



CENTER *for* RURAL AFFAIRS

YOUR RURAL NEWS FOR OVER 45 YEARS | LYONS, NEBRASKA | POPULATION 851 | NOVEMBER & DECEMBER 2019

FLOOD WATERS DESTROY ROADS BUT DON'T DAMPEN SPIRITS

BY LIZ DAEHNKE

Plains states have faced more weather-related catastrophes during seven months in 2019 than entire previous years combined. Flooding has been a major issue for many people, especially residents of Nebraska and Iowa.

Janna Feldman, owner of Doe's and Diva's Dairy, outside of Honey Creek, Iowa, has dealt with this issue firsthand.

Nestled in the Loess Hills of western Iowa, the goat and sheep farm is a small, seasonal, family-run operation. Janna and her family milk 40 sheep during the spring, summer, and fall. And, lambing and kidding occur in the early spring when there are more visitors to the farm.

When flooding hit their area this

—SEE FLOOD WATERS ON PAGE 4



Gene Albers, of south central Kansas, is beginning to retire from his 1,200-acre cattle, wheat, and soybean operation. He is working with his daughter and son-in-law to pass down conservation practices—a long-time tradition on the farm. | Photo by Rhea Landholm

COVER CROPS HAVE KANSAS FARMER COVERED

BY KATE HANSEN, KATEH@CFRA.ORG

Gene Albers joined his family's tradition of farming in south central Kansas in the 1970s.

After working the land with their father, Gene and his two brothers became farmers. Now, with years of experience behind him, Gene is beginning to retire from his 1,200-acre cattle, wheat, and soybean operation.

As Gene reflects on his career, the benefits of years of conservation practices stand out to him. Two practices in particular, planting cover crops and implementing no-till, have been especially beneficial for his operation. He sees them as economically practical ways to steward the land.

Gene's use of conservation practices began more than two decades ago. After a change in the 1996 farm bill, he began incorporating no-till in 1997.

A few years later, he started planting cover crops like radishes, turnips, barley, and oats, and grazing his cattle on them. He was able to start planting cover crops by enrolling in the Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP). The program helped cover his costs for planting cover crops.

CSP is a working lands program run by the Natural Resources Conservation Service that provides farmers with financial and technical assistance for conserva

—SEE COVER CROPS ON PAGE 3

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NOTE FROM THE EDITOR

BY RHEA LANDHOLM, RHEAL@CFRA.ORG

At the Center for Rural Affairs, all of our work ties into our set of values. One value that fits our front page story is “STEWARDSHIP of the natural environment upon which all of us—current and future generations—rely.”

Last March, I had the opportunity to visit south central Kansas where I met Gene Albers who is starting to transition his farm to the next generation.

He lives stewardship every day. Upon our arrival, Gene greeted my colleague and I, then gave us a tour of his land by pick-up. He pointed out the different cover crops, and the conserva-

tion efforts that have been made over time. We even spotted some pheasants hanging out, enjoying habitat that has been restored.

Gene’s values were instilled in him by his father who had the hindsight to make changes to the land to avoid run-off in the 1970s. And, by making changes in his farming practices, Gene continues that work. From one generation to the next, stewardship lives on in south central Kansas.

However, Gene doesn’t just follow one of our organization’s values, he lives several of them. During the 2018 farm bill, he, along with many of you, was instrumental in urging lawmakers to support the Conservation Stew-



ardship Program. He took “ACTION to shape the future.” Gene wrote guest opinion pieces and we helped him submit those to local publications. This helped with visibility and showed lawmakers in Kansas that he cared.

Would you like to get involved like Gene? Give us a call at 402.687.2100 or email info@cfra.org.

NELSEN RECOGNIZED FOR WORK IN CLEAN ENERGY

BY LIZ DAEHNKE

Each year, Midwest Energy News acknowledges leaders based in the Midwest. These men and women are innovators from all sectors, including industry, government, regulatory, business, academia, nonprofit, and advocacy.

The 40 Under 40 awards program highlights their work in America’s transition to a clean energy economy.

This year, the Center for Rural Affairs was represented by one of its own. Policy Associate Lu Nelsen was named one of the recipients of the 2019 Midwest Energy News 40 Under 40 Award.

