

Oklahoma Country

Winter 2024
The magazine of
Oklahoma Farm Bureau

A tradition worth celebrating

Recognizing nine outstanding Oklahoma farm
and ranch families living an agricultural legacy

Taking the reins

*A Q&A with OSU Agriculture Vice
President and Dean Jayson Lusk*

The man for the job

*Improving opportunities for Oklahomans
with rural broadband access*

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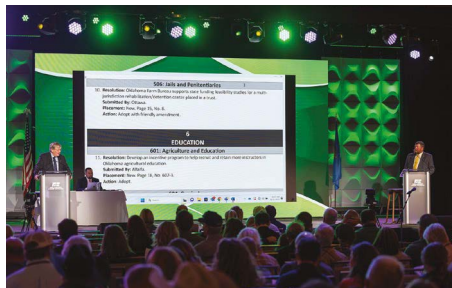
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Oklahoma Country

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ON THE COVER

Photo by Dustin Mielke

The Pfeiffer family of Logan County stands in their farmyard near Orlando. The Pfeiffers were recognized as OKFB's 2023 district three Farm and Ranch Family of the Year.

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ABOUT OKLAHOMA COUNTRY MAGAZINE

Oklahoma Country magazine is the official magazine of Oklahoma Farm Bureau, mailed to Farm Bureau members four times a year. *Oklahoma Country* magazine shares the story of Oklahoma agriculture and our rural communities through the eyes of Farm Bureau members, programs and activities.

ABOUT OKLAHOMA FARM BUREAU

Oklahoma Farm Bureau is Oklahoma's largest general farm organization, dedicated to supporting the agriculture community to improve the lives of Oklahomans. As a grassroots, member-led organization, OKFB gives a voice to family farmers and ranchers through advocacy, outreach, leadership development and supporting the future of agriculture.



Rodd Moesel

*President
Oklahoma Farm Bureau
& Affiliated Companies*

While Farm Bureau is appreciative of the one-year extension of the 2018 farm bill Congress passed in November 2023, Oklahoma farmers and ranchers know the importance of passing a full, five-year bill.

Big goals, big accomplishments and a big year ahead

Each new year is a time of goals, lists, hopes and expectations as each of us aims higher than we have before to reach new achievements in our lives.

Oklahoma Farm Bureau is no different in that our organization and our members have a long list of accomplishments we hope to achieve in 2024.

One of the biggest items on any agriculturalist's wish list for months now has been a new federal farm bill. While Farm Bureau is appreciative of the one-year extension of the 2018 farm bill Congress passed in November 2023, Oklahoma farmers and ranchers know the importance of passing a full, five-year bill. We will continue to work diligently with Congress to ensure Oklahoma agriculture producers have a new farm bill so our farmers and ranchers can make long-term decisions.

OKFB also has a list of priorities for the Oklahoma legislative session that kicks off in February. We are gearing up for a session where we will be watching for efforts to cut income taxes, which has been discussed frequently by our state leaders in recent years. Our Farm Bureau members are concerned that cuts in one type of tax could lead to increases in property taxes to make up any funding shortfalls. Farmers and ranchers are particularly sensitive to such tax increases because it directly impacts their ability to be profitable in times of low commodity prices and unpredictable growing conditions.

One area that our OKFB members are particularly concerned about is funding for Oklahoma State University's Cooperative Extension Service. Extension connects OSU's world-leading research efforts with our

state's farmers and ranchers while also providing opportunities for our agriculture youth through 4-H programming. OKFB will work to share the importance of extension with our state leaders in the coming year.

Additional rules and regulations are never on anybody's wish list, and OKFB will continue to monitor activity from federal and state regulators that could have a negative impact on our state's farmers and ranchers. In recent years we have seen proposed regulations that deal with water, labor and the environment, many of which are written without consideration given to the negative impacts on our food supply. Rest assured we will be watching for any new regulations, and the OKFB Legal Foundation will be standing ready to intervene in court cases to protect our members from threats to production agriculture, no matter the source.

Of course, we will continue our long list of important activities and programs for our members, including our Young Farmers & Ranchers, our Women's Leadership Committee and our Generation Bridge program. We are excited to continue to build upon our strong lineup of youth activities including our Capitol Camp experience, FFA Communications Conference and the Oklahoma Youth Leading Agriculture conference.

While this is quite an impressive list of goals, there are additional programs and efforts too numerous to list here. I hope you will take the time to read about some that are included in this issue of the magazine.

I look forward to seeing many Farm Bureau members at our events and conferences, and if you cannot join us in person, be sure to browse our social media and our website to see all our plans, goals and achievements in 2024.

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*National Cattlemen's Beef Association, Responsible Beef Exploration, 2018-2019

OKLAHOMA
BEEF
COUNCIL
Funded by Beef Farmers and Ranchers

A road map to the new year at the state capitol

As we prepare to launch into the 2024 state legislative session, our OKFB Public Policy team is ready to vigorously fight the good fight for agriculture and rural Oklahoma. Several old battles for OKFB members are expected to re-emerge, but exciting new opportunities could also appear on the path ahead.

A cornerstone for OKFB is to always strive for fair treatment of agriculture producers when it comes to taxation. In 2024 we will face efforts to create new ad valorem assessments aimed at funding expansion of emergency fire and medical services. We are concerned these new property taxes would place a disproportionately large share of the financial burden on farm and ranch landowners. OKFB policy – and our advocacy – remains focused on sales tax as the preferred revenue option when funding is needed for services of this type.

In a few fast-growing urban and suburban sectors of our state, conflicts have emerged as new businesses and housing developments were established in unincorporated areas. If these local disputes are resolved at the Capitol by empowering counties statewide to adopt municipal-style zoning for rural land, the unintended consequences to agriculture producers could be significant.

Year after year of drought in our region has led to increased scrutiny of Oklahoma water resource management regulations. Legislative proposals from the southeastern part of the state are expected to call for complicated new measurement techniques for, and limits on the use of, surface water flowing through creeks and rivers, while bills to require metering of groundwater wells may come from western Oklahoma.

“Workforce development” is a popular buzzword at the Capitol, and there is no better way to positively influence the future quality of Oklahoma employees than to increase participation in agricultural education programs through FFA and 4-H. OKFB will help lead a campaign to increase funding for CareerTech and Oklahoma State University Extension through the legislative appropriations process in order to bolster these invaluable programs.

Our most effective tool to ensure political success on these priorities is the continued active engagement of OKFB members with their legislators. We sincerely encourage you to reach out to your OKFB field representative and set up a visit to the state Capitol for yourself or a group from your county. Our staff can accommodate groups of almost any size, no matter how big or small.

We look forward to a few special upcoming events, including our live weekly Zoom legislative updates every Friday at noon from February through May, the annual Leadership Conference in Oklahoma City Feb. 13 and our Washington, D.C., Summit the week of April 8-12.

We embark on the 2024 legislative journey with a strategic plan to provide multiple opportunities for OKFB members to insert their voices directly into the lawmaking process. Our Public Policy team is proud to represent the Farm Bureau brand and greatly appreciates the support we receive from each of you.



Steve Thompson

*Vice President of
Public Policy*

Oklahoma Farm Bureau



I don't want to leave
my family to cover:

- Mortgage debt
- Monthly expenses
- Funeral costs
- Kids' college tuition

I know you say I need **life insurance**,
but **do I really?**

Yes! While the reasons for having life insurance vary from person to person, coverage is a smart move no matter what stage of life you're in. **Talk to your Farm Bureau agent about the many ways life insurance can help protect you and your loved ones.**







OKLAHOMA FARM BUREAU

A
TRADITION
— WORTH —
CELEBRATING

STORIES AND PHOTOS BY
DUSTIN MIELKE

FARM AND RANCH FAMILY RECOGNITION

A note from the author:

Traveling around the state of Oklahoma this fall to capture the stories of our nine Farm & Ranch Family Recognition recipients took me to all corners of our state. From plains and prairies where you can see a pillar of dust behind a tractor from miles away to mountain ridges where the Milky Way shines vibrantly at night, our state is a diverse and wonderful place to live.

The farm and ranch families we celebrated this year are equally diverse: coming from a wide array of backgrounds and experiences; raising a wide array of crops, commodities and livestock; and participating in numerous and varied community activities.

However, I find agriculturalists all have the same heart and spirit. It is a spirit that takes on the risks associated with growing food in Oklahoma, even when it means looking to a cloudless sky in a drought or struggling to get a crop out of a muddy field. It is a spirit that helps neighbors – even if a neighbor is someone two counties over. And it is a spirit that strives to create a better future for our own children and the children of fellow Oklahomans we will never meet by tirelessly working to ensure healthy and abundant food is on our dinner tables.

It is a privilege to share these stories from all corners of our state of these nine farm and ranch families, each of whom carry on a tradition worth celebrating.

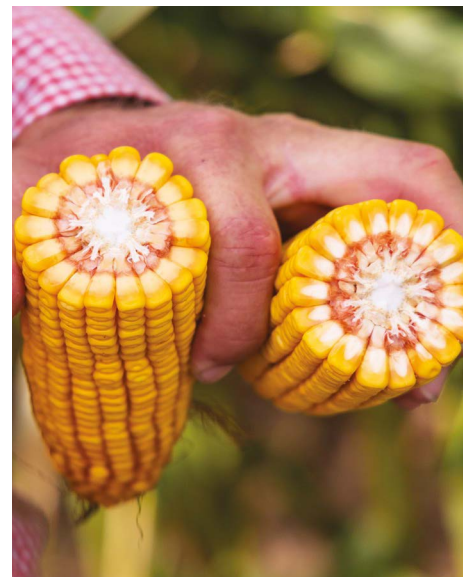
About the Farm & Ranch Family Recognition program

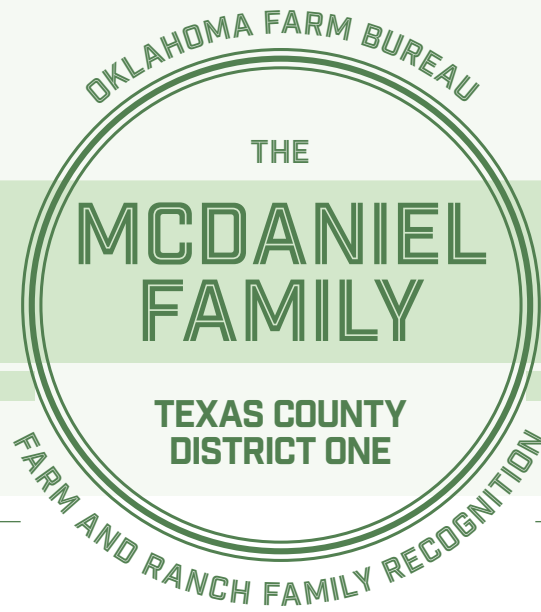
OKFB's Farm & Ranch Family Recognition program is an endeavor of the OKFB Women's Leadership Committee focused on celebrating nine farm and ranch families from around the state who carry on the best traditions of Oklahoma agriculture and our rural communities.

Each family was recognized at OKFB's 2023 convention in Oklahoma City in November, where each family received a cash award and a custom sign to hang at their farm gate.

BONUS: WATCH OUR FARM & RANCH FAMILY VIDEOS

In addition to reading about each of our 2023 Farm & Ranch Family Recognition recipients, you can watch videos featuring each family at: okfb.news/FarmFam23.





Jerod and Julie McDaniel each have generations of agriculture heritage in Oklahoma's panhandle. It is a place they feel produces strong, resilient people who mirror the toughness of the area that Julie likes to refer to as No Man's Land.

"I love people's spirit out here, their grit, their determination and their strength," Julie said. "I love that it is one huge family."

Jerod's family has been farming in the panhandle since 1906, and Julie's family settled in the area even earlier, in 1896.

Today, the family raises both dryland and irrigated crops, including corn, wheat and grain sorghum. They also care for their cattle herd using the area's abundant grassland.

Water conservation plays a critical role for the McDaniels as they farm in a place where rainfall is often scarce and unpredictable. Using modern center-pivot irrigation systems and conservation practices plays a critical role in the family's farming operation as they constantly seek to improve their stewardship efforts.

"We've adopted no-till, strip-till – all the conservation practices – so we can utilize the least amount for the most benefit," Jerod said. "There's a lot of room for improvement, and as you uncover each new thing, you learn just a little bit more about how you can do things differently."

Jerod was honored in 2019 with Oklahoma's Water for 2060 Excellence Award for the family's ongoing efforts to efficiently and productively use their water resources.

The McDaniels are raising the next generation of land stewards as they watch their six children – Jaci, Alex, Luke, Aven, Sienna and Esta – grow up on the farm and begin their own careers with the lessons they learned in agriculture.

