality and eliminating the obstacles that restrict opportunity requires helping all neighbors, new or old, become engaged in our democracy.

CROP INSURANCE REFORM, CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

- Include viable insurance options for the full range and diversity of agriculture including highly diversified farms, integrated grain-livestock operations, organic farms, beginning farmers, and farms selling into local and regional food markets.
- Be crop-neutral and flexible, allowing and encouraging farmers to grow or raise what makes sense for their farming system and for conservation purposes, not simply what they can insure most easily or insure with the highest subsidy.
- Compensate insurance providers fairly while ensuring transparency.

FOUR KEY AREAS FOR CHANGE

There is substantial value within the current federal crop insurance program. But there is also much that is harmful to small- and mid-sized family farms, conservation and the environment, new and beginning farmers, and local and regional food producers. We will work alongside other organizations, in particular the National Sustainable Agriculture Coalition, to secure changes in these four key areas.

STRUCTURE OF AGRICULTURE

The federal crop insurance program largely subsidizes the biggest producers of a few commodity crops. Because so much of the risk is removed, large commodity farms become even larger and more specialized. They have less risk associated with aggressive expansion when they are subsidized on every acre they add to their operation.

This consolidation places beginning and small and mid-sized farms at a competitive disadvantage for land. We will propose a variety of policy options to address these concerns related to the structure of agriculture.

CONSERVATION

The current program causes environmental harm by failing to link subsidies to anything beyond the most basic soil erosion and wetland drainage measures. With the limited exception of the six prairie pothole states, excessive subsidies also create perverse incentives to plow marginal pasture land and virgin grasslands.

The program also fails to adequately account for the risk reducing attributes of conservation practice adoption, and instead rewards environmentally harmful and risky farming practices. Reattaching soil erosion and wetland protection requirements to crop insurance subsidies in the 2014 Farm Bill was a step in the right direction. These protections need to go even further to better align the nation's largest farm safety net program with conservation and environmental objectives.

ACCESS

The federal crop insurance program does not provide equal access to farmers of all types and in all locations. In fact, only a quarter of all farms identified by the Agriculture Census have crop insurance.

While it is clearly not possible to offer individual crop policies for every crop in every county, more should be done to provide fair and equal access to insurance for all types of farms and methods of production.

The program should not directly or indirectly favor certain commodity crops that can push farmers away from diverse production systems. Currently, the program offers the most generous subsidies and coverage to four commodities. Corn, cotton, soybeans and wheat comprise more than 70 percent of the 294 million acres covered by the federal crop insurance program.

The limited availability of insurance for alternative crops and livestock products discourages farmers from attempting to innovate and grow for emerging markets. Growing what is suited to the land and profitable locally helps reduce risk and increases income stability.

Most lenders require farmers to have crop insurance to qualify for loans. If a farmer can obtain insurance they will have better access to credit and thus to new marketing opportunities.

The creation of Whole Farm Revenue Protection in the 2014 Farm Bill is a step in the right direction, but there is more to be done. We will work to ensure crop insurance does not discourage entrepreneurial farming that seeks to create new market opportunities.

DELIVERY

The lack of transparency about who really benefits from the crop insurance system has stifled public debate around the need to make program changes. There is no public transparency about how much the federal government is subsidizing the largest and wealthiest farms, as well as insurance companies.

We will push for policy changes that bring forward transparency so we can be assured the program is serving its intended audience, and we have a consistency between the image they have sold of who they are serving and the actual farmers served.

Note from Traci: *I came to the Center 15 years ago as an intern. The work I began then on farm policy and, more recently, on crop insurance reform has been a highlight of my personal and professional life. Agricultural policy is a foundation of the Center for Rural Affairs, and this work will continue with your help. And I'll be watching on the sidelines. I'm headed to a new opportunity as the Research and Policy Coordinator for the Women's Fund of Omaha. It's been great working with you!*

HEALTH INSURANCE COVERAGE GAP REMAINS

BY LAUREN KOLOJEJCHICK-KOTCH, LAURENK@CFRA.ORG

The Transitional Health Insurance Program, LB 1032, failed to pass this year in the Unicameral. But that doesn't change the fact that nearly 100,000 people still do not have a solution.

