Chuck Says Good-Bye

By Chuck Hassebrook

I had a lump in my throat and a tear in my eyes as I walked out the door of the Center for Rural Affairs on August 30. It was my last day.

My heart, however, has not left the Center. After 37 years, it will always be a big part of me. And I will always be indebted to the supporters and citizen leaders who have helped make it the nation’s leading force fighting for the rural and small town way of life.

I first set eyes on the Center on a summer Sunday in 1976, at the age of 21. It was based in an old, one-room storefront with high tin ceilings on Main Street Walthill, NE. It was led by the balding and brilliant 29 year old Marty Strange and the grizzled and thoughtful 32 year old Don Ralston.

That day changed my life. And that organization has changed the course of history in rural America, with a lot of help from you who share its commitment to creating a better future.

Together, we have upheld the value of strong communities with responsible citizens, genuine opportunity for all, and stewardship of the land and water.

Together, we have opened doors of opportunity to beginning farmers, small businesses, and new leaders. Together, we’ve fought

—See Chuck on page 7.

“I know the Center will march into the future with its supporters, allies, and citizen leaders, as a strong champion for the values we share.”
Recharged: Energy Interns Go to Des Moines
By Brandon Gerstle

On a recent summer morning, Lucas Nelsen and I took a road trip to attend a transmission route planning meeting in Des Moines hosted by ITC Midwest, a transmission developer. Lucas hadn’t been through Iowa in about a decade, and I had never spent much time in the state.

We were surprised to see a constant flow of massive turbine blades being trucked down I-80. They moved gracefully down the interstate like massive whales in a sea of small vehicles. We were also blown away by the scale of the 193-turbine Rolling Hills wind farm in Adair, IA. Everywhere we looked we saw a spinning wind turbine.

Soon we arrived at the ITC meeting to discuss the proposed routing of the Minnesota-Iowa project. Two proposed segments of line were given extended airtime – a segment that will run north and east of Forest City, IA, and another segment that will run east of the Union Slough National Wildlife Refuge.

The primary concerns raised related to the safety of waterfowls and the desired expansion of pre-existing transmission easements to run alongside Wetland Reserve Program land. The meeting was great. It provided us with an opportunity to work with ITC and address public concerns.

The Des Moines trip was an excellent experience. From this short hop over the state line, we realized our efforts are making a difference. We are excited to continue working on these important issues.

Later this fall, both Lucas and I should be concluding big research papers we’ve been working on. Lucas’ paper will discuss concerns landowners have related to transmission development. My paper will explore how to minimize the use of eminent domain when assembling land for transmission corridors.

Thank you for your support!

Effective Messaging to Rural Voters

What would small town and rural Americans like to hear from organizations and elected officials about the issues facing their communities? How do they see the role of government in addressing small town and rural issues? We provide some insights in a new analysis that can be viewed at cfra.org/rural-poll.

The analysis explores these questions and more:

- How many of us would like to run our own farm or business, and what do we think about government help for small business and beginning farmers?
- What do folks who don’t farm think about cutting farm programs to invest in small towns and rural communities?
- How do we feel about help for the working poor?

Check it out at cfra.org/rural-poll.
Pollinators Essential for Food and Community

By Kathie Starkweather, kathies@cfra.org

What do pollinators – honeybees, butterflies, flies, wasps – have to do with community? A lot, especially when the Loup Basin Resource Conservation and Development (RC&D) is involved.

Their “Pollination = Preservation” project is developing pollinator/butterfly gardens up and down the Loup Basin Scenic Highway. The goal is to increase pollinator populations in the region and boost eco-tourism.

Pollinators are essential to the production of about one-third of the food we eat: apples, cucumbers, broccoli, onions, carrots, watermelon, almonds, peaches, strawberries, and more. They also enhance production of soybeans and alfalfa.

If we don’t have pollinators, we don’t have many fruits, vegetables, nuts, and oils – it’s that simple. Can you imagine not being able to pluck a freshly grown strawberry from your garden? Or a ripe peach from one of your fruit trees? Or to purchase fruit at your local farmers market? Scary, I know!