"I feel so privileged that we get to raise our family on a ranch," Julie said. "Most people don't get that. I think that really connects our kids to God and to the earth. It establishes strong roots in family, faith, and that is a tradition worth carrying forward."

"Being able to watch the prior generations take the risks that they

did allows the future generations to be able to take that a step forward and take their own risks," Jerod said.

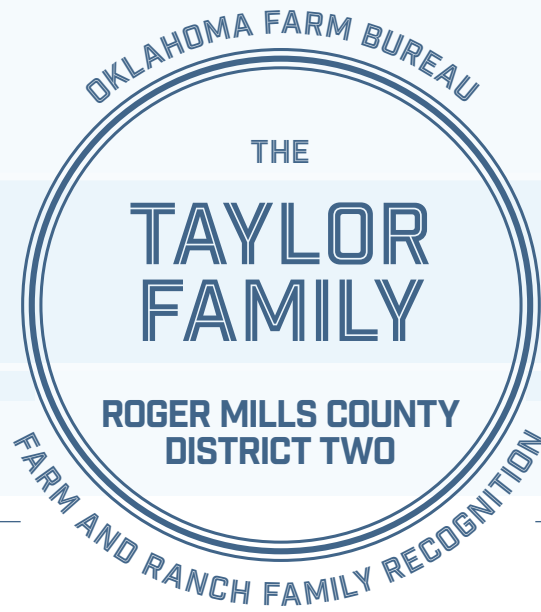
As believers in the community the Oklahoma panhandle provides, the McDaniels are actively involved in their local community of Texhoma and beyond.

The family serves in their local church, and Jerod serves on their local co-op board in addition to their children's numerous activities.

The McDaniels also purchase and renovate buildings in downtown Texhoma, creating updated spaces to benefit their local community. Their most recent renovation project is being fixed up to serve as a community center, providing a gathering place for local events and activities in downtown Texhoma.

Whether it is farming, ranching or supporting their friends and neighbors, the McDaniels are living out the resilience, determination and hard work that runs in their families, according to Julie:

"Our ancestors were risk-takers, and we are raising risk-takers."



A winding gravel road snakes its way through a lush valley lined with red shale hills in western Oklahoma's Roger Mills County.

Throughout the valley lies the ranch of Jimmy and Tracy Taylor, who raise cattle using generations of ranching experience paired with the latest advancements in herd management.

Jimmy can recall his first taste of the cowboy lifestyle on the ranch. The work was done not with a feed truck or ATV, but rather from horseback.

"I remember my first big roundup," Jimmy said. "I was about 12 years old. We got up in the middle of the night, saddled our horses, and we rode five miles to the back of the furthest pasture. We had to be there not when the sun came up, but when it got light enough to see because it was going to be hot that day."

Today, you will find Jimmy perched atop a four-wheeler, checking the family's cattle in a speedier fashion, but he still brings the same approach to animal care the Taylor family has practiced for generations.

"Our first goal is to be the home of

happy cows," Tracy said. "He studies his cattle, he cares about his cattle. As Jimmy's dad always said, we are stewards of the land and of the cattle."

The care and management of their herd does not only happen in pens and pastures. The Taylors use DNA testing and genomic information to understand the traits their cattle have, allowing them to understand their animals beyond what is visible from the feed track.

"Today, I have genetic technology I can use where I know exactly what my animals are," Jimmy said. "When you have a number to work with, you can improve on that number."

Jimmy and Tracy focus on the quality of their cattle, and they use modern management tools to ensure the animals they raise are producing high-quality beef for consumers.

"We develop every animal as if it were going to be served at our own table," Jimmy said. "So we try to make the best steak we can by using the genomic information, the DNA information along with nutrition and handling the cattle in an easy way. All

of that combined is geared toward our customers getting the best steak we can produce."

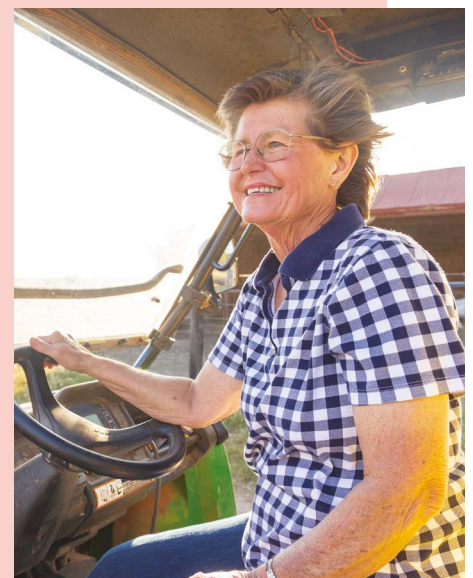
The Taylor family's approach to raising each animal is if it was going to be served on their family's table has earned them recognition and accolades, including excellence awards from the Certified Angus Beef program and the Oklahoma Angus Association.

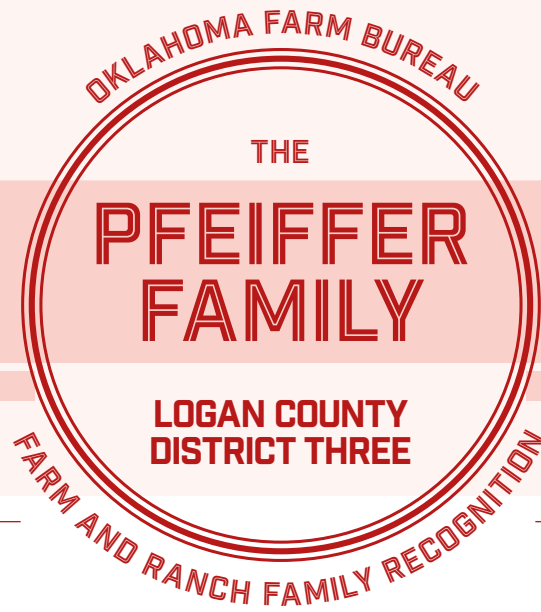
While the focus is on raising quality protein for families around the state, nation, and world, Tracy said she enjoys the work and the connection to the land that ranch life provides.

"What I really enjoy out here is I like to look at things and see what I can make better," Tracy said. "I study the cattle and see how we could round a pasture better. The things that we have to do, how could we do it better so it's less effort for us and less stress on the cattle?"

"I love being out in this isolation, and I feel like I'm in God's country. I feel like I've been blessed to live in this area and this place, and I can't imagine living anywhere else."







If you were to drive past the farm of John and Gaye Pfeiffer on Highway 51 in Logan County, you would be hard pressed to miss the family's barn just off the road emblazoned with a large Certified Angus Beef logo.

From the logo on their barn to the community and school groups they host for tours on their family operation, the Pfeiffers are strong advocates for agriculture and big believers in sharing their farm and ranch story with others.

The family's primary focus is on high-performance cattle that they aim to sell into the Certified Angus Beef program. They also have a flock of hair sheep and grow forage for their livestock.

"We talk about selling cows, but in the end, we're selling beef," John said. "And the beef that we're selling will hopefully end up in the Certified Angus Beef category."

"As farmers, you really feel a responsibility to feed people," Gaye said. "That's what we're here for."

Their younger son, Andy, raises show pigs that he sells to 4-H and FFA

members in multiple states to enter in competitions throughout livestock show season.

Their older son, John Christopher, who lives just down the road with his family and works alongside his dad and brother, serves as a member of the Oklahoma House of Representatives where he uses his agriculture background to create and guide legislation that positively impacts agriculture and Oklahoma's rural communities.

"We're very happy to have a family operation," Gaye said. "I think we get a lot of satisfaction out of doing something that the future generations can work with and add on to. You're also doing something that is important. I think it's very much a part of us that we do something that makes a difference, and we think that producing food is something that makes a difference."

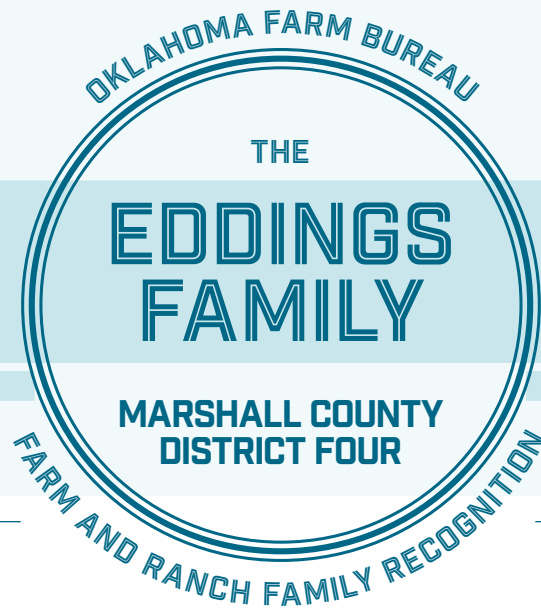
Today, John and Gaye work alongside their sons and spend time working together with their daughter-in-law and grandson as they pass life lessons on to the next generation.

The Pfeiffers also play a role in shaping the agriculture community on the local, state and national levels.

The family hosts tour groups to their farm where they share their agriculture story and showcase their efforts to care for their livestock and natural resources. The family takes time to answer questions and explain their agricultural practices to ensure visitors leave with a deeper understanding of agriculture.

John has dedicated himself to service on boards and committees on the local level – including the Logan County Farm Bureau board – all the way up to the national level, where he served as the American Angus Association president in recent years.

"Being in agriculture is where I really want to be," John said. "It's the people I really want to be with and I want to be around. It's because of their attitudes – even though they know things aren't going to work out right every day, they still get up and try it again, and they'll try something different if that doesn't work the first time."



It does not take much prompting for Steve Eddings to dive into one of his favorite topics: tractors.

The Marshall County Farm Bureau member grew up on the family farm with his grandparents and parents working together in the peanut fields that were once prevalent in the area.

"I'm a farmer at heart," Steve said. "I guess the love of tractors that I have started out when I was just old enough that it would take both feet to push the clutch on an old 4020 when we were laying pipe out to irrigate peanuts."

The Eddings family got its start in agriculture when Steve's grandparents opened a dairy farm on the property in the late 1950s. With time, Steve's parents took on the farm and shifted from the dairy to growing crops and raising beef cattle.

Today, the Eddings family's land has transitioned from peanuts to wheat fields, pecan groves, cow herds and hay pastures. The love of agriculture still runs deep for Steve and Karen as they now watch their own children

work and their grandchildren grow up on the family's farm and ranch while they continue to work alongside Steve's mother.

"Being a farm and ranch family means freedom, just a different way of life," Steve said. "It's not for the weak at heart or a get-rich-quick deal or anything like that. We're glad that hopefully the grandkids and even the great-grandkids can enjoy the same lifestyle and the place that we enjoy now."

The Eddingses' adult children, Mason and Raegin, along with their spouses, continue to help on the farm in addition to working off-farm jobs. Steve's mom still runs tractors in the pecan orchard, meaning three generations of the family can be found working side-by-side with the next generation in tow.

In addition to the hustle and bustle of daily farm activities, Steve has spent the past 25 years working a full-time off-farm job in nearby Ardmore. When his shift ends and he heads home, his favorite way to relax is to

head for the field in a tractor or to the pasture in a feed truck.

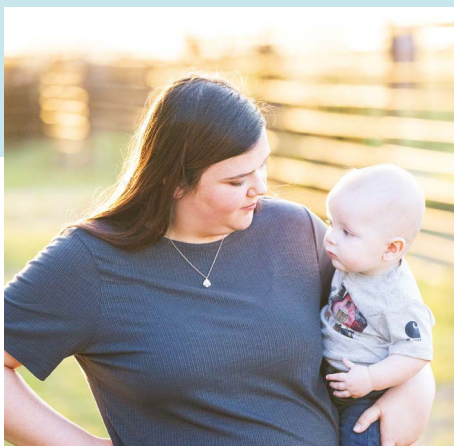
"I've always wondered what it would be like to get off at five o'clock or seven o'clock and just go home and have nothing to do," Steve said. "But it can't be the same as coming home and getting in the feed truck to go feed the cows, or put out a hay bale, or go cut hay. It's just enjoyable."

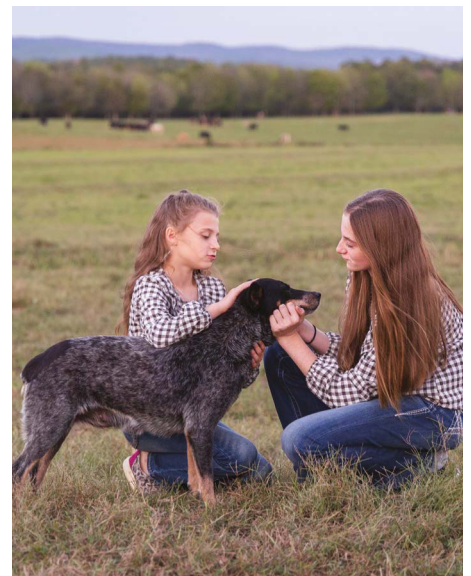
Steve to this day relishes the opportunity to climb into a tractor cab and plant wheat for grazing or to bale hay for the family's cattle.

