



# CENTER *for* RURAL AFFAIRS

YOUR RURAL NEWS FOR MORE THAN 45 YEARS | LYONS, NEBRASKA | POPULATION 851 | MARCH & APRIL 2022

## NOT YOUR AVERAGE CO-OPS: NATIVE AMERICANS SHARE COOPERATIVE INSIGHTS

BY JUSTIN CARTER, JUSTINC@CFRA.ORG

**W**hat do we think of when we say cooperative? Is it the farmers' co-op down the road, combining grains to sell? Is it a nearby co-op grocer with customer members? Is it a large company, maybe Land O'Lakes or Ocean Spray?

The truth is that cooperatives come in all forms, and there is no better way to learn about these diverse enterprises than from Native American cultures of North America.

Cooperatives present many benefits for business owners: the distribution of risk among members to ensure resiliency, the sharing of resources, and a democratic business environment ensuring owners have a voice. One might say the values involved are more societal than business.

—SEE [NATIVE AMERICAN CO-OPS](#) ON PAGE 4



Ohe-láku, or Among the Cornstalks, located in Oneida, Wisconsin, was started because members of the community wanted to be more self-sufficient. Fifteen families grow corn together, like their ancestors. | Photo submitted

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## FAMILY FARM FOCUSES ON THE SOURCE

BY CAIT CAUGHEY, CAITC@CFRA.ORG

**M**ost farmers have interesting stories about how they made the journey to farming. Kelsey Jones, Lyle Marotz, and their baby, Phoenix, are no different.

They are in their third year of marketing farming and raising vegetables, herbs, fruit, and flowers on Source Farms just north of Norfolk in Hoskins, Nebraska.

They found their way to the

land that used to be home to a dairy farm run by Lyle's family via teaching English in Southeast Asia and earning degrees in finance and business management at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln.

"Source Farms is experimental, focused on greens and a wide variety of vegetables, and seeks to inspire plant-based eating," Kelsey said.

—SEE [FAMILY FARM FOCUSES ON SOURCE](#) ON PAGE 3

## EDITOR'S NOTE

BY RHEA LANDHOLM, RHEAL@CFRA.ORG

We love to get out to meet you face-to-face, but due to the pandemic, some meetings haven't been possible. So, we are reaching out in different ways such as videos on our YouTube Channel (page 1); a podcast (page 8); a Zoom gathering (page 2); and even online workshops (page 5).

These ways couldn't be possible without progress in our communities. Throughout this issue, we give additional examples of this core value, "PROGRESS that strengthens rural communities, small businesses, and family farms and ranches," just one value that shapes our organization.

On the front page, we take a look at the cooperative type of business model, which Native



Americans use for arts, food, and more. They are able to progress their businesses while preserving their values and culture.

In another feature, Kelsey Jones and Lyle Marotz run an experimental farm to inspire plant-based eating. They want to provide equitable access to produce in communities where

fresh, seasonal produce is lacking. Check out their inspirational story.

More progress can be found in Nebraska Public Power District's goal to achieve net-zero carbon emissions by 2050.

Last, but not least, our executive director tells us about a new podcast. "Sustainable Agriculture Policy with Ron Kroese" highlights progress made throughout the last 50 years in this sector. I've had the pleasure of working on this project and I can't wait to release these episodes. My favorite story is of efforts to save federal documents before they were destroyed.

As always, these articles contain just a sample of what we are up to. Read more at [cfra.org/blog](http://cfra.org/blog).

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## GRANT PROVIDES OPPORTUNITY FOR SMALL GRAIN PRODUCERS TO SHARE RISK MANAGEMENT CHALLENGES

BY KALEE OLSON, KALEEO@CFRA.ORG

Small grain producers were the focus of two roundtable discussions hosted by the Center for Rural Affairs in November. Thanks to funding from a U.S. Department of Agriculture Extension Risk Management Education (ERME) grant, this often underserved sector of the agricultural community was able to gather virtually and share their experiences growing wheat, oats, barley, and rye.

Twelve farmers from Nebraska, Iowa, Minnesota, and Kansas participated in the discussions, representing both conventional and organic operations. Like other producers, these individuals opt to diversify their farms with small grains, citing reasons such as conservation benefits, organic certification requirements, and filling niche markets.

While small grains are raised by thousands of operations across the Midwest and Great Plains,

their risk management strategies and considerations differ greatly from commodity crops, such as corn and soybeans. During the discussion, participants were encouraged to share their experiences with crop insurance, as well as other tools they've used to back their small grains harvest. They also shared their visions for a sustainable future, considering their value as cover crops

—SEE [RISK MANAGEMENT CHALLENGES](#) ON PAGE 3

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### 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).

