



CENTER *for* RURAL AFFAIRS

YOUR RURAL NEWS FOR OVER 40 YEARS | LYONS, NE | POPULATION 851 | JANUARY & FEBRUARY 2016



Members of the Comite Latino de Schuyler gather for a holiday photo. The committee sprang from the shared journey of adapting to a new life in rural Nebraska. | Photo courtesy of Comite Latino de Schuyler

STRENGTHENING COMMUNITIES THROUGH WELCOMING AND INCLUSION

BY CARLOS BARGENAS, CARLOSB@CFRA.ORG

Exploring the world from the comfort of our living rooms has become so easy, it's amazing. The internet and expanded access to technology make our small communities part of a global landscape.

But your next cultural experience may be right outside your front door. Walk around the neighborhood in your community, and a cultural experience may come to life.

That's the case in rural communities across the nation. In Nebraska, an influx of immigrant families from various ethnic backgrounds has meant a change in our population. That's a positive sign for jobs, production, and economic impact. But it also brings its own struggles and challenges.

In newly diverse communities, chief topics of conversation include language differences and a lack of services and resources. How can

we confront the challenges when language, religion, and ethnic backgrounds are so diverse?

In my small community, we looked for a common denominator. It began with the idea that "we all live in this community." A conversation centered on working together for the wellbeing of everyone around us is a great place to start. With that premise, we can begin to explore how to strengthen our

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REAP ACHIEVES TOP 10 POSITION IN NATIONAL LENDING

BY JEFF REYNOLDS, JEFFR@CFRA.ORG

The Center for Rural Affairs' small business development program, REAP, ranked #7 in the United States for the number of Small Business Administration Micro loans placed. REAP was #21 for the dollar value of Micro loans closed.

The ranking was done by the SBA's Office of Economic Opportunity at the close of their fiscal year last September. As the director of the REAP program, I am extremely proud of this accomplishment.

This is exciting for our micro work. To use a sports metaphor, hats off to a staff who, just like the Kansas City Royals, never quits and has the will and desire to be the best! (Note: I've been a Royals fan for years.)

For a rural only program, this is impressive. I thank everyone involved for this incredible achievement. I know we will



REAP Staff includes, standing: Juan Sandoval, Monica Braun, Nancy Flock, Dena Beck, Kim Preston, Janelle Moran, Griselda Rendon and Jeff Reynolds. Seated: Jerry Terwilliger and Gene Rahn.

continue to move onward and upward as we help entrepreneurs build small businesses and create vibrant small towns and rural communities.

That's been a core belief of the

Center since REAP started in 1990. Put dollars in the hands of local entrepreneurs, and their passion and hard work will build the local economy.

STRENGTHENING COMMUNITIES, CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

communities by learning about our differences.

A good example is the community of Schuyler, Nebraska. A group of mainly first generation Latino immigrants formed El Comitè Latino de Schuyler (CLS) – the Schuyler Latino Committee. Individuals saw the unmet needs of the Spanish-speaking community and came together to find a solution.

Each committee member has a different immigrant story. And each one has gone through the accul-

turation journey, learning English, adapting and adopting their new way of living in rural Nebraska, their new home.

Not only are they serving the Spanish-speaking community, they are serving the entire community. They own businesses or provide services in Schuyler. More than that, they have volunteered to serve on other committees and boards that make decisions that impact the community as a whole.

Creating an inclusive commu-

nity is a two-way street. The effort should come from both sides.

This is exactly what el Comitè has achieved, by starting the conversation with the Spanish-speaking community. But also with local community leaders, and getting involved to create change that ignites the process of welcoming and inclusion.

Having a sense of belonging is a sign of a healthy community!

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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The Center for Rural Affairs was incorporated as a private nonprofit organization on September 5, 1973.



DEVELOPMENT MATTERS

Thank you FOR YOUR GENEROUS SUPPORT

BY TYLER VACHA, TYLERV@CFRA.ORG



As a nonprofit, we realize our fundraising efforts can be frustrating. As the pace picks up in the holiday season, we know they can be annoying and downright infuriating.