Almost 100,000 of our friends, neighbors, coworkers and family members go without health insurance because they make too much to qualify for Medicaid, and too little to qualify for assistance to purchase health insurance through the exchange. Those that have health insurance pay more because so many go without.

Wherever you live, many of you know someone who falls in the "gap." Maybe you fall into it yourself. Many of you have told us why you care about expanding coverage. Here are just a few things we've heard while working on this issue:

- "Medicaid expansion means less worries for my family and friends who are stuck in the gap."
- "It means my daughter and her children will have health care. They are struggling to make ends meet and need more support in their health care."
- This is a "movement toward justice for all."
- "It makes no sense to deny health care coverage and to cause financial harm to our hospitals, particularly the smaller hospitals in rural communities, because of political posturing."
- "If you can't pass it out of concern for the 97,000 neighbors affected, do it for economic reasons. No other action within your power will have as great an economic stimulus result. I say this as a former Director of the Nebraska Department of Economic



Nationwide, many of our friends, neighbors, coworkers and family members go without health insurance because they fall in the "gap." The coverage gap stretches too far in this country, and the only way to change that is to talk to your elected officials, like Board Member Maryanne Rouse and staff member John Crabtree did.

Development."

- "This is a dignity issue. No one should have to skip treatment or choose between treatment for a health condition and paying rent. We all want our neighbors to be healthy."

The coverage gap stretches too far in this country, and the only way to change that is to talk to your elected officials. If you are a citizen and resident of Nebraska, contact me, Lauren Kolojchick-Kotch at 402.687.2100 or laurenk@cfra.org.

CONGRATULATIONS GRADUATES AND OTHERS!

Honoring our spring tradition of recognizing the graduates among us, we offer our best wishes to the following:

Blair Preston, daughter of REAP Administrative Assistant Kim Preston, is graduating from Lyons Decatur Northeast High School. Blair plans to attend South Dakota State University in Brookings, S. D. She will major in nutrition and dietetics.

Katie Starkweather, daughter of Farm and Community Program

Director Kathie Starkweather, is graduating with a Ph. D. in anthropology from the University of Missouri. Katie has accepted a post-doctorate position at the Max Planck Institute in Leipzig, Germany.

Traci Bruckner, Senior Policy Associate, is heading to the Women's Fund of Omaha as their Research and Policy Coordinator. She will be working on public policy around economic self-sufficiency, women leadership, domestic violence and sexual literacy.

Marie Powell, Communications Associate, is retiring from the Center after 21 years of service. She looks forward to traveling with husband, Tim, and black lab, Tucker, and having more time to enjoy the great outdoors. Marie says, "It's been my great pleasure to bring the Center for Rural Affairs newsletter to you. It will be in good hands, as former intern and board member Rhea Landholm has joined the staff in a new communications role."

LOCK IN YOUR LEGACY

BY TYLER VACHA, TYLERV@CFRA.ORG

Through years of deliberate donations in support of the Center for Rural Affairs, many of you have built your legacy by associating your name with creating a bright and vibrant future for rural America.

In the last year, Congress has passed two laws to make it easier than ever for you to lock in your legacy. Doing so will ensure your contributions continue to make a difference for our children, our children's children, and beyond.

First, the deduction cap for gifts of land for the purpose of conservation was raised from the normal 30 percent to 50 percent for landowners and 100 percent for

eligible farmers. This deduction can now be carried forward for up to 15 years.

Second, if you are 70 and one-half years old or older and have a traditional or Roth IRA, you can now make Qualified Charitable Distributions of up to \$100,000 annually tax free! Consider making your Required Minimum Distribution a gift to a qualified charity, and increase your impact.

Lastly, an old one but a good one. If you'd like to make a gift, but still need income for day to day living expenses, you can do so by establishing a Charitable Gift Annuity. Through a Charitable Gift Annuity you make an irrevocable gift of cash securities to establish

a fixed income for you and/or your loved ones for life. Upon the expiration of that annuity, the remainder interest benefits your charity of choice.

Please consult with a financial adviser to be sure you are following proper procedures when making a charitable gift. You'll likely be eligible for significant tax benefits, and this can be negatively affected if proper procedures are not followed.

As always, thank you for continuing to build upon your legacy of support for the Center for Rural Affairs. We are proud to be building a vibrant rural future for America with you.

PREMATURE DEATHS, CONTINUED FROM PAGE 8

Blacks experience the highest rural mortality penalty. If you are black, where you live is more highly correlated with how long you will live.