"Agriculture for me is just the changing of the seasons and the newborn calves hitting the ground," Steve said. "It's just the family, the freedom, the joy."

The opportunity to make a living in agriculture alongside the fourth and fifth generations to get their start on the family farm makes the agricultural way of life even more special for Steve and Karen.

"I enjoy watching my children on the farm," Karen said. "It's just a legacy."







When Mike Parsons says he and his family live “in the middle of nowhere,” he is not exaggerating.

Not many roads run through the small southeastern Oklahoma community of Battiest – only one does, to be precise – but the valley lined with ridges of timberland has been home to Mike, his wife, Pam, and generations of the Parsons family before him.

“I’ve been here nearly 70 years,” Mike said. “I’ve never lived anywhere else. I never saw any place I liked better than this.”

Mike recalls years spent on horseback in the nearby hills and mountains rounding up cattle that would graze on land leased from a timber company.

In fact, it was a cattle drive that brought the first generation of Parsonses into the area after a drought in the McAlester area caused Mike’s grandfather to relocate his family’s herd of 200 cattle to McCurtain County. The location where they settled is in the family to this day.

These days, the Parsons family runs

cattle on their own pastures in addition to raising broiler chickens in several poultry houses.

“We’re involved with farming because it’s something we love,” Mike said. “Actually, I’m a grass farmer. I grow grass – the cattle are how I market it. We have broilers, and the litter out of that is what we fertilize the grass with. It all ties together.”

Mike and Pam raised three children on their McCurtain County farm: daughter Suzanne and sons Dooley and Tuff. Each of the Parsonses’ children continue to be involved in agriculture with their two sons working as high school agriculture education instructors in nearby towns. Suzanne’s husband, Justin, is also a high school agricultural education instructor, and each family has their own farming and ranching enterprise. A total of seven grandchildren also return to the family’s farm to help out with haying, chores and other farm tasks.

“We have the two boys, and we have a daughter, and they’re all involved in the livestock show program,” Pam

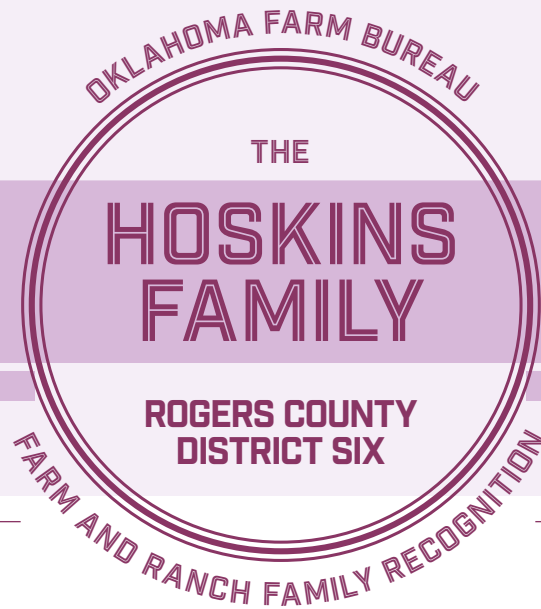
said. “They help us with the hay and the feeding, and the girls help us with putting the hay up in the summertime. It’s just kind of a family thing that we all have, helping each other out.”

Mike and Pam are proud to have the opportunity to work alongside their children as they watch their grandchildren grow up as the sixth generation on the family’s farm.

“I’m just extremely proud of my kids and grandkids,” Mike said. “It does me good to watch them work.”

The Parsons family is also highly involved with area 4-H clubs and FFA chapters. With three FFA advisors in the family and years of volunteering with local agriculture youth programs, Mike and Pam continue to furnish calves for local youth to hone their livestock showing and handling skills in addition to numerous other volunteering capacities. It all ties back to the family’s love for agriculture.

“I like to see grass growing, I like to see baby calves being born, I like to see them when they’re big and ready to wean,” Mike said. “And I enjoy every bit of it.”



Chris and Ashley Hoskins will be the first to tell you there is something special about farm kids.

Both having grown up in and around agriculture, the couple has built their own cattle herd on their Rogers County ranch through a partnership with a family friend.

Now they are raising their two children, Callie and Hayden, on the ranch, proudly teaching them the values and work ethic that comes with working in agriculture.

“To have your children and show them what it takes to get to where you are, what it takes to raise a quality animal and to get to the next level, it’s teaching them responsibility – that they have to put in the time and the effort,” Ashley said. “It’s sometimes not easy. It’s long days, it’s early mornings.”

The family’s livestock operation consists of a cattle herd in addition to the kids’ show pigs that their children raise and care for.

The family also sells butchered beef to local customers, an enterprise that grew during the COVID-19 pandemic

when area families were looking for locally raised beef. The Hoskins proudly raise the cattle they sell directly to consumers and feed their livestock using a custom ration they design themselves.

Chris said selling butchered beef provides an opportunity for the family to share agriculture with local community members.

“It has allowed us to share our story and share the story of agriculture,” Chris said of the family’s direct-to-consumer beef sales. “We have a lot of clients who like to come to the farm, see how we raise the animals and see how we finish them out.

“It’s really satisfying. We have between 25 and 30 families that we sell beef to every year now, and we have for the last three years, and we look to continue to be fortunate enough to do so.”

Chris works off the farm as an operations manager for a civil construction company and Ashley works at the Rogers County Farm Bureau office in Claremore. The couple said the chance to raise their

kids on the farm is an opportunity they’re grateful to have.

“I feel fortunate to have been raised as a farm kid,” Chris said.

“In all the industries I’ve worked in, the best employees are farm kids. They understand that ‘no’ is not an answer, and they know how to figure things out. And that pays off dividends in life.

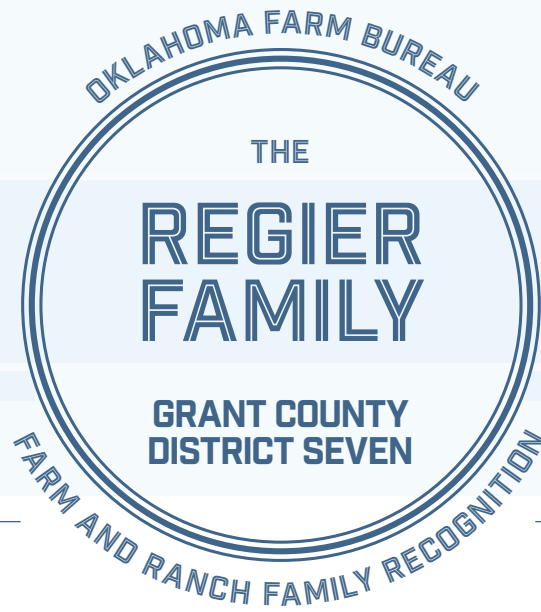
“I’m really proud to say that I feel like my kids are developing those qualities as well.”

Through hard work and dedication, Chris and Ashley have built their own agricultural dreams step-by-step. Today, the couple sees their hard work paying off in the form of life lessons they are able to teach their children along with building lasting relationships with their customers.

“I take a lot of pride in the products that we produce, whether it be the steers and our freezer beef or the groups of replacement heifers we raise,” Chris said. “We’re building a brand that people want that has our name attached to it. I take a lot of pride in that.”







Craig and Sierra Regier always knew they wanted to return to the family farm Craig grew up on to raise a family of their own.

"From an early age, I've always wanted to be involved in agriculture," Craig said. "I guess as they say, it's in your blood. I have a strong passion for it; I love being out there planting the crops and watching them grow."

Although Craig grew up on his family's northern Oklahoma farm, the path he and Sierra took to farming full-time took the couple through off-farm jobs before returning to working the land full-time. After college, Craig managed a local feed yard then worked as a commercial pesticide applicator while Sierra worked a corporate job. However, the couple never deviated from their plan and made it back to the farm full-time.

"It was always the goal to come back and farm full-time," Craig said. "It always takes a little longer than you initially planned. It took a lot of hard work. We finally made it, we're here today, and we're very thankful."

The Regiers have a diversified farm

where they grow a rotation of crops that includes wheat, cotton, soybeans and corn on their Grant County farm.

They also have a cow/calf herd and have even branched out into direct-to-consumer beef sales to customers both online and at the Edmond Farmers Market with their 1070 Farms brand.

A key goal that pushed the Regiers to pursue their passion for farming and ranching was the opportunity to raise their children – Camri, Kendall and Easton – on the farm and instill in them the values the couple said result from growing up close to the land.

"I think just to where our kids realize where things come from: their food, their clothing. They have a little more freedom out here," Sierra said of raising kids on the farm. "I think teaching our kids core values and morals is what we're trying to instill in them, and hopefully they will instill in their own kids."

Craig and Sierra are doing just that as the family traverses the back roads near the northern Oklahoma community of Deer Creek as they

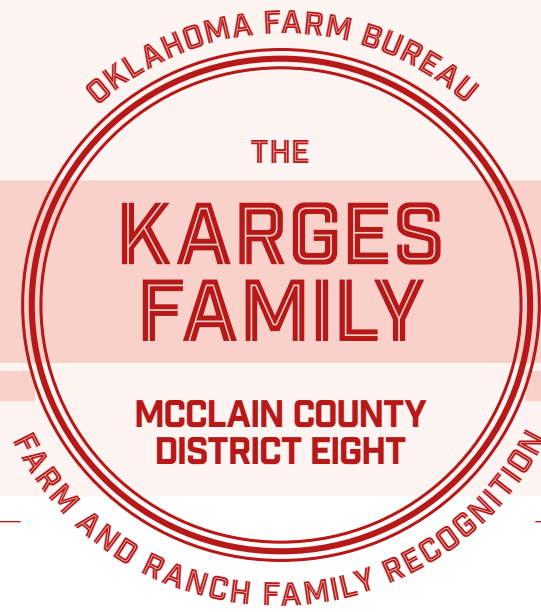
check cattle, survey crops and work the land as a family.

The Regiers are also active in their local community, helping keep rural Oklahoma a vibrant place for future generations. The Regier family serves in numerous ways with volunteer positions in their local church, on their county fair board, local fire department, and local school. Craig also serves on the Grant County Farm Bureau board.

Craig said his passion for agriculture stems from a love of raising crops and seeing things grow coupled with the opportunity to spend time together as a family working side-by-side.

Walking fields together and having the kids ride along in the tractor cab represents a fulfillment of the dream that the Regiers had to raise their family close to the land.

"One of the things that we strive to do as farmers and as ranchers is to build a legacy that you can pass down to your kids that they can be proud of and pass down to the next generation after them," Craig said.



Before the sun rises at Triple Heart Ranch, Brock and Sheila Karges, along with their daughter, Karena, and their dedicated group of ranch hands, are already busy processing a load of cattle that just arrived on their ranch near Wanette.

The heart of the Karges family's ranch is bringing in cattle from around the state of Oklahoma, working to ensure they are healthy and thriving, feeding them to reach a desired weight, then sending them off to feedlots on their way to a processing plant.

With many cattle passing through their gates each day as they receive new animals from sale barns and ship cattle they've had a hand in caring for, the Karges family focuses on animal care and careful record-keeping to ensure they are being the best stewards possible for the livestock and the land.

"We really like to go back to the bare basics of animal husbandry: are they taken care of, do they have clean pens, do they have clean water?" Sheila said.

"There's hardly ever a day that the thought doesn't cross my mind that this animal that I'm taking care of is going to be on somebody's plate. And it's a very humbling experience to know that you are directly responsible for what somebody's going to consume, and it makes you very aware of putting out a quality product."

The family also has more than 20 years of experience raising and showing cutting horses they use daily on the ranch to work and sort cattle.

In an effort to find even more opportunities to use the resources at their fingertips, the Karges family started making compost using manure the cattle create that is sold in bulk to landscaping companies.

"We started making compost three years ago," Brock said. "We took a product that we make every day – the cattle make for us every day – we capture that byproduct and we make it into a product that is re-marketable."

While Brock and Sheila concentrate daily on the cattle in their care, the real focus is on family.