But nonprofit organizations don't bombard you without a reason. More than any other month, donors have shown they prefer to give in December. Year-end tax incentives, a feeling of gratitude, or holiday cheer may be factors.

And thanks to you, our year-end fundraising

campaign was successful. In fact, since September 1, 2015, we raised \$182,962.

We couldn't have done it without your support. From all of us, thank you for helping to keep us employed, our mission afloat, and our donors and supporters (you) proud of the work we do.

Please contact me, Tyler Vacha, to discuss the Center's development program, tylerv@cfra.org or 402.687.2103 ext 1018. I would love to visit with you!

BEGINNING FARMERS, CONTINUED FROM PAGE 8

Data shows beginners are more likely to farm smaller acreages and have smaller farm incomes – sometimes much smaller.

Meanwhile, more than 60 percent of all farmers are 55 or older, and more than 25 percent are 65 or older. An estimated 400 million acres of farmland will change hands in the next 20 years.

Given this, why hasn't the number of beginners increased? We believe the answer lies in the structure of agriculture.

Without real limits on government support for the largest commodity farms, beginning and smaller farms are at a disadvantage. Limits must include traditional commodity programs as well as crop insurance subsidies. Under current law, if one operation farmed the entire state of Iowa, the federal government would subsidize its crop insurance on every single acre.

Our research shows this sub-

sidy is bid into the value of farmland. This keeps land out of reach for beginners. By subsidizing the key risk management tool used by farms, we help them grow larger and larger. Until we address this, beginners will struggle to access the land needed to create sustainable operations.

We must also reform livestock markets and guarantee contract fairness. The Center first called for such reform in the 1990s. Hogs were once the quintessential "mortgage lifter" for a new farmer who could provide labor and skilled management. Vertical integration has now left many beginners in the unfair position of taking on significant debt to raise hogs on contract.

Livestock policy reform should include a ban on meatpacker ownership of livestock, and should limit practices packers use to manipulate the market. Without these changes, we risk writing off

commodity livestock as a viable economic strategy for beginning farmers.

Corporate control of markets also affects other farm commodities. A small handful of multinational corporations now control most farm inputs, commodity purchases, and even segments of the organic market.

In recent years, some sustainable and family farm advocates have suggested it is time to stop fighting for policy reform to address these fundamental issues.

You won't find the Center among these groups. We must keep fighting to fix the underlying policy structure if small and beginning farmers and ranchers are to succeed. Doing so is critical to creating a rural future that includes family-scale farms and ranches on the landscape stewarding our natural resources for the next generation.