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## FAMILY FARM FOCUSES ON SOURCE, CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

She and Lyle raise more than 200 tomato plants, long beans, Mohawk pole beans, sunflowers, basil, elderberries, blackberries, pumpkins, kale, Tahitian melons, and more on about one-third of an acre of land.

Lyle is “full force with the vegetables,” and Kelsey focuses on herbs that help support women’s health.

Together, they want to provide equitable access to produce in communities where fresh, seasonal produce is lacking. This vision led them to connect with restaurants like Juju’s Vegan Cajun and Creole Cuisine and Pepe’s Bistro in Lincoln. Source Farms also regularly attends the farmers market in Norfolk, where they have built relationships.

“Initially, they did not know how to receive us,” Kelsey said of their rural community.

Over time, they have built relationships with people who became repeat customers at the farmers market and who support their work. Kelsey said she’s gained important insights for fellow beginning farmers, in particular, Black women farmers.

“Be consistent,” she said. “Show up and take up space. Enter into the space you deserve to be in. Share about who you are. It is a matter of time; let people live into the initial discomfort.”



Kelsey Jones, Lyle Marotz, and their baby, Phoenix, want to provide equitable access to produce in communities where fresh, seasonal produce is lacking. They are in their third year of marketing farming and raising vegetables, herbs, fruit, and flowers on Source Farms in Hoskins, Nebraska. | Photos submitted

She also highlighted the need for farmers to have educational, networking, and community-building opportunities.

“The networking piece is so important,” Kelsey said. “It gives you hope that you are not alone, you can grow together in that way.”

The Center for Rural Affairs is dedicated to supporting young, beginning farmers of color by developing programming to empower future generations of farmers like Source Farms. Find Source Farms on Facebook (Source Farms) and Instagram (@sourcefarms\_). Contact them at [kjsource402@gmail.com](mailto:kjsource402@gmail.com).



Lyle Marotz, owner of Source Farms alongside Kelsey Jones, raises more than 200 tomato plants, long beans, Mohawk pole beans, sunflowers, basil, elderberries, blackberries, pumpkins, kale, Tahitian melons, and more on about one-third of an acre of land.

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## RISK MANAGEMENT CHALLENGES, CONTINUED FROM PAGE 2

ing their value as cover crops and long-term investment in soil health.

“In addition to (more technical strategies), groups like this—knowledgeable farmers and friends—are huge for risk management,” one participant said.

ERME, previously referred to as

the Risk Management Education Partnership Program, is designed to help underserved and underinsured producers, such as beginning and socially disadvantaged farmers, understand and mitigate the risk of their farming operations. Other Center projects conducted with support from

ERME have helped educate certified organic farmers and producers with diversified operations.

For more information on insuring small grains, download a copy of our report “From Seed to Secured: Crop Insurance for Small Grains” at [cfra.org/publications](http://cfra.org/publications).



Ancestral Rich Treasures of Zuni (ARTZ) is the only Pueblo artist-owned and operated cooperative in New Mexico. Once accepted into the cooperative, artists can sell their work in a volunteer-operated gallery. | Photos submitted

## NATIVE AMERICAN CO-OPS, CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

In many ways, these values are the foundation of how Native American societies function: as singular communities in which members take care of one another. Today, many Native Americans are transferring these values to their businesses.

In 2021, the Center for Rural Affairs offered an online series of Native Cooperative workshops, taught by Pamela Standing of the Minnesota Indigenous Business Alliance (MNIBA). “Models of Native Cooperative Ownership” presented on 11 enterprises with unique stories.

Some are more structured, such as Ancestral Rich Treasures of Zuni (ARTZ), a cooperative of 32 artists who operate their own retail store where they ensure artists receive the full monetary value for their art.

Some are smaller and operated by families. Ohe-láku, or Among the Cornstalks, is made up of 15 families and grows traditional corn that is divided among members

based on the number of hours they invest.

Others focus on education, prioritizing the future of their food and people. Dream of Wild Health is a seed-keeping cooperative with youth food system programs for all ages.

What they all have in common is a strong sense of community, protecting their cultures, traditions, and foodways. However, cooperatives have their share of challenges, often requiring a level of trust between members and owners not seen in other businesses. Once trust is established, members collaborate in ways that benefit the entire business.

“The cooperative highlights everybody’s strengths and makes it so we cover each other’s weaknesses,” said Kandis Quam of ARTZ.

Cooperatives also can serve as community hubs, providing space to train others, and establishing networks where community members care for each other.