Pollinators create over $20 billion worth of crops each year. Honeybees, butterflies, and other pollinators vanishing from the landscape is a real concern. Habitat loss due to land-use change, pesticides/herbicides, parasites/diseases, monoculture, and climate change all play a role.

“Pollination = Preservation” takes a regional approach to preserve local habitats. People work with communities to teach the importance of pollination and help develop pollinator/butterfly gardens. This will go a long way toward motivating preservation of existing habitat and developing new habitat for pollinators.

The economic impact of eco-tourism to the region has great promise. Butterfly watching is gaining popularity, often piggybacking on the popular pastime of bird watching. That hobby generated $85 billion in economic benefits in 2001.

The Center for Rural Affairs is working closely with Loup Basin RC&D to provide training and technical assistance. By this time next year, the Loup Basin should be buzzing with butterflies and bees and the beauty of the flowers that attract them. Plan your trip now to this scenic area of Nebraska!

The project is funded through a Nebraska Environmental Trust grant. Contact me if you have any questions, kathies@cfra.org.

Land Link Sneak Peek: Beekeepers for Rural America

By Virginia Meyer, virginiam@cfra.org

This is a honey of an opportunity! Owners of a small acreage in Nebraska, located between Omaha and Lincoln, are looking ahead for a successor. They have an ideal location for direct marketing at farmers markets, restaurants, and grocery stores.

The owners are experienced beekeepers and would gladly train their successor in beekeeping. The acreage is not currently for sale, but the owners could assist a successor with financing when they are ready to sell (approximately by 2019).

Right now, the landowners are interested in leasing part of the farm to the right beginners as a trial before they commit to a long-term lease or sale.

Buzzing with interest? Find out more by contacting me, Virginia, at 402.687.2100 or email virginiam@cfra.org.
A recent report from the University of Nebraska Medical Center highlighted the acceleration of a long-time rural health care challenge – the shortage of dental services in rural Nebraska. *Access to Oral Health Care in Nebraska* found that 44 counties in the state (out of 93 counties) are designated as general dentistry shortage areas. Twenty rural counties are completely without a dentist. Only 39 percent of the state’s dentists practice in a rural area – a number that has stayed relatively constant since 2008.

A long-term concern expressed in the report was the aging of practicing dentists and more dentists approaching retirement. As the number of dentists in the state decreased, the number of dentists over 60 increased.

The report analyzed several possible options; among them are:

- Giving dental hygienists wider range for preventive and basic practice.
- Using practice sites of other providers (such as physicians or health clinics) for dental services. Dental services in Federally Qualified Health Clinics are increasing, but most of rural Nebraska is not served by such a clinic.
- Increasing the number of graduates at dental schools, though both the state’s dental schools are currently at capacity.
- Increasing student loan reimbursement rates for those dentists who agree to practice in rural and shortage areas. Fifteen years ago the state began offering reimbursement for such new dentists. The program has not kept up with inflation and the increase in student loan debt.

Access to dental services is a major health care issue. The American Dental Association estimates that dental issues contribute to 164 million lost work hours and 51 million lost school hours annually. Oral health deficiencies have been found to contribute to a host of other health issues.

The Nebraska report corresponds to a recent report by the National Academy for State Health Policy estimating 85 million Americans lack dental coverage. The lack of coverage is most acute among low-income adults and due in large part to the decline in Medicaid reimbursement rates.

A lack of dental services is also a critical issue for children, also in large measure to Medicaid coverage and challenges dentists have in participating in the Medicaid system.
Do you know all you need to know about the Affordable Care Act, and the changes that will happen soon? Yeah, me either. But that’s why your questions are so helpful! I find the answers, and share them with everyone. Keep them coming.

Are families who can’t afford the employer provided health insurance eligible for subsidy on the health insurance marketplace, or “exchange”?  