CLEAN POWER PLAN IS A STEP FORWARD

NEBRASKA TO REDUCE CARBON EMISSIONS FROM STATE POWER PLANTS BY 40 PERCENT

BY LAUREN KOLOJEJCHICK-KOTCH,
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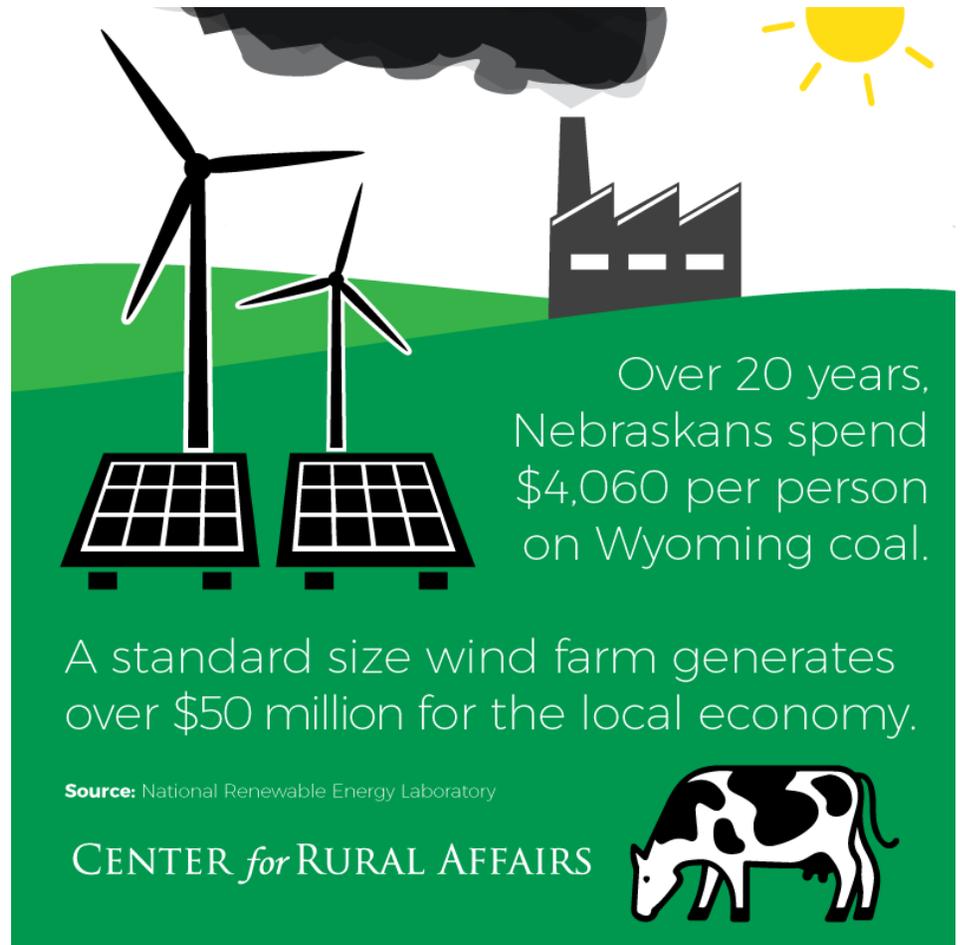
As 2015 closed, the Clean Power Plan was filed in the Federal Register. The final version set ambitious goals for many states. For example, here in Nebraska we are tasked with reducing carbon emissions from state power plants by 40 percent.

For us, like other states, this will mean burning far less coal, because coal emits carbon dioxide into the atmosphere. It will also mean bumping up investments in clean, renewable energy.

Well over half of Nebraska's electricity generation capacity comes from coal. Sheldon Station accounts for 20 percent of carbon emissions in Nebraska Public Power District's footprint. Nebraskans spend \$203 per person each year to import coal from Wyoming.

Transitioning away from coal at plants like Sheldon Station not only helps to implement the Clean Power Plan. In place of coal we can invest in clean energy, which gives a boost to our communities.

The Clean Power Plan, and its Clean Energy Incentive Program, is pointing America in the right direction. The incentive program offers matching emissions allowances to help with early investments in renewable energy. It also offers low income energy efficiency incentives. It would reward states



Over 20 years, Nebraskans spend \$4,060 per person on Wyoming coal.

A standard size wind farm generates over \$50 million for the local economy.

Source: National Renewable Energy Laboratory

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like Nebraska for developing largely untapped clean energy potential.

Nebraska has 918 GW of annual wind energy generating potential (118 times our current demand). We rank 4th in the nation for wind development potential. Yet Nebraska ranks 7th nationally for per capita energy consumption. We rank in the bottom third for policies that support energy efficiency for consumers.

Americans have opportunities ahead, but they do not come from importing and burning coal. A standard size wind farms generates \$50.14 million in local spending into the local community economy. It adds \$4.8 million in Land Lease payments to local landowners.

Nebraska has a great opportu-

nity to create an implementation plan that protects our pocketbooks and builds our state economy. Fellow states are similarly positioned.