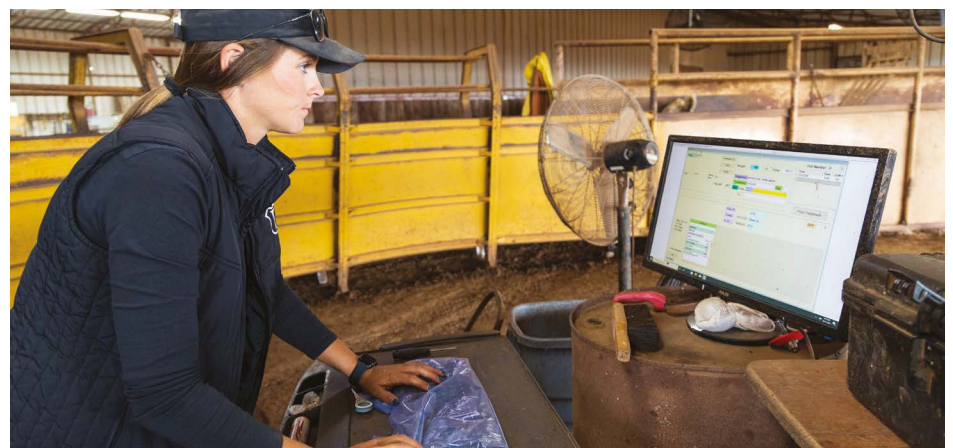
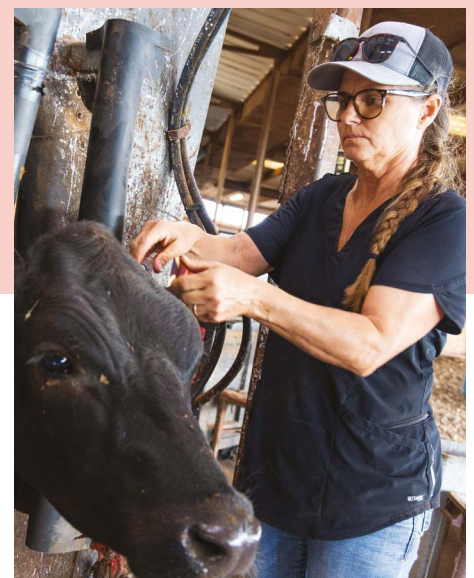
Brock and Sheila raised their daughters, Karena and Jessica, working cattle as a family, and today, Karena has returned to the ranch to work alongside her parents. Jessica is also involved in agriculture as an equine veterinarian technician.

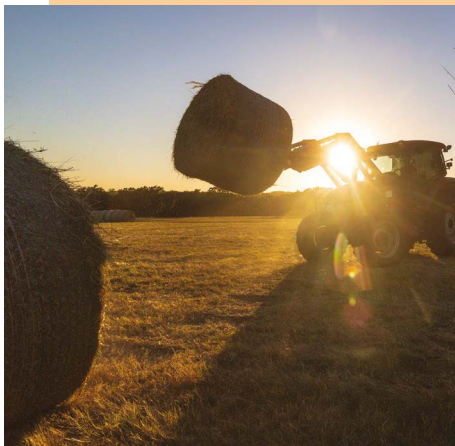
"Family is everything," Brock said. "You cannot put a dollar value on family. It's a culture, it's a way of life – it's not necessarily about the dollar."

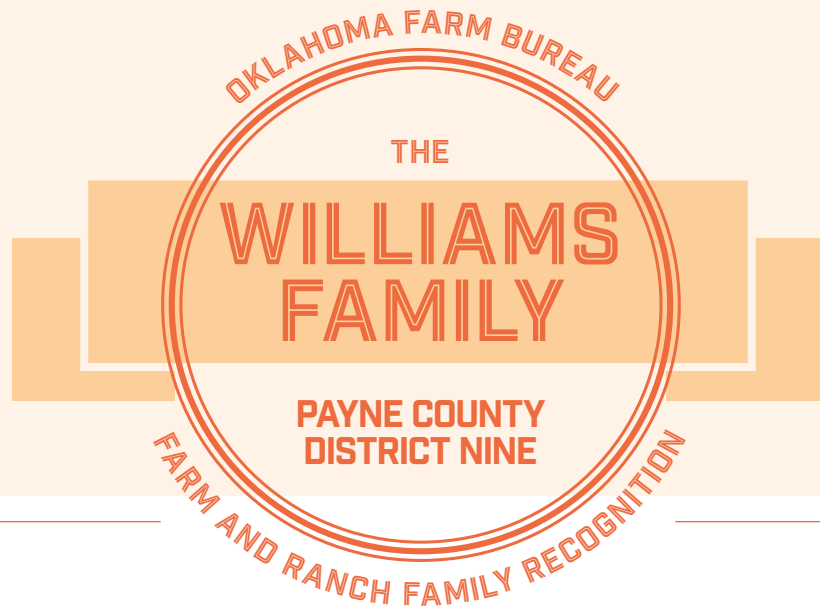
The Karges family draws from years and years of records and data they have gathered from raising cattle to help guide their decision-making each and every day.

"We have kept records for a lot of years, so we know the performance of the cattle," Brock said. "We can kind of predict where things are going to go, at least as much as you can in this kind of business."

"I think it's really important to look back at how far you've come," Sheila said. "You can really look at how much progress you've made, and you can really lay your head down and go, 'It's going to be okay. We're moving, we're progressing, we're moving forward.'"







Generations of family history can be found up and down the dirt road that runs in front of Carl and Karen Williams' farm in Payne County.

"Right where we live now, this place, my great-grandpa bought it around 120 years ago," Carl said. "I'm a fourth-generation farmer in western Payne County. My great-grandpa, then grandpa, then my dad, and then me and now my son is also involved with the operation."

Today, the family farms alongside Carl's parents on land that Carl's grandfather purchased in 1902. Three generations of the Williams family farms side-by-side as Carl and Karen's son, Cale, has returned to work on the family operation.

Karen said the family values their two children, Cale and Kenzie, learned growing up on the farm – along with growing up around generations of family – are invaluable.

"They showed animals, they learned quickly about the circle of life, they learned hard work," Karen said. "I really appreciated that his parents are just two miles down the road, so to

grow up with their grandparents close – and they even knew their great grandfather – that's huge.

"I appreciate that his family is here and they have deep roots."

Carl and Karen raise an ever-changing rotation of crops in their no-till system, including wheat, grain sorghum, corn, soybeans, canola and cotton. The family also has a commercial cow/calf herd with Angus-based cattle.

Carl is continually learning and adapting the family's farming practices to better use natural resources and care for the land that he intends to stay in the family for generations to come.

"We strive to take care of the land as best as possible," Carl said. "It's been, you know, over 100 years, and it's still productive. We hope to leave it better than it was when we started for future generations."


While Karen herself did not grow up in production agriculture, she said she has enjoyed the opportunity to raise their children on the farm with close connections to family and life lessons

to be learned from the farm.

"I always say, 'Well you know you fall in love with the farmer, you can't move a farm,'" Karen said. "So I guess I'm moving to the farm."

"It made him who he was, it made him who he is – who Carl is. He's the man I fell in love with, so agriculture is pretty great."

Carl and Karen both work to give back to their local community through a wide variety of involvement. Carl serves as a Payne County Farm Bureau board member and is a member of the Payne County and Oklahoma Cattlemen's Associations. Karen is a member of the Payne County Farm Bureau Women's Leadership Committee, and the family is involved in numerous school, church and community programs.

"One of the aspects that I enjoy about farming is that there are so many tangible things you can accomplish," Carl said. "If you plant the seed, grow the seed and harvest the seed, and then get it into the bin, you feel like you really accomplished something." 

A man with grey hair, wearing a dark blue suit, a light-colored checkered shirt, and a patterned tie, stands in a room with vertical wood paneling. He is smiling and has his left hand on the pommel of a Western saddle. The saddle is brown leather with intricate tooling and a rope coiled around it. A logo for Oklahoma State University is visible on the saddle. In the background, a framed painting of a horse and rider is on the wall. A large orange horizontal bar is positioned behind the title text.

TAKING THE REINS

STORY AND PHOTOS BY DUSTIN MIELKE

THERE IS A BUZZ OF ACTIVITY in and around Oklahoma State University's Agricultural Hall and the surrounding buildings that comprise the Division of Agricultural Sciences and Natural Resources.

From the bustle of student-filled classrooms and hallways to agricultural research taking place in labs and on-campus farms to the construction crews working on the new flagship agriculture building that has risen from the red Oklahoma soil over the past year, OSU's agriculture division continues to grow and innovate.

Jayson Lusk stepped into this world of bustling activity in August 2023 as the vice president and dean of the Division of Agricultural Sciences and Natural Resources. The West Texas native returned to OSU after a previous tenure in the university's agricultural economics department from 2005-2017 and a diverse academic background that spans institutions of higher education, including faculty positions at Mississippi State University and Perdue University.

As the new head of OSU's agricultural teaching, research and extension endeavors, Lusk begins his time as dean and vice president in a time of change and transition both on campus and off.

Oklahoma Farm Bureau had the opportunity to sit down with Lusk and visit about his vision for the future of OSU's agriculture division, which impacts OKFB members and Oklahomans from all walks of life through a myriad of programs, efforts and educational activities.

A Q&A WITH OSU'S JAYSON LUSK

Q WHAT DROVE YOUR DECISION TO RETURN TO STILLWATER TO LEAD OSU AGRICULTURE?

First, it is a place we previously lived, and where we enjoy living. Part of it was a personal reason that we enjoyed living in Oklahoma. We enjoyed the community here, and we enjoyed the culture of the state – all of that was important to us.

I wouldn't do this job just anywhere because I think these are big jobs and important jobs that are almost 24/7 in terms of your responsibility. I knew if I wanted to give this job what I think it takes to be successful, I need to be able to do that at a place I care about, not just any place. OSU is a place where I can give it my all, where I can spend nights and weekends trying to promote the work that we do and garner resources for the work that we do here.

More substantively is that I feel OSU has a great ag college and a great division of ag, and we do a lot of things well. But I think we're also in a position where we could do many things better, and I think the opportunity that is attractive to me is to move us to be

world-class in some areas where we are good now. I think we could be nationwide leaders in even more areas.

So the appealing thing to me is the opportunity to really move the needle forward at an institution and help the agricultural producers and students in the state as we go along.

Q AGRICULTURAL RESEARCH IS AN AREA IN WHICH FARM BUREAU MEMBERS TAKE A KEEN INTEREST. AS A RESEARCH INSTITUTION, AND SPECIFICALLY AN AGRICULTURAL RESEARCH INSTITUTION, WHAT DOES THE FUTURE LOOK LIKE FOR AGRICULTURAL RESEARCH AT OSU?

I look at research at a fundamental level: what is it we're trying to accomplish with our research? Foundationally, there are several things I can think of.

One thing we're trying to improve is agricultural productivity. At the basic level that is looking at whether can you produce more with less, which comes down to crop yields, livestock efficiency and similar considerations.

Beyond those things, I think it

increasingly encompasses sustainability. If we can produce the same amount using fewer natural resources, that's also a way of saying we've improved sustainability. When we talk about research in the division, I'm often asking, "Is this the kind of research that can increase agricultural productivity and ultimately benefit the bottom line for farmers and ranchers?"

Another aspect I think will be foundational in guiding our research going forward is creating opportunities. Are there new crop varieties? Are there new types of production practices? Are there new niche marketing opportunities that we can learn about as an institution?

I see our role as being a test bed, taking that risk to try to understand a new practice or a new crop so that agricultural producers can learn from that and not bear the full brunt of that risk early on.

I'll also add to that value-added products. You know, we do produce a lot of raw commodities in our state. What can we do to add value to those either through processing or through adding

JAYSON LUSK STANDS IN FRONT OF THE NEW HOME OF OKLAHOMA STATE UNIVERSITY'S AGRICULTURE DIVISION THAT IS CURRENTLY UNDER CONSTRUCTION. LUSK SAYS THE BUILDING WILL SERVE AS A COLLABORATIVE, MODERN SPACE FOR STUDENTS, FACULTY, RESEARCHERS AND STAFF.



quality or services that bring more revenue to the agricultural sector and add more profitability to agriculture in the state?

On a practical level, our two biggest commodities in the state are cattle on the livestock side and wheat on the crop side. We have a lot of investment in those spaces. We produce wheat varieties grown on 70% of Oklahoma acres. So if we want to have that kind of impact in the future, we need to make investments today not only in terms of greenhouses, but also increasingly in genetics, in phenotyping and in other modern technologies.

Research is something unique we bring to the university, and it is a very applied kind of research.

Q OUR FARM BUREAU MEMBERS ARE ALSO VERY INTERESTED IN OSU'S EXTENSION EFFORTS FROM SHARING THE UNIVERSITY'S RESEARCH TO 4-H YOUTH ACTIVITIES. WHAT DOES THE FUTURE HOLD FOR OSU EXTENSION?

We could do all the research we want, but it really doesn't matter if nobody knows about it. The role of extension is conveying the knowledge that we learn here at the university through research and other efforts and getting it into the hands of people who need it.