If your employer offers a health insurance plan, you first need to look at what it covers and how much it costs. It must be a comprehensive plan that meets or exceeds the essential benefit package.

Essential health benefits must include items and services within at least the following 10 categories: ambulatory patient services; emergency services; hospitalization; maternity and newborn care; mental health and substance use disorder services, including behavioral health treatment; prescription drugs; rehabilitative and habilitative services and devices; laboratory services; preventive and wellness services and chronic disease management; and pediatric services, including oral and vision care.

If your employer offers a comprehensive plan, next look at how much they require you to pay. If the annual premium is more than 9.5 percent of what you report on your tax forms as your income, the plan is considered “unaffordable.” You would be eligible to purchase insurance in the health insurance marketplace. If you are between 100-400 percent of the federal poverty level, you’ll be eligible for a premium subsidy too.

I got a check in the mail from my insurance company recently. Why?  

One of the ways the Affordable Care Act seeks to lower costs is by making sure insurers aren’t padding their pockets or using a majority of your premium dollars for things that aren’t medical care. It’s sometimes known as the 80/20 rule – at least 80 percent of your premium dollar goes to actual medical care. It may not be your medical care, but that’s the nature of insurance. If the insurer charges too much and doesn’t meet this threshold, they are required to give every customer a rebate until they meet the rule.
Farmers across the country reported higher yields from use of cover crops, especially in drought zones, in 2012. Over 700 farmers responding to a survey reported yield increases for corn and beans following cover crops.

The Conservation Technology Information Center carried out a survey of experienced cover crop farmers last winter. Responding farmers had over 200,000 acres under cover crops, about 10 percent of the national cover crop acreage.

Farmers reported that dormant-season cover crops led to increased yields of 9.6 percent for corn and 11.6 percent for soybeans over fields without cover crops. In severe drought regions, yield differences were even higher: 11.0 percent for corn and 14.3 percent for beans. Farmers spent, on average, $40/acre establishing their cover crops.

“The yield improvements provided from cover crops in 2012 were likely a combination of factors,” stated Dr. Rob Myers, a University of Missouri agronomist, “such as better rooting of the cash crop along with the residue blanket provided by the cover crop reducing soil moisture loss. Also, where cover crops have been used for several years, we know that organic matter typically increases, which improves rainfall infiltration and soil water holding capacity.”

Cover crops in a crop rotation can provide a range of benefits to soils, crops, and water quality. They can control erosion, smother weeds, reduce soil moisture loss, and add nitrogen and organic matter to the soil. Nearly all survey respondents identified “soil health” as a key benefit of using cover crops.

Another benefit, cover crops can also slow climate change or reduce its impacts on crops. Cover crops increase capture of carbon from the air when they are used during the cash-crop dormant season. They add more carbon to the soil, where it can be stored, than cash crops alone. Mixtures of legumes and grains as cover crops can reduce synthetic fertilizer used for cash crops, cutting emissions of potent greenhouse gases.

Acreage of cover crops has increased nearly 40 percent per year since 2009, and knowledge of how to manage them has grown. USDA’s handbook *Managing Cover Crops Profitably* is a good guide to crops, seed sources, planting techniques, and more. Both the handbook and the full survey report are available free online from USDA SARE (sare.org).

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### Around the Center

#### Farewells and Job Openings

We extend our farewell and thanks to Bailey Mahlberg, our Farm to School Coordinator; Cristina Perez, our Garden and Farmers Market Manager in South Sioux City; and Sadid Carillo, our intern who assisted with community work. The contribution of each to the mission of the Center has been outstanding. We’ll miss them greatly and wish them the best of luck in future endeavors.

The great news, though, is that we might have a place for you! **We’re looking for two AmeriCorps intern positions in our community foods programs:** a Community Food Specialist and a Farm to School Coordinator and State Lead. You’ll find the details at cfra.org/careers. Hurry though – we need your skills right away!
Coalition of Farm and Rural Groups Celebrates 25 Years

The National Sustainable Agriculture Coalition formed in 1988 with a goal to impact federal agriculture policy to strengthen family farming livelihoods, rural communities, and natural resources

By Traci Bruckner, tracib@cfra.org

During August at the National Sustainable Agriculture Coalition’s summer meeting, we helped celebrate the coalition’s 25th anniversary. In 1988, the Center for Rural Affairs, and many other family farm and rural organizations, helped create the coalition.