Members of Ohe-láku, or Among the Cornstalks, say the corn they grow has very little to do with the corn. “It has everything to do with the spiritual connection to the food and rebuilding our community in Oneida.”

“We can create these things in our communities, designed by our own culture, language, and life-ways to help our community grow strong,” Pamela said.

You can view the entire series on the Center’s YouTube page, [youtube.com/c/cfraorg](https://youtube.com/c/cfraorg).



Antonio Fombellida Garcia, owner of Handyman Antonio, wanted to make sure he did everything correctly when starting his business. He and co-owner Sheyla Campos attended Cleaning and Construction Academies hosted by the Center. | Photo submitted

# CENTER ACADEMIES PRESENT NEW OPPORTUNITIES FOR HANDYMAN BUSINESS

BY SHELBY OSTRAND, SHELBYO@CFRA.ORG, AND CARLOS BARGENAS

**W**hen Sheyla Campos and Antonio Fombellida Garcia started their business Handyman Antonio, in Grand Island, Nebraska, they made sure everything was by the book.

They turned to the Center for Rural Affairs' Construction Academy and Cleaning Academy, each a series of classes focused on the industry—exactly what they needed.

“We were looking for orientation on how to open a business, do it according to the law and follow state regulations,” said Sheyla.

Griselda Rendon, Center Latino loan specialist, guided them to the academies after assisting the new business owners with a one-on-one business counseling session.

“She was the first person we met, and we are extremely thankful,” Sheyla said. “We were taken by the hand in this process so we could open our business, step by step.”

After attending the Cleaning Academy, Sheyla and Antonio

took their business to new heights with lessons learned, including knowing what products to use for different jobs, the differences in chemicals, and what portions of products are required.

They also touted their Cleaning Management Institute certifications they earned upon completing the course and passing an exam.

“We were able to be prepared and put everything into practice right away,” said Antonio. “I have been able to share these skills with many others to make sure others are using the right chemicals and portions as well.”

The next step in improving their business was attending another of the Center's courses, the Construction Academy.

“The Construction Academy was fantastic,” Sheyla said. “It taught us how to keep our paperwork, construct a contract, and to make sure our clients are happy with our work. We learned a lot from budgeting to making proposals for potential jobs. We also received information on customer service

and the proper way to do business.”

Sheyla and Antonio have been grateful to the Center staff, including Griselda and Raúl Arcos Hawkins, business development specialist, who continue to let them know about upcoming opportunities.

In early 2021, they were notified of special financing made available to businesses struggling during the pandemic. They applied for and received a COVID-19 relief grant administered by the Center, with funds provided by Wells Fargo.

“Raúl and Griselda have been wonderful with us and everyone else, letting people know what is going on,” said Antonio. “Raúl has been very attentive and shared content online through social media which has helped us tremendously.”

“We are so thankful for all the help the Center for Rural Affairs has provided to us,” said Sheyla.

Academies are now planned for 2022. Visit [cfra.org/academies](http://cfra.org/academies) for more information.



With the adoption of a goal to achieve net-zero carbon emissions by 2050, Nebraska Public Power District joins a statewide effort to reduce carbon emissions for a decarbonized electric grid. | Photo courtesy of the Center for Pollinators in Energy

## DECARBONIZATION GOALS ESTABLISH STATE AS CLEAN ENERGY LEADER

BY LINDSAY MOUW, LINDSAYM@CFRA.ORG

**N**early every Nebraskan is now served by an electric utility committed to supplying clean, sustainable energy. In December, the Nebraska Public Power District (NPPD) board of directors voted 9-2 to adopt a goal to achieve net-zero carbon emissions by 2050. This means the utility will steadily seek to source more energy from such carbon-free sources as solar and wind energy and reduce reliance on such carbon-intensive sources as coal over the next 30 years. During this time, NPPD will continue to use reliable generation sources, such as natural gas and nuclear, until alternatives are developed at scale. These efforts will be combined with energy

efficiency projects, certified offsets, beneficial electrification projects, and other economic or practical technologies.

With the adoption of this policy, NPPD joins Lincoln Electric System (LES) and the Omaha Public Power District (OPPD) in what has become a statewide effort to reduce carbon emissions for a decarbonized electric grid. OPPD adopted its net-zero by 2050 goal in 2019 and LES aims to reach net-zero by 2040 as part of a goal adopted in 2020.

This is a big win for Nebraska and its rural residents and communities.

Clean energy brings additional tax dollars to counties that support local schools, infrastructure, and public services. It also brings

jobs, increased retail sales, and secure payments to area landowners, in addition to providing sustainable, homegrown energy. Many rural Nebraskans have already experienced these benefits and want to bring additional investments to their communities.