Through his work, Lu helps

bring awareness of the benefits of renewable energy development to people in rural America. This work is done in an effort to assist those in rural communities in being part of a clean energy transition.

Lu’s colleagues at the Center took notice of his hard work and dedication to renewable energy, and nominated him for the award.

“Because of Lu’s commitment to clean and renewable energy, I have learned so much about rural America’s place in a clean energy economy,” said Cody Smith, policy associate.

“When it comes to nonprofits working on energy, Lu is definitely one of the experts, and is a great

addition to the group,” said Trenton Buhr, policy assistant. “Lu’s research and energy advocacy speaks for itself—he’s definitely a leader in this field.”

Humbled by the recognition, Lu feels grateful to be acknowledged, and hopes this publicity will help bring forward momentum to his work.

“It’s an honor to be part of a group that features advocates from around the region doing great work,” he said. “The list demonstrates the breadth of work being done across the Midwest to support a clean energy transition and support communities in addressing climate change.”

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.

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Gene Albers' use of conservation practices began more than two decades ago. He plants cover crops, like radishes, turnips, barley, and oats, and grazes his cattle on them. He was able to start planting cover crops by enrolling in the Conservation Stewardship Program. | Photo by Rhea Landholm

COVER CROPS, CONTINUED FROM PAGE 3

tion practices. Gene was the first person in his county to hold a CSP contract.

"I am grateful for the program, because I would not have been as motivated to begin planting cover crops without it," Gene said.

Over the years, Gene has seen the benefits of taking care of his soil with no-till and cover crops. When he began farming, people told him he would never produce soybeans because no one in the area did, and that local soil was not suitable for growing that crop.

However, Gene proved them wrong. His first attempt to grow soybeans resulted in a yield of 52 bushels per acre—a respectable average yield by today's standards. He credits this success in part to his land stewardship practices.

Gene was glad to hear the 2018 farm bill increased support for cover crops under CSP. The update allows farmers to receive higher payments for cover crops under a CSP contract.

"I support the increase, especially because CSP was the main reason I started with cover crops," Gene said. "It will help with overall water quality, air quality, and erosion if more people get involved with these practices."

"...CSP WAS THE MAIN REASON I STARTED WITH COVER CROPS. IT WILL HELP WITH OVERALL WATER QUALITY, AIR QUALITY, AND EROSION IF MORE PEOPLE GET INVOLVED WITH THESE PRACTICES."

—GENE ALBERS, KINGMAN COUNTY, KANSAS

Today, Gene plants a cover crop blend of more than 10 species, and grazes his cattle on it. He says its benefits are diverse.

"Cover crops increase residue, put nitrogen into the soil, prevent soil erosion, support the roots, and reduce runoff," he said. "I also don't have to use as much fertilizer because there is more organic material in the soil."

The farmer appreciates that, in the decade he has been planting cover crops, he hasn't had to replant any crops due to soil crusting, which is common in Kansas.

Gene's commitment to conservation extends off the farm as well: he is the chairman of the South Central Kansas Residue Alliance and former chairman of the Kingman County No-till Group. For 16 years, he also held multiple leadership roles for the Kansas Association of Conservation Districts, including serving two years as president. In all of his positions, Gene often organizes local tours

and interacts with fellow farmers.

One common misconception Gene runs into when he talks with farmers about cover crops is they will use moisture that could be used for the next crop. He said this is "simply not true," and cites instances on his farm where increased cover crops had a positive impact on yield.

As Gene begins to pass the farm on to his daughter and son-in-law, he is working with them to continue conservation practices. He hopes more farmers will realize the value.

"Making changes can be hard on a farm, but doing cover crops and no-till is worth it," Gene said.

With higher payments for cover crops now available under CSP, farmers have an increased opportunity to start planting cover crops and integrating them into their farm's systems. For Gene, the reason is clear: cover crops and no-till have transformed his operation for the better.

FLOOD WATERS, CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

spring, Janna says everything on their operation stood still. Flood waters washed out all interstates, highways, and gravel roads surrounding their dairy. People were unable to reach their place to attend classes and shop at their farm store.