We're proud of our model where we have a physical presence in every county across the state. However, that model is being challenged budgetarily and otherwise, and if we cannot continue to find resources for extension, we will

have to think about whether that model is viable long-term. It is a priority for us over the next two years to make sure that we have a funding base to support those activities at the county level.

Of course, a lot of extension is youth-based for 4-H programs as well, and in training and educating youth who hopefully will one day be OSU students.

Looking to the future of extension, I think there are a variety of things we can do.

The way we communicate with each other today is very different than we did 10-15 years ago. I think we must continue to adapt, whether it is through social media, YouTube, Facebook, Instagram – this is the way people get information today, and we need to be able to communicate in those forms and those media if we want it to be relevant.

Our world is increasingly digital, and we use a lot more data to support decision-making. OSU already shares extension information digitally, but I would like to see our extension service create enhanced aids, tools and apps to help producers make decisions. We don't want to make decisions for people, but we want to at least help people make more informed decisions.

With today's technology we have the ability to bring more data to bear in ways that simply were not possible in the past. If we want to get even further on the cutting edge, there's ChatGPT and other large language models that are trained on information that you can query chat bots to draw from that information base.

We have a lot of information in extension. We have hundreds and thousands of fact sheets out there. It is possible to conceive of us creating a chat bot that is trained on our extension fact sheets, but is easier from the end-user perspective to ask that chat bot, you know, "What does OSU extension have to say on this topic?"

I think those are the things we need to be thinking about for the future if we want to continue to be relevant.

Q A VERY EXCITING AND VISIBLE INITIATIVE AT OSU IS THE CONSTRUCTION OF A NEW BUILDING TO SERVE AS HEADQUARTERS OF OSU AGRICULTURE. WHAT DOES OSU'S NEW FRONTIERS CONSTRUCTION EFFORT MEAN TO OSU AND THE OKLAHOMA AGRICULTURE COMMUNITY MOVING FORWARD?

Let me first start by saying, "Thanks." I know many Farm Bureau members contributed directly, and others provided moral support for getting the new building off the ground. It is a facility that is largely paid for by generous donors throughout the state of Oklahoma, and we are very grateful for that.

Everybody likes to have a place they enjoy coming to work, and particularly in today's day and age where people can work remotely. When we're recruiting staff and faculty, they have options to work in remote jobs.

Having a nice place to work creates an environment where people can come together and create community and collaborate together. I think having a

LUSK SPEAKS TO OKLAHOMA FARM BUREAU MEMBERS AT THE ORGANIZATION'S 2023 ANNUAL MEETING IN NOVEMBER. LUSK SHARED HIS VISION FOR THE FUTURE OF OSU'S AGRICULTURE DIVISION AND THE IMPACT THE UNIVERSITY HAS UPON OKLAHOMA'S AGRICULTURE INDUSTRY.



nice bricks-and-mortar building will help facilitate a culture and environment that we want to promote because we think that's good for Oklahoma agriculture.

Beyond that, it will help us with student recruiting. Students these days have numerous options when it comes to choosing a school. We host prospective students on a regular basis through here, and they're looking for modern facilities. We try to recruit FFA presidents from around the nation, and those students are in particularly high demand all over the country. Having a place where they feel like they can come and be a part of a family and be supported is something we think will give us a recruiting advantage.

Also, it has a great location on campus, which is very close to a big classroom building. So regardless of whether you're an ag student or not, you're going to walk into or past that building. We're also going to have a dairy bar, so you're going to want to eat there. I think that's an opportunity for us to raise our visibility on campus and maybe even recruit internally a little bit.

And then there is the research and extension that will happen there. The research labs will be state-of-the-art and world-class. The new facility will have a much more open lab-based concept where you've got a bench, but you can see the people in another area working right down from you. We hope that will create a more collaborative environment where scientists can learn from each other. They will be able to see

opportunities they wouldn't have seen otherwise. That's where a lot of science happens: borrowing ideas from a slightly adjacent field that you didn't know applied in another.

We will also be able to bring in 4-H together with extension. I think it's just a wonderful environment to really promote what we do and raise the visibility of what we do on this campus.

Q AS AN AGRICULTURAL ECONOMIST, YOU HAVE WRITTEN EXTENSIVELY NOT ONLY ABOUT AGRICULTURE, BUT ALSO ABOUT THE ENTIRE FOOD VALUE CHAIN. AS OUR FOOD SYSTEM CONTINUES TO SHIFT AND EVOLVE, WHAT ROLE DO YOU SEE OSU PLAYING IN THE FUTURE OF FOOD?

I ncreasingly, the public has taken a renewed interest in food and agriculture. You can see it in a variety of ways, whether it's the local movement or the farm-to-table movement. The pandemic also created an opportunity where people really want to take a look at agriculture.

I think sometimes those of us in agriculture feel threatened by that. However, it's an enormous opportunity for us to say, "Let's work with people to help them understand why we do things." It is also an opportunity for us to grow and develop products and practices that might yield us a higher return if we are willing to listen to and learn from our customers.


We are fortunate that the public does care about what we do in

agriculture and what we do with food. It can be frustrating sometimes because I don't think they always understand why we do certain things.

But that's just an educational opportunity for us. And certainly at Oklahoma State, that's our role: to provide education and to help engage the public – and maybe sometimes even to challenge producers.

One effort I've already launched is a Dean's Dialog series where I plan to invite prominent guests to campus to promote conversations around food and agriculture. I can't promise you that every guest will be somebody that everyone in Farm Bureau agrees entirely with all their points of view.

But that's not the point. The point is if you can't come to a university like OSU and have conversations on difficult and sometimes controversial topics, where else can we do that? I think this is the environment and the place where we can challenge our ideas, where we can find collaborative opportunities and where we can come together to pursue solutions.

Ultimately, we all care about the quality of our land. We all care about the profitability of farmers. We all care about the environment and the health of the public. I don't think there's any disagreement over those core values. I think sometimes there is disagreement about how we get there. I'm hopeful that as an institution, Oklahoma State can be one of those entities that helps us converge towards collaborative solutions. 

The man for the JOB

By Rachel Havens



Jim Meek has never laid an inch of fiber-optic cable,

but the Okmulgee County rancher was recently chosen to lead the charge to bring affordable, high-speed broadband to every corner of the state when he was elected unanimously to serve as chair of the Oklahoma Broadband Governing Board in October 2023.

The Oklahoma Broadband Governing Board was established in 2022 after the passage of the Oklahoma Broadband Expansion Act. The nine-member board oversees the work of the Oklahoma Broadband Office, which is charged with bringing high-speed broadband internet to 95% of Oklahoma by 2028.

Originally appointed to the governing board by Oklahoma House Speaker Charles McCall, Meek brings to the table a valuable rural perspective and a host of administrative and leadership experience.

Meek's early career began in the classroom as an agriculture education teacher in the late 1970s. It was during this time that Meek first got his first computer – an Apple IIc.

"At that time, it was the answer to the world's problems," Meek said of the early computer. "I was fortunate enough to get one for my agriculture program. I had to be trained how to use it, and by the time I learned how to use it, it was obsolete, and we moved on."

As Meek advanced in his career and his education, technology did the same.

Meek's career led him to the Oklahoma Department of CareerTech in 1990 where he oversaw nearly 100 agriculture education programs in southeast Oklahoma for 25 years. Even in the early days, the CareerTech offices were well equipped with the latest technology.

"When I walked into my office in Stillwater, I always had the latest and greatest in high-speed computers and internet," he said. "When I turned on my computer, I could be working within 30 seconds to one minute."

The same could not be said for the dial-up connection he used at his home in rural Okmulgee County. As his work began following him home, Meek's slow internet connection made it nearly impossible for him to work.

"Really, I was just kind of out of business," he said.

Fortunately for Meek, broadband availability has since expanded in his area, and he now has internet connectivity equivalent to that which he had in Stillwater all those years ago. But his experience is not unlike many in rural Oklahoma, and that is one reason he is passionate about expanding broadband access in the state.

"What drives me is I fully understand the economic impact broadband has on rural communities and their quality of life," Meek said.

He equates broadband access in 2023 to electricity in the early 20th century. Despite the time gap between them, the two technological phenomena have many similarities, both in necessity and the productivity increase that followed.

"The light allowed farmers and ranchers to work long days during the winter," Meek said of electricity's expansion in rural areas. "It allowed them to bring in milking machines and refrigeration."

OKFB Treasurer and District 9 Director Jim Meek is spearheading the statewide effort to bring broadband to rural Oklahoma.

In Meek's experience, the expansion of modern-day broadband has brought with it a similar hesitancy to adopt the technology that his parents saw when electricity first came to their town just before he was born.

A steady broadband connection gives rural residents access to news and weather updates, a reliable home telephone for emergency communication and access to telehealth services – something that Meek said is especially important.

"In this day and time as I get older, I can contact my doctor and get an appointment for him to visit with me over a video meeting, and we can talk through what is bothering me," he said.

Meek can take his own blood pressure, blood sugar readings and other vital statistics and report those to his healthcare provider, all via telehealth.

"A lot of people don't have transportation," Meek said. "As they get older, telehealth might be the only viable way they can go for minor doctor appointments."

The benefits of broadband do not stop at healthcare services. Broadband opens doors to take online college classes, connect with long-distance relatives, work remote jobs and more.

Broadband has a strong economic impact through creating jobs, bolstering local businesses and supporting rural schools, Meek said. It allows major corporations to expand their locations to rural areas, helps main-street businesses market their products, and gives families the opportunity to live and work in rural communities.

"Broadband is just as important in Battiest, Oklahoma, as it is in downtown Tulsa,"

Meek said. "Battiest is one of the most rural communities we've got in the state of Oklahoma, and they need it as bad or worse than a metropolitan area."

Getting broadband to rural areas like Battiest, however, is a challenge, Meek said. Geography, supply challenges and the technical skills required to lay fiber-optic internet cable are all major roadblocks in broadband expansion.

Meek and his colleagues are focused on overcoming these roadblocks as they assess the need for broadband across the state and steward the \$1.3 billion in federal grants to assist in the expansion efforts.

Meek said the governing board and the broadband office have placed their focus on getting broadband to unserved areas of the state first.

"Generally speaking, when you take a map and look at the state of Oklahoma, we have pockets across the whole state that have no service," he said.

While there are many areas of the state that are completely unserved, much of Oklahoma is inadequately served. Towns like Bristow and Okemah, Meek said, only have high-speed broadband access in hospitals, police stations and government buildings.

"We are trying to develop ways to tap into that middle mile and go the final mile, which is what serves homes and small businesses," Meek said of extending the service in these situations.

As the Oklahoma Broadband Office works to allocate and distribute funding, Oklahomans can advocate for themselves in several ways.

"Our funding was based on the federal broadband map that shows who has broadband – and who doesn't – by state, county and even down to the address on the road," Meek said.

The Oklahoma Broadband Office found the federal map to be outdated and incorrect in many areas of Oklahoma. Meek encourages Oklahomans, especially in rural areas, to check their addresses on the map to verify their coverage options and file a challenge if the information is incorrect.


Rural Oklahomans can also visit with their current internet service providers to express interest in service or infrastructure upgrades, Meek said.

"If no one calls, it is not a problem," he said. "The providers have to know if they bring the product out, there will be people to use it."

Expanding broadband access does not happen overnight, but Meek and his colleagues are working tirelessly to bring connectivity to every Oklahoman who wants it.

"I am not a broadband technician, but I do know how to manage grants, and I do know how to work with people, how to communicate and how to make those things flow," Meek said. "Our broadband staff is a very talented group of individuals. They work hard to put in the hours it takes to make it happen."

The lifelong educator and cattle rancher may have never expected to lead a statewide broadband expansion committee after retirement, but Meek knows the importance of his team's mission to serve Oklahomans with accessible, affordable broadband connectivity both today and for years to come.

"There are going to be a lot of people I never meet and never see," Meek said. "But if people have a better economic life, a better quality of life, can get an education and can stay healthier, I've met my goal. It's that simple." 



IMPACT

OKLAHOMA FARM BUREAU ANNUAL MEETING NOVEMBER 10-12, 2023

Oklahoma Farm Bureau members gathered in Oklahoma City Nov. 10-12 for the organization's 82nd annual meeting where they elected new leaders, set organizational policy for the coming year, recognized outstanding members and learned from several speakers and presenters.

"Our convention is a chance for farmers and ranchers to get together, visit with one another, renew their friendships and learn how much they have in common with their farming and ranching counterparts from across the state," said Rodd Moesel, OKFB president. "There is a special camaraderie that develops from gathering together and a reassurance that you're not the only person out there who is facing issues. There is comfort, encouragement and inspiration that comes from togetherness, so I think that gathering in person is very important."