With the state's unique public power system, Nebraskans have the power to influence how their energy is generated. NPPD's rural customer/owners are to be commended for the part they played in the adoption of this goal.

Because of their efforts, and the work of others, Nebraska has established itself as a clean energy leader on the road to providing affordable, reliable, and sustainable clean energy across the state.

# GIFT OF GRAIN HELPS THE CENTER GROW

BY KEVIN RAUN, AND HIS WIFE, JESSICA, LONGTIME CENTER SUPPORTERS

Early in my farming career, I began paying attention to different farm organizations and their respective values. I determined early on that the Center for Rural Affairs' ideas about the future of farms and rural communities made sense to me. Ideas such as broad ownership in land and business. Ideas like protecting our natural resources of soil, water, and air. Ideas such as helping neighbors and celebrating vibrant communities, including the immigrant and Indigenous communities.

What I learned later was that the Center for Rural Affairs actually takes action to make all these ideas come to fruition. That is why I support the Center and joined its Board.

I became personally involved in the work of the Center several years ago when they helped me apply for and receive a conservation contract for my farm. It makes



Kevin Raun, longtime supporter and former Center Board member, tried something new in fall 2020 and gave a gift of grain. He was able to increase his donation. | Photo by Erin Schoenberg

for a long story, but we worked together and had an impact on the way the program was administered. I used my experience as a typical producer and the Center provided their expertise in organizing and education. As a result, I and others were successful in our efforts. I subsequently decided

that I would contribute a percentage of the contract proceeds to the Center.

While I am no longer on the Board and my conservation contract has expired, my wife, Jessica, and I still contribute to the Center annually to help support the work they do. In fall 2020, we decided to try something new and gave a gift of grain. By making a gift of grain, rather than a gift of cash, we were able to increase our donation. It was simple and straightforward. Of course, we consulted with our tax preparer to make sure we did everything correctly to satisfy the IRS.

We made our second gift of grain in fall 2021. A gift of grain or livestock is a tax-smart form of giving that provides a meaningful contribution from what you produce on the land.

To learn more, visit [cfra.org/gift-of-grain](https://cfra.org/gift-of-grain), call 402.687.2100, or email [give@cfra.org](mailto:give@cfra.org).

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## SUSTAINABLE AGRICULTURE PODCAST, CONTINUED FROM PAGE 8

conservation Stewardship Project in 2002. The Beginning Farmer and Rancher Development Program in 2008.

These programs, and others, would not exist without a national coalition of grassroots individuals and organizations working in their respective states and collaboratively in Washington.

The coalition today is known as the National Sustainable Agriculture Coalition, although it had forerunners in the Midwest Sustainable Agriculture Working Group, the Sustainable Agriculture Coalition, and the National Campaign for Sustainable Agriculture.

While the coalition can claim significant wins, there are other areas of policy change where we have been less successful. Most notably, we have struggled to curb monopoly power within the food system or to reign in unlimited subsidies for the largest farm operations.

At the same time, topics first envisioned by sustainable agriculture advocates 40 years ago—such as a greater focus on soil health and climate change—are now receiving new attention.

History marches forward; new opportunities for change emerge.

I invite you to take time to learn what led up to today. With the interviews now available as video recordings, transcripts, and a podcast, more people will have access to this history.

This is a large project with most significant credit to Ron Kroese, as well as the individuals who sat for interviews. I am happy the Center could support a small part of making this history more widely available through a podcast.

Explore National Sustainable Agriculture Oral History Archive videos and transcripts at [cfra.org/Sustainable-Ag-Podcast](https://cfra.org/Sustainable-Ag-Podcast) and listen in your favorite podcast player.



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## **Inside: Value of cooperatives**

Native Americans use model for arts, food businesses

FROM THE DESK OF THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

# SUSTAINABLE AGRICULTURE HISTORY PROJECT NOW AVAILABLE AS PODCAST

BY BRIAN DEPEW, BRIAND@CFRA.ORG

**T**hroughout the nearly 50-year history of the Center, the emergence of federal policy supporting soil and water conservation, local and regional food systems, beginning farmers, and value-added agriculture is one of the most significant areas of policy wins.

This is why when I heard about Ron Kroese's sustainable agriculture oral history project, I knew it should be available as a podcast. Now, with support from the Center, you can find it on your favorite podcast app by searching "Sustainable Agriculture Policy with Ron Kroese."

In 1982, Ron co-founded the Land Stewardship Project, a Minnesota-based partner of the Center. Later he worked in philanthropy, supporting many organizations engaged in the development of sustainable agriculture policy. His background made Ron well-suited to take on an effort to document the history of sustainable agriculture policy.