It formed out of a simple desire. The founding groups wanted to work together to have a positive impact on federal agriculture policy to strengthen family farming livelihoods, rural communities, and natural resources.

Over 25 years, much has been accomplished. If you are a farmer or rancher who has benefited from on-farm, sustainable agriculture research, you have this coalition to thank. They (along with others such as Rodale and American Farmland Trust) fought for funding to make the Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education (SARE) program happen. NSAC continues to fight for its funding year in and year out.

Another early accomplishment was adding the definition of sustainable agriculture into the 1990 Farm Bill.

Other victories included the Wetland Reserve Program, which provides landowners the opportunity to restore and enhance wetlands. The Conservation Reserve Program buffer initiative helps farmers integrate buffers on their working farmland to prevent soil erosion and improve water quality.

More recent wins include the:

• **Value-Added Producer Grants Program**, serving small and mid-size family farmers and ranchers in creating high value, niche markets.

• **Conservation Stewardship Program**, the first ever conservation program designed to reward farmers and ranchers for being good stewards of their working farm and ranch land.

• **Beginning Farmer and Rancher Development Program**, specifically focused on training and mentoring the next generation of farmers and ranchers.

• **Farmers Market Promotion Program** to support many forms of direct marketing.

There is more to this story, but not enough room to tell it all in this space. No other farm-based coalition has accomplished so much with so little, and we are proud to be a part of it. Here’s to another 25 years!

Chuck, continued from page 1.

...important fights in Washington and state capitols to support family farms, small business, small towns, and care for the land and water. We’ve even won our share of those fights.

Now, the Center has reached a critical point in its history. Leadership change tests the mettle of organizations. Some fail. The strongest organizations thrive by growing their own leaders to step up when needed.

Marty Strange and Don Ralston tutored and nurtured me, before I took their place. I’ve tutored and nurtured Brian Depew, who has taken my place. Brian is deeply rooted in rural America, hailing from a Laurens, IA family farm.

After working alongside Brian for seven years, I know he is prepared. I ask each of you who has been there for the Center under my leadership, to be there for Brian and the rest of the Center’s excellent staff.

This is a bittersweet time. I have invested my entire professional life to date in the Center. I care deeply about its board, staff, and supporters. I am fully invested in its mission.

I am proud that I answered my call to this work and assured in knowing that others will take my place, enabling me to go on to an exciting new challenge. I know the Center will march into the future with its supporters, allies, and citizen leaders, as a strong champion for small town and rural people, small communities and the values we share.
Dear Friends,

I am pleased to announce a leadership transition at the Center for Rural Affairs. Assistant Executive Director Brian Depew has been named the new Executive Director. Chuck Hassebrook, who shaped the Center for decades through his hard work and leadership, has left to pursue new challenges. The transition became effective on September 1, 2013. It followed a thorough and rigorous process the Center for Rural Affairs Board of Directors had established to meet this eventuality.

We cannot thank Chuck enough for his dedication and selflessness in serving the mission of the Center. You'll see his final message to all of you in his regular "essay," usually located here, but moved to the front page for this occasion.

I am excited and confident in Brian's ability to lead this organization. He was honored during his time as Acting Executive Director in 2012. Speaking for the board and staff, we are fortunate to have his talent and dedication. We have great expectations for the Center's future.

On September 5, 1973, the Center for Rural Affairs was incorporated as a nonprofit organization. Now, almost 40 years later to the day, we're heading into a new future. I know it is one where you, our supporters, will be at the heart of every decision we make. Here's to another 40 years of representing the best in rural America, with you by our side.

Jim Knopik, President, Center for Rural Affairs Board of Directors

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