OKFB LEADERS ELECTED

Moesel was re-elected to serve his final two-year term as OKFB president. Moesel has served as OKFB president since 2017.

Three OKFB members were re-elected to serve another three-year term on OKFB's board of directors, including Leon Richards of Texas County, who was re-elected to represent District One; Kerry Givens of Comanche County, who was re-elected to represent District Four; and Stacy Simunek of Kay County, who was re-elected to represent District Seven.

Jacey Fye of Cotton County was elected to represent District Four on the OKFB Women's Leadership Committee.

OKFB Young Farmers and Ranchers elected Jacob and Chastity Beck of Logan County to serve a one-year term as YF&R chair and re-elected Katie Richards of Texas County to serve as the District One representative,

Additional YF&R members elected include Ethan and Allison Theis of Comanche County, District Four; Garrett Haskins of Kay County, District Seven; Tommy and Chalaynna Salisbury of Tulsa County, at-large; and Taylor Fent of Ottawa County, collegiate.

MEMBERS SET 2024 GRASSROOTS POLICY

Farm Bureau voting delegates considered 75 policy resolutions throughout the weekend's business sessions, including resolutions on emergency drought commission funding, cooperative extension service funding, ad valorem taxes on unmanufactured farm products, surface water rights and more.

The grassroots policy resolutions presented on the floor in Oklahoma City began as county-submitted positions and advanced through the state resolutions process in the early fall. The policies adopted by OKFB members during the annual meeting will help guide the work of the organization for years to come.

OKFB members also voted to approve changes to the organization's bylaws after a multi-year process with input from grassroots members. The changes update and modernize the governing document.

MEMBERS LEARN FROM SPEAKERS, PRESENTERS

Farm Bureau members heard from American Farm Bureau President Zippy Duvall, Oklahoma State University Vice President and Dean of Agriculture Jayson Lusk, Oklahoma City Mayor David Holt, AFBF WLC Chair Isabella Chism and Vivayic's Tobin Redwine throughout the weekend.

Members had the opportunity to attend one of three breakout sessions on Friday, Nov. 10, including reports from Oklahoma's AFBF Issue Advisory Committee members, a mental health workshop with Tobin Redwine and an update on OKFB's new Oklahoma Grassroots Rural and Ag Business Accelerators program.

Outside of the general sessions, OKFB members heard inspirational messages from Maj. Ed Pulido of the United States Army (Ret.) during the Saturday awards banquet and LaDonna Gatlin during the Sunday morning worship service.

AWARDS PRESENTED

County Farm Bureaus and Farm Bureau members were honored throughout the weekend with dozens of awards and honors. Learn more about the award winners in the following pages.



JAYSON LUSK



DAVID HOLT



TOBIN REDWINE



ISABELLA CHISM





ABOVE: Okmulgee County Farm Bureau President Jim Meek (left) accepts the 2023 Oklahoma Farm Bureau John I. Taylor Award from Oklahoma Farm Bureau President Rodd Moesel.

Okmulgee County named top county Farm Bureau

Okmulgee County Farm Bureau was presented with the 2023 Oklahoma Farm Bureau John I. Taylor Award on Saturday, Nov. 11, during the organization's annual meeting.

Named after OKFB's first president, the award is the organization's highest county honor, recognizing the county Farm Bureau with the most effective county-led programs and activities.

Okmulgee County was honored for excelling in the program areas of public policy, service to members, public relations, membership, Women's Leadership Committee and Young Farmers and Ranchers Committee.

"To Okmulgee County, this award is a big deal," said Jim Meek, Okmulgee County Farm Bureau president. "This is our third time to win it in six years, and it is just as special to us tonight as it was the first time we won it."

Okmulgee County Farm Bureau was active throughout 2023, hosting a countywide ag tour, partnering with the Morris Fire Department for fire safety events, visiting with lawmakers and more.



ABOVE: Garfield County Farm Bureau President Joe Peeper (left) accepts the 2023 Oklahoma Farm Bureau Lewis H. Munn Award from Oklahoma Farm Bureau President Rodd Moesel.

Garfield County wins Lewis H. Munn Award

Garfield County Farm Bureau was honored with the Oklahoma Farm Bureau Lewis H. Munn Award on Saturday, Nov. 11.

Known as the Farm Bureau Builders Award, the 2023 award was presented to the county that conducted the strongest program in county leadership development.

Garfield County hosted more than 50 students for a Farm Safety Day Camp to educate them about the importance of farm safety and the hazards that farmers and ranchers encounter every day.

"This award is a fantastic achievement based upon the hardworking people in our county, and not just the board members, but everybody who pitches in and does the hard work it takes to get things done," said Joe Peeper, Garfield County Farm Bureau president. "We have a great board and great people in the county, so it is really a thrill to achieve this award."

The Lewis H. Munn award is named after OKFB's second president, whose philosophy centered on building strong county programs.

OKFB honors District Administrators of the Year

Oklahoma Farm Bureau presented its District Administrator of the Year Awards at the organization's annual meeting.

The District Administrator of the Year Award is presented to one county Farm Bureau administrator from each OKFB district for their contributions to the overall success of their county Farm Bureau organization. County administrators conduct the daily operations of the county Farm Bureau and help meet the needs of members.

The 2023 District Administrator of the Year recipients are: Joy Fitts, Beaver County, District One; Makayla Ellifritz, Greer County, District Two; Rachel Uhlenhake, Kingfisher County, District Three; Nancy Minyard, Love County, District Four; Melissa Edwards, Haskell County, District Five; Cody Morgan, Ottawa County, District Six; Laura Yunker, Grant County, District Seven; Bobbie Sneed, Seminole County, District Eight; and Kristin Story, Okmulgee County, District Nine.

Comanche, Ottawa County Farm Bureaus recognized with County Excellence Awards

Oklahoma Farm Bureau presented the OKFB County Excellence Award to Comanche and Ottawa County Farm Bureaus on Saturday, Nov. 11, at the organization's 82nd annual meeting in Oklahoma City.

Modeled after the American Farm Bureau Federation's County Activities of Excellence Award, this award recognizes county Farm Bureaus with the most outstanding or unique local program, activity or event.

Comanche County Farm Bureau hosted an Ag Days event for nearly 1,200 fifth-grade students from four school districts in Comanche County. An idea that stemmed from Comanche County Farm Bureau member Joshua Sullivan and his daughter, Cora, Ag Days offered students the opportunity to learn more about agriculture through learning stations presented by local farmers and ranchers featuring livestock, crop production, farm equipment and more. The hands-on event was the largest agriculture demonstration for elementary students in a 50-mile radius of Comanche County.

"As agriculturalists, we uphold the highest standards for ourselves to be good stewards of the land," Sullivan said. "It is our job to cultivate and educate the public and younger generations why we do what we do and how their food gets to their tables."

Ottawa County Farm Bureau hosted an Ag Experience Lunch for Leadership Miami, where several Ottawa County Farm Bureau leaders and members spoke with the Leadership Miami class about their operations. Class participants also had the opportunity to view and sit in tractors, combines and other equipment provided by Ottawa County Farm Bureau board member Greg Leonard.

"We are elated to receive this award," said Ottawa County Farm Bureau President Alisen Anderson. "It is something that we were able to really show that simple education can move mountains not only with legislators and with county officials, but also with business owners in counties that are not specific to agriculture."



ABOVE: Oklahoma Farm Bureau President Rodd Moesel (right) presents Comanche County Farm Bureau members Kerry Givens (left), Cora Sullivan (second from left) and Joshua Sullivan with the OKFB County Excellence Award.



ABOVE: Oklahoma Farm Bureau President Rodd Moesel (right) presents James Fuser of Ottawa County Farm Bureau with the OKFB County Excellence Award.

County Farm Bureaus honored for excellence with 2023 Presidential Star Awards

Several county Farm Bureaus were recognized for their efforts to further agriculture and rural Oklahoma on Saturday, Nov. 11, during Oklahoma Farm Bureau's 82nd annual meeting in Oklahoma City.

Each year, OKFB recognizes the county Farm Bureaus that have excelled in program areas such as membership, public policy, local affairs, service to members, Women's Leadership Committee and Young Farmers and Ranchers with a Presidential Star Award. A star is given to a county for each program area in which it excelled, with a maximum of six stars possible.

SIX-STAR PRESIDENTIAL AWARD

Cherokee, Comanche, Mayes, Okmulgee, Ottawa, Payne and Rogers

FIVE-STAR PRESIDENTIAL AWARD

Creek, Garfield, Grant, Greer, Kingfisher, LeFlore, Major, Noble, Okfuskee, Stephens, Texas, Washita and Woodward

FOUR-STAR PRESIDENTIAL AWARD

Alfalfa, Caddo, Haskell, Jackson, Kay, Logan, Love, Muskogee, Nowata, Oklahoma, Pontotoc, Pottawatomie, Seminole, Tulsa and Washington

THREE-STAR PRESIDENTIAL AWARD

Atoka, Choctaw, Cleveland, Cotton, Hughes, Kiowa, Lincoln, McClain, McIntosh, Sequoyah and Woods

Noble, Kay County Farm Bureau members honored with OKFB YF&R Achievement Award

Jake and Kelly Decker of Noble County and Garrett Haskins of Kay County were honored with the 2023 and 2024 Oklahoma Farm Bureau Young Farmers and Ranchers Achievement Awards, respectively, during the organization's 82nd annual meeting.

The YF&R Achievement Award recognizes young farmers and ranchers who have excelled in their farming or ranching operation and have honed their leadership abilities through Farm Bureau and other activities and organizations.

"This is really a huge honor," said Jake Decker of winning the 2023 award. "We are first-generation, so that is another part to our story that makes it even better. It is difficult to make it in agriculture, but we have worked hard to make it work. Being first-generation, we didn't have anything holding us back – we just went after it."

The Deckers and their three children raise cattle and hair sheep on their ranch near Orlando.

This year, OKFB named both the 2023 and 2024 award winners to better align the state-level competition cycle to American Farm Bureau's national competitions.

The 2024 winner, Garrett Haskins, runs a cow-calf operation and raises wheat, soybeans and grain sorghum in Kay County.

"Winning this award means a lot to me," Haskins said. "I was elected to the Kay County Farm Bureau board nine years ago, and I worked really hard, got more involved and got to meet all of these people that all became like family, and to receive something like this is just icing on the cake for me to move forward with my Farm Bureau career and better agriculture in any way I can."

The Deckers received an expense-paid trip to the 2024 AFBF Annual Meeting in Salt Lake City, Utah, and Haskins received an expense-paid trip to the 2025 AFBF Annual Meeting in San Antonio, Texas, where they will compete for the AFBF YF&R Achievement Award. The winners also received John Deere gators, courtesy of P&K Equipment.



ABOVE: Kelly and Jake Decker (center) of Noble County receive the 2023 Oklahoma Farm Bureau Young Farmers & Ranchers Achievement Award.



ABOVE: Garrett Haskins (third from left) of Kay County receives the 2024 Oklahoma Farm Bureau Young Farmers & Ranchers Achievement Award.

OKFB YF&R names discussion meet winners

Oklahoma Farm Bureau Young Farmers and Ranchers named the winners of four discussion meet competitive events during the organization's 82nd annual meeting.

Leslie Lewis of Okmulgee County was named the 2023 winner of the YF&R Discussion Meet, which was held in late July during the OKFB YF&R Summer Conference, and Jacob Beck of Logan County was named the 2024 winner after the discussion meet competition during OKFB's annual meeting on Nov. 10.

Cassidy Cashen of Oklahoma State University was named the 2023 Collegiate Farm Bureau Discussion Meet winner, and Ashlee Purvine of Thomas-Fay-Custer FFA won the High School Discussion Meet.

Competitors faced fellow participants in a panel-style discussion where each competitor's performance was evaluated on the exchange of ideas and information on predetermined topics.

Participants were judged on their ability to offer constructive input, cooperation and communication while analyzing agricultural problems and developing solutions.

Lewis and Beck each received a John Deere lawnmower, sponsored by P&K Equipment. Lewis also won a trip to the 2024 American Farm Bureau Annual Meeting in Salt Lake City, Utah, and Beck won a trip to the 2025 AFBF Annual Meeting in San Antonio, Texas, where they will compete in national discussion meet contests.



ABOVE: Oklahoma Farm Bureau Young Farmers & Ranchers chairs Alisen and Jared Anderson (left) and OKFB President Rodd Moesel (right) present Jacob Beck his award as the 2024 OKFB YF&R Discussion Meet winner.

Cashen received an expense-paid trip to represent Oklahoma at the 2024 AFBF Collegiate Discussion Meet in Omaha, Nebraska, and Purvine received a cash prize.