“We are up in the hills, so we did not have direct flooding, but roads all around us were closed off,” she said. “What was normally a 20-minute trip turned into a two-hour drive.”

Because of this, Janna says her business has suffered financially.

“Spring is usually one of our busiest seasons, and the highest income producing time at the dairy,” she said. “Some roads are open now, but travel is still restricted, and we have only had a handful of visitors to the farm since the flooding.”

The devastation of the flood has not only affected visitors coming to the farm. Feeding the animals of Doe’s and Diva’s Dairy became a huge obstacle as well.

The hills around the dairy endured very hard rains, causing gullies to form and fences to wash out. The animals could not graze on the pasture, as per usual. Janna’s husband, Tom, works full-time off the dairy, so he didn’t have time to fix the problem areas right away. As a result, they had to buy hay to feed the goats and sheep.

But, even that was a difficult task.

“We couldn’t even go get hay, because our sources were gone—they got washed out by the flood,” said Janna. “We had to drive for hours and hours to get hay because all the roads were closed, and we had to take back roads and long routes to get everywhere.”

Though the flooding has taken a toll on their business, Janna shows no signs of giving up hope or slowing down. After working on other operations and being in the



Flooding in the Midwest has affected Doe’s and Diva’s Dairy in Iowa. Visitors have been unable to reach their place to attend classes or shop at their farm store.

Owner Janna Feldman keeps things creative by marketing her animals for nondairy-related activities. Goats and lambs are available through their “Party Poopers” package, designed for photography sessions, parties, and more. Also offered on-site is sheep and goat yoga—a popular form of yoga practiced in the presence of animals, which allows people to interact with them, too. | Photos submitted



dairy business for more than a decade, she knows a thing or two about the recipe for success.

“Doe’s and Diva’s Dairy has been open for business for six years,” she said. “We attend farmers markets during the summer, and rely on our farm store outlet to sell soaps, lotions, and yarn. We also sell fresh cheese in the store.”

Doe’s and Diva’s also benefited from a flood grant from the Center for Rural Affairs made possible through Farm Aid. To date, Farm Aid has granted \$157,500 to farm organizations in the Midwest and Plains to make emergency grants available to farmers impacted by the historic flooding of 2019.

“Receiving that funding was such a blessing,” said Janna. “When we had no income from the dairy, the Center really helped us out.”

And, though the flooding temporarily slowed down business, Janna keeps planning the next steps for her dairy.

“People see the pictures of flooding, and they automatically think everything is under water, but it’s so much more than people are aware,” she said. “We keep moving forward. We just entered the Iowa State Fair with our cheese, and every year we win some kind of recognition. We’re tough, we’ll keep going and doing the best we can.”



Loan specialists at the Center for Rural Affairs work with Latina small business owners each day. Through this, we identified and understood the need to help them start a business. This resulted in the first-ever Empowerment for Latina Women in Business Conference, offered solely in Spanish, this August. | Photos by Kylie Kai

BUSINESS NEEDS PROMPT CONFERENCE IN SPANISH

BY ANNA PRATT, ANNA@CFRA.ORG

This August, Ana Gonzalez was among 60 of her peers who heard from Latino business leaders on marketing, leadership, business planning, and legal requirements for small businesses.

She attended the Center for Rural Affairs' inaugural Empowerment for Latina Women in Business Conference, offered solely in Spanish.

"I enjoyed learning that how you look and how you act when you receive your customers speaks highly of your business," Ana said.

The owner and operator of Enchanted Bakery in Grand Island, Nebraska, also shared her story with conference attendees. She started her small business in 2015 with the help of two loans from the Center for Rural Affairs.

Ana is part of a growing demographic, as women own 44 percent of Latino businesses, according to the Latino American Commission.

Over the last decade in Nebraska, the Latino population has increased by 77 percent, noted in U.S. Census data. Latinos are moving to rural areas attracted by several factors, including the low cost of living and new job opportunities. When those opportunities present as small business entrepreneurship, the Center for Rural



Ana Gonzalez, owner of a bakery, and Norma Marquez, owner of a media outlet, were featured on a panel of Latina business owners who shared their experiences and stories of starting a business in the U.S.

Affairs is eager to help.