The Nebraska Department of Environmental Quality is tasked with writing Nebraska's Clean Power Plan implementation plan. They will hold a series of stakeholder meetings between January and March of 2016. There will be opportunity to learn more about the Clean Power Plan, ask questions, and provide your input.

Stay tuned for more details about the meetings. We hope you are interested in participating and learning more about how the Clean Power Plan can benefit your hometown!



Nebraska State Poet Twyla Hansen returned to her hometown of Lyons to share her poetry and reminisce with the audience. | Photo by Kat Shiffler

STATE POET SHARES RICHNESS OF FOLKLORE AND STORYTELLING

BY KAT SHIFFLER, KATS@CFRA.ORG

Twyla Hansen grew up on a farm just outside of Lyons, the Center's hometown. For the first time since being appointed State Poet of Nebraska, she returned to do a reading and presentation about the stories of her native place.

After sharing stories of her small farm upbringing – portrayals of the land and its people for which she is known – Hansen opened the floor to audience members to share their own stories and area folklore. In the audience were family, former classmates, and a teacher from her schoolhouse days, making the event seem like an intimate homecoming. Community members had the time and space to remember together, to laugh, and to reflect on the changes they've seen in the landscape and in rural life.

Storytelling is a great way to understand and engage with the culture and identity of a place. In recent months, the Center has been working to transform the stories of four Nebraska towns into community artworks with our Byway of Art project. When completed, the Byway of Art will connect four distinct northeastern Nebraska towns through new creative venues and cultural events.

What we've noticed is that storytelling – whether it's a poetry reading, or the unveiling of a community artwork, or the screening of a locally-produced docu-

mentary – brings people together to talk about what is most important to them. Twyla's poems burst with a sense of those values stripped down to their bare parts: the simplicity of walking through an open field, of family together on the farm, the quiet beauty of the natural world. All are stories we are capable of telling. It's but a matter of creating the space.

Walk on the Prairie

**There is mystery here, in the shapes of grass,
in the dim movements of an inland sea,
connections to an earlier time. Wander barefoot,
hypothesize the dance of millennia, the unbearable
carvings of the built environment, this ragtag escape.**

**Let its divine simplicity ooze into your pores.
Comb the steel from your hair, blanket your
tongue with orange. Your breathing will slow.
Breathing slow, unbutton the child within.
Give her permission to fly like a kite.**

*by Twyla Hansen
from **Prairie Suite: A Celebration (with Paul A.
Johnsgard) 2006 Spring Creek Prairie Audubon Center***



Photo courtesy of USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service

CORPORATE FARMING NOTES

THE ANTI-CORPORATE FARMING PHOENIX

BY JOHN CRABTREE, JOHNC@CFRA.ORG

In what brings to mind the ashes-to-rebirth legend of the mythological Phoenix, statutes prohibiting corporate farming in North Dakota and meatpacker ownership of livestock in Nebraska are both fighting for survival.

The real story, however, might rest with the resurgence of political and popular support for these laws, in particular in states where the fighting has been white hot.

In the late 90s, Nebraska state Senator Cap Dierks proposed a law prohibiting packer ownership of livestock that many said was redundant. They claimed it was unnecessary in light of Nebraska's constitutional prohibition of corporate farming, popularly known as Initiative 300.

Senator Dierks persisted, and won. The law sat on the books quietly until Initiative 300 was

overturned in federal court, when it reemerged from the ashes and still holds sway today.

Over the last three years, the same forces that brought down I-300 have taken aim at the packer ownership of livestock law, but they've failed three years running. They have succeeded, however, in expanding political and popular support for the law. And they've infuriated independent cattlemen who don't buy the argument that they only intend to allow packers to own hogs, as was proposed in LB 176 in 2015.

Likewise, North Dakota's corporate farming law, passed in 1932, has always been popular. But when the state legislature passed SB 2351 last spring to hamstringing that law, they incurred the wrath of the North Dakota Farmers Union.