For rural whites, and middle-aged white women in particular, the trend toward longer life expectancy has actually reversed course. In 21 hard-hit counties in the rural South and Midwest, the death rate for middle-aged white women has more than doubled. While white women remain an advantaged group, their advantage is eroding.

The impact is significant. Considering just the reversal of improving life spans for white Americans over the last decade, half a million people are dead who should not be dead.

Each untimely death results in a family without a mother, a company without a worker, and a

community without a leader.

While researchers are not yet certain of the cause of the trend, we know that it is correlated with fewer economic opportunities in rural areas, lower rates of education, higher than average rates of smoking, obesity, and drug and alcohol abuse.

The trend is also correlated with increasingly fractious politics. The *Washington Post* found that the places where middle-aged whites are dying fastest are the same places where presidential candidate Donald Trump is performing best.

This is an election outcome driven by individuals who feel left behind. Negative health outcomes and diminished economic opportunity have led this group to become disenfranchised. The resulting population is less likely to be engaged at the community, state,

and national level.

In considering the challenge, we must remember that declining economic opportunity and rising health challenges are not inevitable facts of our nation. Rather, increasing challenges for the working poor are the result of policy decisions we have made.

We can make different decisions. Trade agreements that hollowed out American manufacturing, a stagnant minimum wage, unfair tax policy, and a failure of states to expand health coverage to the working poor all correlate with rising death rates.

We can choose to make different decisions about these policies, and we should.

Our goal should be that all Americans continue to enjoy increasingly longer and higher quality lives, regardless of who they are or where they live.



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FROM THE DESK OF THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

PREMATURE DEATHS ON THE RISE IN RURAL AREAS

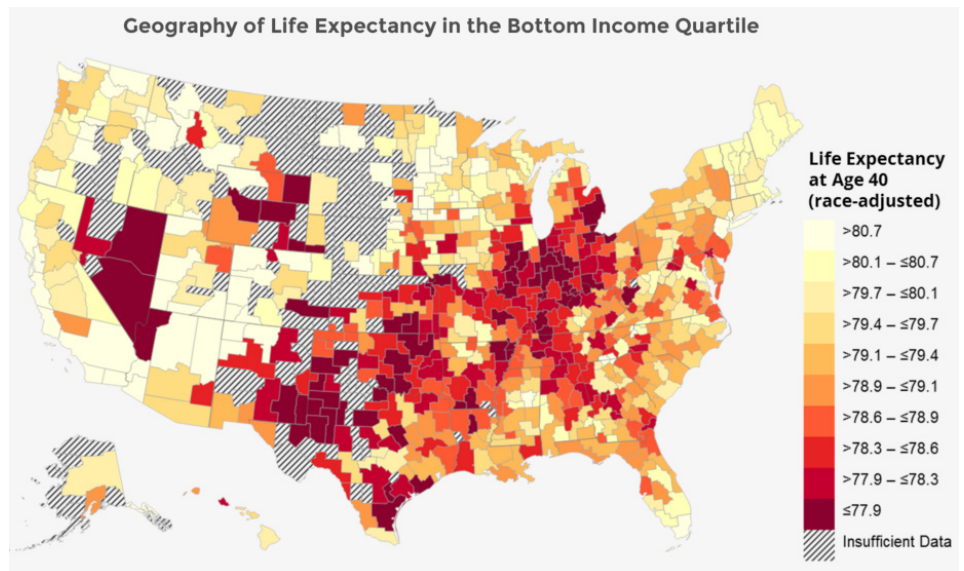
BY BRIAN DEPEW, BRIAND@CFRA.ORG

Where you live should not determine how long you live. New research shows it does. Americans have enjoyed increasingly longer lives over time. Advances in medicine, a decline in fatal car accidents, and falling violent crime rates mean we are living longer.

But new research is showing a reversal of this trend for some. If you are rich, geography doesn't matter. Your expected lifespan is increasing. But if you are poor, geography matters. In some parts of the country, we see an actual reversal of the trend.

Life expectancy is lowest in a large swath that cuts through the rural Midwest and south.

—READ MORE ABOUT [PREMATURE DEATHS](#) ON PAGE 7.



Map courtesy of The Health Inequality Project, <https://healthinequality.org>