Loan specialists with the Center work with Latina small business owners each day. Through this, we identified and understood the need to help Latina entrepreneurs navigate the legalities and requirements of starting a business in Nebraska.

"We wanted to provide an inclusive and culturally friendly place for Latina women to learn about resources to ensure their business is a success," said Veronica Spindola, Center for Rural Affairs loan specialist. "That's how we came up with the Empowerment for Latina Women in Business Conference."

At the conference, Center staff strived to provide resources and business coaching to help empower new immigrants to be better

prepared and informed.

"This conference was a two-fold benefit since we learned things outside our field, and also met with like-minded people and industry peers," said Rocio Esparza, attendee and owner of an immigration services business.

One unique aspect was the session that featured Ana—a panel of Latina business owners who shared their experiences and stories of starting a business in the U.S. Ana shared that resources, such as loans from the Center for Rural Affairs, were very important to her success.

And, Ana sent a message to her peers.

"Do not give up on your dreams," she said.

CLARA'S GARDEN SHOWS THAT A SUSTAINABLE FLORAL BUSINESS IS POSSIBLE

BY KAYLA BERGMAN, KAYLAB@CFRA.ORG, AND KATE HANSEN, KATEH@CFRA.ORG

Being a florist focused on sustainability in the face of our changing climate may be difficult, but Mediapolis, Iowa, mother-daughter duo Meredith and Jen Hinson do just that.

Meredith began her floral career working for a local florist 15 years before opening her own shop—Clara's Garden—in 2000. Jen joined the Clara's Garden team when she moved back for the summer after teaching in Houston, Texas, for a few years.

But, Jen wasn't intending on staying long-term, she was doing temporary work while applying for jobs in Chicago. That was 2003. Here we are in 2019, and Jen now leads the wedding florals part of the business, and Clara's Garden recently moved to a larger space in the southeastern Iowa town.

The sustainability of their operation stems from the sourcing of their florals to how they dispose of remnants and used products.

"We would love to get all local flowers, but that isn't practical due to the two largest days for our business being Valentine's Day and Mother's Day," Jen said.

The duo source some of the flowers from a large garden they planted on their family farm, called the Hinson Family Farm, along with foraging in their timber along the Mississippi River. In addition, they have worked with a farmer in Ecuador and a distributor in Illinois for the past 15 years to purchase the flowers they arrange and provide for holidays, weddings, funerals, births, and all other occasions in between.

"We want the next generation to visit and to put their hands on and to have something there to use—with climate change, we



Meredith and Jen Hinson, owners of Clara's Garden, focus on sustainability from sourcing their florals to how they dispose of the remnants and used products. Jen, pictured, adopted the mindset of "we take care of the Earth, because it takes care of us." | Photos submitted

are all going to have to adapt," Jen said. "I am seeing the effects even with my floral garden being planted so late this year due to excessive rain and flooding."

Other practices that Meredith and Jen have instilled in their operation include minimizing the use of non-biodegradable floral foam, composting used flowers and remnants, and rain barrels at their shop.

Jen attributes the sense of community they have in their sustainable floral business to the Slow Flowers Movement, which, according to their website, promotes and supports the purchase of American-grown flowers in the U.S.

Through a connection in that network, Jen adopted the mindset of "we take care of the Earth because it takes care of us."

The Hinson Family Farm has

a mindset of conservation in the face of our changing climate as well, which Jen attributes to her cousin, Jason, who chooses to fix things instead of buying new and has converted the farm to solar power.

Jen is passionate about family farms and Jason's contribution to the Hinson Family Farms.

"If we ever get back to strong family farms, it will be people like Jason who will make the most impact," Jen said.

The Hinsons have won awards for how they maintain their forest land and farmland, including the Conservation Faces of Iowa award from the Iowa Pheasants Forever and Quail Forever.

Jen said there is no reason a sustainable floral business couldn't be repeated elsewhere.

"It is completely practical, it just takes time," she said.

CULTURAL FESTIVALS CAN BRING A COMMUNITY TOGETHER

BY GLADYS GODINEZ, GLADYSG@CFRA.ORG

Let's celebrate our rural communities with intention. The Center for Rural Affairs helps communities learn and engage in an intentional way to make long lasting connections across cultures.