Almost immediately, Farmers

Union was circulating petitions to refer the legislation to a vote of the people. By July, they turned in over 21,000 signatures to put the law to an up-or-down vote on the June 2016 ballot. Polling commissioned by North Dakota Farmers Union demonstrates that 3 out of 4 North Dakota voters oppose SB 2351 and favor keeping the state's corporate farming law intact.

There is no silver lining to the attacks on corporate farming laws many states have endured. But it is my sincere hope that corporate farming enthusiasts have overstepped.

They have awoken the popular support that made these laws possible. And they are helping all of us see the core values that have always under-girded our society's preference for family farms and ranches over corporate farms.

ALL I WANT FOR NEW YEAR IS CROP INSURANCE REFORM

BY JOHN CRABTREE, JOHNC@CFRA.ORG

In December, an historic meeting took place in Des Moines, Iowa. It wasn't historic because there were thousands of people there. It wasn't historic because the people there were famous. For the most part, there wasn't anyone there who is much more famous (or notorious, depending on perspective) than I am.

On those unseasonably warm December days, about 25 farmers and representatives of farm, rural, and conservation organizations gathered to discuss the need for reforming federal crop insurance policies, and to plan a campaign to achieve those reforms.

Farmers from Iowa, Minnesota, South Dakota, and North Carolina attended. Their experiences with crop insurance on the ground and their genuine desire to see concerns about the program addressed were invaluable.

We talked about the need for caps on crop insurance subsidies. Bill Furlong, a mid-sized farmer from Iowa City, Iowa, revealed that, while his farm is not large, in some years he would have been impacted by the cap on subsidies under discussion. (Bill actually called his crop insurance agent during a break in the meeting to get the numbers.)

Bill has been a good friend of the Center for Rural Affairs for years, and I invited him to this meeting for a reason. But I must admit I held my breath for a



A packed room is filled with farmers and representatives of farm, rural and conservation organizations. They gathered in Des Moines, Iowa, in December to talk about crop insurance reform. | Photo by John Crabtree

moment waiting to hear what he might say next. True to form for Bill, he said, "and that proves that it would work."

With that one sentence, Bill demonstrated the common sense that most farmers possess on this issue. For a cap on crop insurance subsidies to keep large farms from using unlimited subsidies to expand even further and drive their smaller neighbors out of farming, it has to actually impact someone.

We've had conversations about reforming crop insurance with other rural organizations and with farmers for some time now. At this meeting, that circle grew considerably. The Center for Rural Affairs, Land Stewardship Project, Rural

Advancement Foundation International, and the National Sustainable Agriculture Coalition have been at the heart of building this campaign for reform.

We were joined by five more organizations, including our good friends at Dakota Rural Action and the Isaak Walton League of Minnesota. And again, the added perspectives on conservation, beginning farmers, and many other issues were priceless.

I believe this meeting sowed the seeds for writing a different history for American farm and rural policy, and I was thrilled, honored and humbled to have been a part of it. Let me know if you have questions or comments.



SHOW YOUR SUPPORT AND JOIN THE CONVERSATION!
ENCOURAGE FRIENDS TO CHECK OUT THE CENTER FOR RURAL AFFAIRS.



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FROM THE DESK OF THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

A POLICY AGENDA TO SUPPORT BEGINNING FARMERS

BY BRIAN DEPEW, BRIAND@CFRA.ORG

The following is drawn from remarks made to the Sustainable Agriculture & Food System Funders at their policy briefing in Des Moines, Iowa.

Since the Center for Rural Affairs began, we have been engaged in the debate over who will steward the land a generation hence.

In the last two farm bills, we helped pass new policy to support beginners. Wins included training programs, set-asides with-



Photo courtesy of USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service

in farm conservation and financing programs, and increased support for new market development.

These are good building blocks for a beginning farmer policy agenda.

Despite these gains, the share

of beginning farmers continues to decline.

—READ MORE ABOUT **BEGINNING FARMERS**
ON PAGE 3.