Ottawa, Coal County Farm Bureau members win OKFB YF&R Excellence in Agriculture Award



ABOVE: Jake and Meggie Gibbs (second and third from right) of Ottawa County receive the 2023 Oklahoma Farm Bureau Young Farmers & Ranchers Excellence in Agriculture Award.

Jake and Meggie Gibbs of Ottawa County and LC and Jaclyn Darling of Coal County were honored with the 2023 and 2024 Oklahoma Farm Bureau Young Farmers and Ranchers Excellence in Agriculture Awards, respectively, at the organization's 82nd annual meeting Nov. 10-12.

The award is presented to young farmers and ranchers who do not derive a majority of their income from a farming or ranching operation for excellence in agriculture and Farm Bureau.

"We are so grateful for the opportunity to share our story," said Meggie Gibbs of receiving the 2023 award. "We have moved several times in our careers, so we have gotten to share the resources we had through USDA that we have used to improve our operation, and we are just so thankful for YF&R. My only regret is not joining sooner."

This year, OKFB named both the 2023 and 2024 award winners to better align the state-level competition cycle to



ABOVE: LC and Jaclyn Darling (second and third from right) of Coal County receive the 2024 Oklahoma Farm Bureau Young Farmers & Ranchers Excellence in Agriculture Award.

American Farm Bureau's national competitions.

"We are so honored to receive the Excellence in Agriculture Award," said 2024 award winner Jaclyn Darling. "What we do as agriculturists is challenging work, and receiving this award makes the hard and long days all worth it. I remember my first county board meeting where the board members were encouraging us to get involved. They told us about the YF&R awards, and I remember thinking we didn't have a big enough operation to win, but we did it."

Each couple received a Polaris Sportsman 450 HO ATV, courtesy of Oklahoma Ag Credit and Farm Credit of Western Oklahoma. The Gibbs family earned a trip to the 2024 AFBF Annual Meeting in Salt Lake City, Utah, and the Darling Family earned a trip to the 2025 AFBF Annual Meeting in San Antonio, Texas, where the couples will compete for the AFBF Excellence in Agriculture Award.

Ottawa County honored as top county YF&R program

The Ottawa County Young Farmers and Ranchers Committee was honored with the 2023 Oklahoma Farm Bureau YF&R Charles L. Roff Award during the organization's 82nd annual meeting.

Presented to the state's top county YF&R committee, the Charles L. Roff Award encourages YF&R members to improve their local committees while strengthening the Farm Bureau organization.

"When we started our YF&R chapter a couple years ago, we just hoped to have a place where folks of similar age and industry who were going through similar things could come together and fellowship," said Dillon Johnson, Ottawa County YF&R committee chair. "Along the way, we started doing some programming and found that we could really be a service to the community through YF&R. Our membership keeps growing, and it's really just a testament to the dedication of the folks in our county YF&R that we've gotten this far."

The Ottawa County YF&R committee hosted a number of activities throughout 2023. Most notably was the first-ever Ottawa County Farm Bureau YF&R Pedal Tractor Pull, which was held as part of the Ottawa County Fair in August.

The YF&R committee planned and executed the event, which brought more than 30 participants to the inaugural competition. Proceeds from



ABOVE: Oklahoma Farm Bureau President Rodd Moesel (right) presents Ottawa County Young Farmers & Ranchers members with the 2023 OKFB Charles L. Roff Award.

the event went to a local community crisis center in Ottawa County.

The county received a traveling plaque in recognition of their outstanding committee involvement.

Northeastern Oklahoma A&M recognized as top Collegiate Farm Bureau chapter

The Collegiate Farm Bureau chapter at Northeastern Oklahoma A&M College was honored with the first-ever Oklahoma Farm Bureau Young Farmers and Ranchers Moesel Award on Friday, Nov. 10, during the organization's 82nd annual meeting.

The Moesel Award recognizes the top Collegiate Farm Bureau chapter that works to improve their local chapter while strengthening the Farm Bureau organization.

NEO Collegiate Farm Bureau hosted a number of activities for their members during the 2022-2023 school year, including several commodity tours where members toured local agricultural enterprises from traditional livestock and grain operations to coffee shops and Christmas tree farms. The NEO chapter also packed care packages for local farmers in



ABOVE: Oklahoma Farm Bureau Young Farmers & Ranchers chairs Jared and Alisen Anderson (left) and OKFB President Rodd Moesel (right) present Taylor Fent of Northeastern Oklahoma A&M College with the OKFB YF&R Moesel Award.

celebration of Farmer Appreciation Day, read agriculture books to elementary students, hosted a mock discussion meet and more.



ABOVE: Oklahoma Farm Bureau Executive Director Thad Doye (left) and OKFB President Rodd Moesel (right) present KC Sheperd with the OKFB Journalist of the Year Award.

Sheperd named OKFB Journalist of the Year

KC Sheperd, director of farm and ranch programming at the Oklahoma Farm Report, was presented with the Oklahoma Farm Bureau Journalist of the Year Award at the organization's 82nd annual meeting.

The award honors a journalist for their contributions through accurate and regular reports about Farm Bureau news, agricultural issues and the importance of these issues to Oklahoma and the nation.

Sheperd regularly attends OKFB events and shares the work of the organization through the Oklahoma Farm Report and the Radio Oklahoma Ag Network, which provides agriculture news and market updates on 45 radio stations across Oklahoma, Texas, Kansas, New Mexico and Missouri.

Stowers honored with Distinguished Service Award

Terry Stowers was recognized with the Distinguished Service to Oklahoma Farm Bureau Award during the organization's 82nd annual meeting.

The award honors individuals who have made outstanding contributions to agriculture and the Farm Bureau organization.

Stowers earned the award for the two decades he spent advocating for the rights of individual and family mineral owners in Oklahoma through the Coalition of Oklahoma Surface and Mineral Owners.

"Terry Stowers has been an incredible partner and key adviser to farmers, ranchers and mineral owners in Oklahoma for more than two decades," said OKFB President Rodd Moesel. "We are incredibly grateful for the countless hours he has volunteered over the years to provide input and guidance on mineral rights, and we look forward to continuing his legacy through the Royalty Owner Coalition of Oklahoma."

ROCO is a non-profit corporation that provides a structured, consistent and strong voice for the interests of Oklahoma mineral owners. OKFB partnered with several other agriculture organizations to establish ROCO in 2021 to continue Stowers' work after he announced his retirement.



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 2024 event dates

February

13

**OKFB Leadership
 Conference**
Oklahoma City

April

8-12

**OKFB Washington,
 D.C., Summit**
Washington, D.C.

19-20

**OKFB WLC State
 Conference**
Oklahoma City

July

26-28

**YF&R Summer
 Conference**
Broken Arrow

October

22-23

**State Resolutions
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Oklahoma City

November

8-10

**OKFB Annual
 Meeting**
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Find more dates online at
okfarmbureau.org

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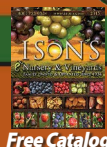


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Inspiring Innovation

Ten Oklahoma innovators share big ideas at the first-ever Oklahoma Grassroots Rural & Ag Business Accelerators Demo Day

Inspired ideas rang out loud and clear from the stage at the Oklahoma State University Hamm Institute for American Energy in Oklahoma City on Monday, Dec. 4.

From innovations in eyecare and firefighting to integrations of aquaponics and hydroponics to new water pumping technologies and beyond, cutting-edge ideas and products from Oklahoma-based innovators were in the spotlight during the Oklahoma Grassroots Rural & Ag Business Accelerators first-ever Demo Day.

The event served as an opportunity for ten rural Oklahoma innovators to showcase their innovations – and their passion – in front of investment and venture firms in hopes of finding partnerships to take their enterprises to the next level.

The event capped off the inaugural year for the accelerator program's Activate Oklahoma rural innovation pipeline cohort in addition to a special Customized Development cohort. Oklahoma-based innovators located in towns with a population of 50,000 or less received specialized business training, innovation coaching and peer-to-peer mentorship beginning in the summer of 2023.

The goal throughout the program year was to increase innovation in rural Oklahoma to provide business opportunities and spur job creation to help keep rural Oklahoma vibrant.

During Demo Day, cohort members of Activate Oklahoma along with participants of the program's Customized Development pipeline made five-minute presentations to a group of financial firms, venture funds, and guests. The innovators also fielded questions, and they also manned booths where they visited with potential investors one-on-one.

Nathan Kuykendall of Claremore-based Eyedeal Innovations was one of the Activate Oklahoma cohort members who pitched an innovation at Demo Day. Eyedeal Innovations

created a machine-learning model to identify abnormalities in retinal photos, an innovation he hopes will allow optometrists and ophthalmologists to more easily assess retinal photos and diagnose diseases that can be spotted in such scans.


"It's very exciting – it's nerve-wracking," Kuykendall said of the opportunity to present his company's innovation. "But it's encouraging to know that this could lead to an opportunity that changes the direction of our company."

Demo Day culminated with the graduation of the Activate Oklahoma and Customized Development participants, marking their completion of the months-long education, training and mentorship programming.

"Just like preparing to run a marathon, you have to get in shape," Kuykendall said. "It has pushed us to get our company in shape with refining our idea, with clarifying why our product is valuable and how it is valuable. Even if this doesn't lead to a life-changing opportunity, it has put us in a place for more success in the future."

The financial and venture firms who heard the pitches from the ten innovators will have an opportunity to invest in the entrepreneurs they feel are a good fit for further development.

With graduation in the rear-view mirror for the inaugural Activate Oklahoma and Customized Development classes, OKFB is looking forward to a new program year and a new group of rural Oklahomans with ideas, innovations and products that will help build a better future for our rural communities.

The next round of program applications for the Oklahoma Grassroots Rural & Ag Business Accelerators pipelines is open from January 1 to March 1, 2024. Find the application and more information on OKFB's website at okfarmbureau.org/accelerator. 

Meet our innovators

We are proud of the ten innovators listed below who took part in our 2023 rural business development programs and graduated from our Activate Oklahoma and Customized Development cohorts.

Activate Oklahoma

Apexloads
Hinton

Cimarron Maltworks
Guthrie

Electromagnetix
Shawnee

Eyedeal Innovations
Claremore

Fast Foam Suppression
Altus

Trailer Butler
Ponca City

Customized Development

33 Processing
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UpTerra
Cordell

REVIVING A DREAM



Fifth-grade students from Lawton and the surrounding area explore farming equipment with board member River Mitchell at the Ag Days event on April 11, 2023. (Photo courtesy of River Mitchell)

Lawton-area highschooler Cora Sullivan had a vision for sharing the agriculture story with younger students, and with a little inspiration and help from her father, Joshua, the Sullivans embarked upon an effort to bring a hands-on agriculture experience to life.

The Comanche County Farm Bureau members were determined to educate students in the Lawton area about where their food and clothing comes from with dreams of an immersive, hands-on agriculture education event like one Joshua's FFA chapter hosted in the area more than 20 years ago.

"When I was FFA president during my senior year, we hosted Ag Days at the school farm," Joshua said. "We had the kids come out, we showed them our ag projects, and they went back to school."

Despite the rural nature of some of the schools in Comanche County, Joshua and Cora knew the need for agriculture education was high.

"So many of our kids are distant from agriculture," Joshua said. "They are not raised on a farm anymore. They are raised in town."

The Sullivans knew it was time to revive Ag Days and make it better than ever. While Cora met some roadblocks and challenges on the path

to bringing the event to life, Joshua was there to offer encouragement.

"I kept telling her to push for her dream of what she wants," Joshua said. "She wanted to improve agriculture and get more kids involved in it."

The Sullivans continued to visit with Lawton Public Schools and eventually got the green light to begin planning Ag Days for area fifth-grade students at Lawton's school farm.

"Fifth graders are the age where they're not too cool for school, but they're not too young to understand," Joshua said.

Joshua and Cora wasted no time planning and soon had a robust agriculture education event set for April 2023 with the help of local community members and businesses.

"We picked the springtime because Lawton Public Schools has an outstanding greenhouse, and it was full of flowers," Joshua said.

The flowers, he hoped, would serve purposes other than simply providing a pleasant view.

"For some of those kids who might not be interested in the tractors, the animals or the commodities, they could get a little taste of horticulture or something they could possibly do at home," Joshua said.

In addition to horticultural stations, Ag Days featured a veterinary demonstration, Oklahoma Farm Bureau's commodity trailer and educational stations on cattle, sheep, goats, swine and natural resources.

The Sullivans approached Comanche County Farm Bureau to help with the event, and the county board was eager to assist.

"Our board is always interested in every opportunity that we have for any kind of outreach effort or educational or promotional activity in the county," said Comanche County Farm Bureau President Kerry Givens. "When we heard about Ag Days, we were thankful it was a Farm Bureau member who wanted to kick this off."