One way to celebrate our small towns is to support cultural festivals in rural communities. Festivals teach us something new about our neighbors, strengthen our relationships, and foster community pride by bringing people together from all walks of life.

With the variety of multicultural months, we have the opportunity to host all kinds of festivals. For example, November is National Native American Heritage Month. Our communities can help support our Native American neighbors by celebrating their history and pride. This is a great chance to learn about our history as a nation and the strengths that we all bring.

Festivals can foster community pride. All cultural festivals allow individuals to showcase their history by dressing in traditional cultural attire. We can showcase our foods by sharing them and learning about new tastes. Our kids can play together and live in



One way to celebrate our small towns is to support cultural festivals in rural communities. Festivals teach us something new about our neighbors, strengthen our relationships, and foster community pride by bringing people together. | Photo by Rhea Landholm

a colorful world of differences.

The Center supports communities that foster this type of inclusion and can help in taking those intentional steps to get to know your neighbors. For example, we are currently working with community leaders in Hastings, Nebraska, toward making great steps in inclusion.

CULTURAL CONNECT WEEK

Community leaders in Hastings saw a need for a festival with food and entertainment. As a result, Hastings is hosting its 10th annual Cultural Festival. This year, we helped develop a week of inclusion activities in conjunction with the festival, called Hastings Cultural Connect Week.

Planned activities include a training for those who serve immigrant communities, a showing of Go Luna Go!, a folkloric dance class, an interfaith conversation, and a poetry slam. This week is intentional in growing the Hastings community in becoming more inclusive and understanding of all of its members.

In addition, community leaders are starting an inclusion committee to focus on active steps to continue to make Hastings a welcoming and inclusive community. This event is co-hosted by the Center for Rural Affairs, the YWCA of Adams County, and the Hastings Multicultural Association.

GET BIG OR GET OUT, CONTINUED FROM PAGE 8

record \$100 million in funding for beginning farmer training and local food system support because we chose to fight for these programs.

We are not resigned to a future of inevitable market consolidation.

We understand the choices we make in Washington set the path for agriculture in the countryside.

We believe in a future where people who work hard are treated fairly in the marketplace, where policymakers fight to protect ev-

eryday rural people from corporate market control, and where ownership of assets is widespread with opportunity for all who participate.

We call on policymakers to join us.



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FROM THE DESK OF THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

GET BIG OR GET OUT, A REDUX

BY BRIAN DEPEW, BRIAND@CFRA.ORG

Asked about the plight of dairy farmers in Wisconsin, U.S. Secretary of Agriculture Sonny Perdue said, “[The] big get bigger and small go out, and that’s kind of what we’ve seen here... Everyone will have to make their own decisions economically whether they can survive.”

The Center for Rural Affairs was founded in 1973. Earl Butz was Secretary of Agriculture. Butz had a similar view, “Get big or get out.”

Butz believed farm consolidation was inevitable.

The Center was founded on a different belief. We believe in our ability to come together to shape the future through policy change. We believe in widespread ownership of businesses and farmland. We believe those who work hard

ought to have an opportunity to share in the ownership and prosperity their labor created.

For 46 years, we have stood up for these beliefs.

Unlike Perdue, we believe consolidation in agriculture is not inevitable. Instead, we understand it is the direct result of policy decisions we have made together as a nation. We can choose to make different policy decisions. Consider:

We can choose to place a cap on crop insurance subsidies. Right now, if one operation farmed the entire state of Iowa, the federal government would subsidize their crop insurance on every single acre. We have fought to level the playing field by capping this subsidy at \$50,000 per farm, a cap that would affect only the largest 2 percent of farms.

We can choose to enforce the Packers and Stockyards Act and put hardworking livestock producers on a level playing field in the market dominated by large multinational meatpackers. Instead, the current administration has chosen to roll back rules and enforcement even further.

These are choices we make. We can make different choices. Together, we have made good choices to shape the future of agriculture, proving it can be done. Consider:

Today, over 70 million acres of working farmland are protected by the Conservation Stewardship Program because we chose to fight for this landmark program in the 2008 farm bill.

The 2018 farm bill includes a

—SEE GET BIG OR GET OUT ON PAGE 7