When he retired from the McKnight Foundation in 2015, Ron began an effort that eventually grew to 40 videotaped interviews. Former Center for Rural Affairs Executive Director Chuck Hassebrook is among those interviewed.

The history told in these interviews is rich, detailed by the individuals who lived the work, most of them engaged in the effort for decades.

It can be easy to take for granted many of the federal programs supporting sustainable agriculture that exist today. Programs that are well known and popular exist because of the work done by the Center and many of its allies from across the country.

The Conservation Reserve Program was a policy win in 1985. The Sustainable Agriculture and Research Education Program in 1988. The Value Added Producers Grant Program in 2000. The Con

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Cornelia & Jan Flora  
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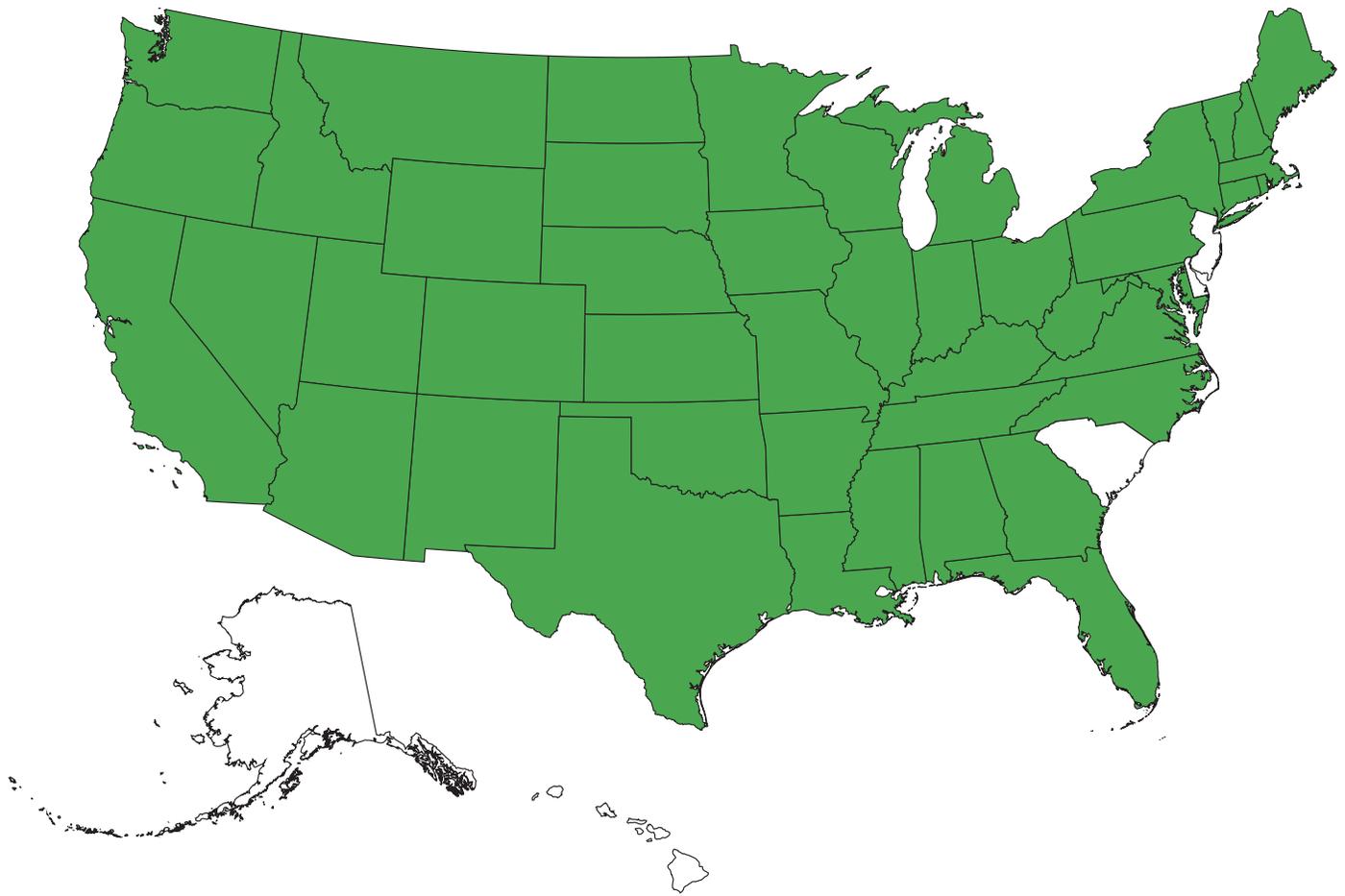
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