Comanche County Farm Bureau sponsored a cookout-style lunch for the students, and board member River Mitchell provided farming equipment for students to experience firsthand, including tractors, combine sprayers, balers, swathers and more.

"We had everything for the kids to look at – a broad spectrum of equipment they would see in southwest Oklahoma," Joshua said.

Ag Days brought nearly 1,200 fifth-grade students from Lawton, Flower Mound, Sterling and Bishop Public Schools over the course of two days to



machinery with Comanche County Farm Bureau
y of Kaila Williams)



Cora Sullivan explains an activity to
Lawton-area students during Ag Days.
(Photo courtesy of Kaila Williams)



Comanche County Farm Bureau member
Kara Goodknight speaks with fifth-grade
students during Ag Days. (Photo courtesy
of Kaila Williams)

Lawton's school farm to learn about and experience agriculture – many for the first time.

"Watching those kids' faces light up was like watching them open their Christmas gifts on Christmas day," Joshua said. "They could see (agriculture). They could touch it. They could smell it."

Joshua said he hopes the students who participated in Ag Days learned something about an industry they might not have otherwise considered.

"So many kids, they don't fit into a sports program," he said. "They don't fit in to an orchestra or the band, or they don't fit into choir or the many different things the school has to offer. There's a lot in agriculture that these kids could be involved in, whether it's on the technical side or in the animal industry. It's not just about the showing. It's about the responsibility of taking care of something 24/7 whether you feel like it or not."

Givens had the opportunity to attend Ag Days and said he was struck by how much the Lawton-area community rallied around the event.

"There were so many people from the community who stepped up," Givens said. "There were probably 20 or 25 folks there from the community

who didn't have any ties really at all, but they saw it was a good work and they came out and helped."

Some of those community members included individuals from the Comanche County Extension office, the local Natural Resources Conservation Service office, Comanche County's Farm Service Agency and the Lawton Public Schools maintenance division.

The Sullivans received overwhelmingly positive feedback from the students and participating schools, and they are already thinking about the next Ag Days event, which Joshua said he hopes can feature even more diverse agricultural sectors.

"People think of agriculture, and they think of a cow, they think of a pig or they think of a tractor," he said. "But there are fish farms, bee farms, vineyards and so many things kids could be involved with outside of the basic stuff we all think about."

For the Sullivans, who have farmed and raised cattle in Comanche County as a family for generations, the importance of an event like Ag Days cannot be understated.


"As agriculturalists, we have to get back in the game and get involved with our local communities and cultivate these kids and teach them

what we do and why we do it, so they are educated whenever somebody comes along with a different agenda and says that we're cruel to animals or we don't take care of the environment," Joshua said. "It's very important to start at a younger level and educate those kids of why we do what we do."

Comanche County Farm Bureau and the Sullivans were recognized for their work in the Ag Days event with a County Excellence Award at Oklahoma Farm Bureau's 2023 annual meeting in November.

OKFB's 82nd annual meeting was the Sullivans' first, and Givens said he was glad Joshua and Cora were able to attend the annual meeting to be recognized for their hard work.

He said he hopes Comanche County's support and involvement in the Sullivans' event will only further the family's involvement in Comanche County Farm Bureau and beyond.

"It was a win-win for the county," Givens said. "It was a win-win for the schools, and it was a win-win for Comanche County Farm Bureau." 

Read more about Comanche County Farm Bureau's County Excellence Award on page 37 of this issue.

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OKFB Foundation for Agriculture awards two rural schools with \$10,000 greenhouse grants

The Oklahoma Farm Bureau Foundation for Agriculture recently selected Roland Public Schools and Navajo Public Schools to each receive a \$10,000 Growing with the Foundation grant.

The grant program is designed to help students learn about agriculture through assisting schools with the purchase of a teaching greenhouse.

"We are proud to award Roland and Navajo Public Schools with the Growing with the Foundation grant," said David VonTungeln, OKFB Foundation for Agriculture president. "As our society becomes further removed from the farm, we appreciate the commitment these schools have to teaching their students about where their food comes from."

Typically awarded to one school per year, this year's grant was presented to two schools thanks to the generous contributions of OKFB members during fundraising events at the organization's 82nd annual meeting in early November.



Roland Public Schools



Navajo Public Schools

OKFB hosts booth, members-only lunch at Tulsa Farm Show

Oklahoma Farm Bureau shared the Farm Bureau story with farmers, ranchers and members of Oklahoma's agriculture community at the Tulsa Farm Show held Dec. 7-9 at Expo Square. OKFB showcased the organization's activities and benefits at the OKFB booth during the entire event.

A special luncheon for OKFB members was provided on Friday, Dec. 8, featuring Wes Nofire, Oklahoma's Native American Liaison along with staff members from Oklahoma's congressional delegation.



Wes Nofire

Drummond creates organized crime task force to combat illegal marijuana grows

Oklahoma Attorney General Gentner Drummond has created an Organized Crime Task Force to combat the rise of illegal marijuana grow operations across Oklahoma and added a resource for citizens to report suspicious activity related to unlicensed operations. The task force investigates all crimes related to illegal grow operations.

Oklahomans can report an illegal marijuana grow operation online at oag.ok.gov under the Illegal Marijuana Tipline tab or by sending a tip by email to illegalgrow@oag.ok.gov.

Mullin introduces Black Culture Relief Act

Sen. Markwayne Mullin co-sponsored the Black Culture Relief Act in Congress to allow farmers and ranchers to protect their newborn livestock from black vultures.

The legislation provides regulatory relief by allowing farmers and ranchers to take black vultures any time the birds threaten their livestock without a depredation permit. Despite being listed as a species of lowest conservation concern, black vultures are still protected under the Migratory Bird Treaty Act of 1918, making it illegal to take one without a depredation permit from U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service.

"Many Oklahoma Farm Bureau members have long faced extreme challenges with black vultures and the devastating effects they can have on livestock herds," said Oklahoma Farm Bureau President Rodd Moesel. "When these birds attack cattle and other livestock, ranchers are rendered helpless without first engaging in the lengthy process to obtain a depredation permit. We have heard countless stories from our Farm Bureau members about the threat vultures pose specifically to newborn livestock, and as caretakers of our herds and flocks, agriculturalists need appropriate measures to protect our animals. The Black Vulture Relief Act is a welcome sight for our members affected by these predatory birds, and we applaud Sen. Mullin for his work to help ranchers protect their livestock and their livelihoods."

OSU's Dr. Shannon Ferrell wraps up Cultivating Healthy Minds webinars



Oklahoma Farm Bureau members wrapped up the webinar portion of the Cultivating Healthy Minds series with a look at resilience in agriculture on Friday, Oct. 13.

The finale of the three-part webinar series featured Oklahoma State University's Dr. Shannon Ferrell as he led members through an exploration of agriculture's unique stressors and risks when it comes to mental health.

Stress is the root of many of the mental health problems in agriculture, Ferrell said. Factors that are out of a farmer's control like the weather or pest invasions only add stress in an industry that already has a relatively low rate of financial return coupled with high business risk.

"In the end, the great paradox that we face in rural mental health is some of the things that are our greatest strengths might also be the sources of our greatest vulnerabilities," Ferrell said.

Read the full wrap-up and watch our final Cultivating Healthy Minds webinar with Dr. Ferrell online at okfb.news/FerrellCHM.

2023 Oklahoma School Garden Contest winners announced

The Oklahoma Department of Agriculture, Food and Forestry and the Oklahoma Farm Bureau Women's Leadership Committee announced the winners of the 2023 Statewide School Garden Contest in fall 2023.

The winners selected were:

Best overall school garden
Positive Tomorrows School

Best startup garden
Maysville Elementary School

Best education-based garden
Eugene Field Elementary

Best harvest partnership school garden
Redbud Farm School

Best Community Collaboration School Garden
Oologah-Talala Lower Elementary

OKFB Foundation for Ag awards 10 mini grants for ag literacy projects

The Oklahoma Farm Bureau Foundation for Agriculture awarded ten \$500 grants to organizations around the state through the foundation's mini grant program.

Grants were awarded to:

- **Red Oak FFA Chapter**
- **Holdenville 4-H**
- **Oklahoma Union Schools STEM class**
- **Central High FFA**
- **Milburn FFA**
- **Navajo FFA**
- **Silo FFA**
- **Strother FFA**
- **Logan County robotics club**
- **Cimarron FFA**

Activities held by the grant recipients included chicken incubator projects, a plant-to-table salsa project, a Lego-based farm challenge simulation, greenhouse and plant-growing projects, and a bee hotel project.

OKFB hosts Ag Defense Fundraiser in Tulsa

Oklahoma Farm Bureau members gathered at the Mayo Hotel in Tulsa Saturday, Dec. 9, for the OKFB Ag Defense Fundraiser.

The event featured a dinner and a conversation between North Carolina Pork Council CEO Roy Lee Lindsey and author Ray Starling, whose book "Farmers Versus Foodies" discusses the influences on and changes developing in agriculture and our nation's food value chain. Starling appeared remotely by video conference due a last-minute family emergency, but Farm Bureau members still had the opportunity to learn from his perspective gained through years of working in the legal and public policy arenas of the food and agriculture industries.

The event brought together nearly 90 Oklahoma Farm Bureau members for an evening of food, fun and discussion about agriculture.

Proceeds raised from the Ag Defense Fundraiser will help support Oklahoma Farm Bureau's ongoing efforts to preserve Oklahoma's agriculture industry from outside challenges that seek to limit the ability of Oklahoma family farmers and ranchers to produce safe, affordable and abundant food.





Above / A water feature can bring peace and tranquility to a garden space.
(Photo by David Hillock)



Above / Structures in the garden, whether wooden or made of another material, provide a great place for climbing plants.
(Photo by David Hillock)

Landscaping isn't just about the plants

By **Trisha Gedon**

Oklahoma Cooperative Extension Service

During the winter months, gardeners get a bit of a reprieve from the day-to-day tasks such as weeding and watering in the garden. While many gardeners take this time to pour over seed catalogs and plan what plants will be installed in the spring, it's also a good time to focus on non-plant materials that can enhance the landscape.

Even though plant selections typically are the bread and butter of a landscape, hardscapes such as driveways, fencing, water features, retaining walls, walkways, pergolas, firepits and patios also play key roles in the function of the outdoor space, said David Hillock, Oklahoma State University Extension consumer horticulturist.

"For many gardening enthusiasts, the landscape is an extension of the home. In a home, walls and furniture help define various spaces," Hillock said. "This same effect is created outdoors using various hardscapes."

Gardeners need to know how they want to use the space. Will it be used for entertaining, cooking, dining or relaxing? Is a larger space needed where children can run around and

play games? These are all factors to consider when planning the hardscapes that will be used in the space.

When planning hardscape elements of a landscape, consider the durability, functionality and aesthetics. Choose materials that complement the style of the landscape. There are many different landscape materials on the market, so choose styles that coordinate with each other, as well as coordinating with the exterior of the home and the landscape design style.

Adding structure with hardscapes helps create separation in the garden and turns a wide-open space into smaller, more intimate areas. To keep areas of a landscape separate, consider making walls with plant materials or fencing. Low shrubs block physical movement and visually separate two different areas. Properly placed trees and shrubs can also be used as a guide to show visitors where they can move through the space.

Hillock said while plants are used to define individual spaces, these spaces can be connected by pathways, much like how a hallway in a home connects its rooms.

"Think about the color, texture and pattern that natural stone, brick, gravel or pavers add to the outdoor living space. It can be hard to pick a favorite, but oftentimes, using two or three textures, colors or materials can make a space look messy and distract from the overall aesthetic of the landscape," he said.

A structure as simple as a trellis with a climbing vine growing on it, or something more elaborate such as a gazebo, can add function to the outdoor space. Depending on the space, a curved or straight retaining wall can be effective in defining space.

"A retaining wall can be beneficial in a flat space because it adds height and depth," Hillock said. "The retaining wall can be straight or curved, and trailing plants can soften the edge. Raised garden beds can help create the same effect."

A water feature adds to a landscape not only visually, but audibly. It can be as simple as a small fountain or as elaborate as a small pond with a waterfall. Fountains often act as the feature statement or focal point in a landscape. They benefit from having open space around them or low-



Above / When placed properly, fencing can define various spaces in the landscape. (Photo by David Hillock)



Above / A simple bottle tree with brightly colored bottles provides visual interest in the landscape. (Photo by David Hillock)

planted flower beds to help enhance the design of the water feature. Running water adds ambiance and can mask street noise.

"The local home and garden store is likely stocking the shelves with garden improvement supplies right now," Hillock said. "In addition to choosing plants, trees and bushes for the landscape, now is a great time to start developing a new landscape plan or upgrade an existing one," he said.



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