

Oklahoma

Country



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Oklahoma Farm Bureau
® Winter 2021 • Vol. 74 No. 1

Carrying on

Recognizing nine Oklahoma **farm and ranch families** dedicated to making **today better** and **tomorrow brighter** through agriculture.

A call to serve

Getting to know OKFB's new board members

Rising to the occasion

Celebrating a year of Farm Bureau achievement

Lincoln to local

Opportunities to advocate for agriculture



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Oklahoma Country

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ON THE COVER

The Budy family of Woods County were one of nine families honored as OKFB Women's Leadership Committee Farm & Ranch Family Recognition recipients. Read more on page 9. *Photo by Dustin Mielke.*

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One member family's Oklahoma Farm Bureau membership number is hidden somewhere in this issue of *Oklahoma Country* and could earn that member family \$50. To claim the cash prize, the member family must find its own hidden membership number and contact Brianne Schwabauer before the last day of the month, Monday through Friday, 8:30 a.m. to 4 p.m. at (405) 523-2325.

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Rising to the occasion

A recap of the members and counties honored following OKFB's Online Business Meeting conducted in early November.



Carrying on

Meet the nine Oklahoma Farm Bureau farm and ranch families recognized by the OKFB Women's Leadership Committee as outstanding examples of family agriculture in our state.



A call to serve

By Brianne Schwabauer

As three members step into their new leadership roles on the OKFB board of directors, learn about their commitment to serve their fellow farmers, ranchers and rural Oklahomans.



PRESIDENTIALLY SPEAKING

Show up, stand up, speak up

By Rodd Moesel

President, Oklahoma Farm Bureau & Affiliated Companies

It is once again that time of year where Oklahoma Farm Bureau prepares to walk the hallways of the state Capitol to bring the message of our members to legislators and state leaders.

This upcoming session promises to be one unlike anything we have seen before. From social distancing to state budget shortfalls, there will be plenty of challenges ahead as we work to ensure the voices of our state's agriculturalists and rural residents are heard loud and clear during this upcoming legislative session.

Oklahoma's legislature will be called upon to make a myriad of tough decisions as they work through the fallout of a pandemic coupled with a new requirement to fund state Medicaid expansion. There is hard work ahead for all of us as our state grapples with new realities and reduced income.

This is where it is imperative for OKFB members to be engaged and get involved. We know that when state budgets are tight, tax relief measures that our farmers and ranchers depend upon fall under scrutiny. As state and city revenues feel pressure, increasing ad valorem taxes is an idea often floated to help shore up meager collections. Farm Bureau stands opposed to such ideas because we know that when agricultural commodity prices are low and weather conditions are unforgiving – the story of Oklahoma agriculture the last several years – any increase in operating costs can be devastating to our farm and ranch families.

Farm Bureau members must remain vigilant to ensure our voices are heard. As our OKFB staff takes our policy message to the state Capitol, nothing serves as more powerful ammunition than the voices of our members. While we have always counted on our members to step up and speak out on issues, the 2021 session will bring with it a need for a new level of involvement.


To help our members stay on top of the issues during a legislative session where the state Capitol may not be as

accessible as in the past, we are assembling a number of new ways to get involved. Our public policy staff will hold weekly call-ins for our county Farm Bureau leaders to get updates and give input on our advocacy efforts. Our communications department will share regular legislative updates to keep our members informed. Our field staff will connect our grassroots members with ideas and information that arise during the session. Of course, you can always contact me or any member of our staff if you have questions or ideas about our policy process.

And if you would like to sign up for our action alert system, which we use to connect our Farm Bureau members with their local legislators on key issues, we would love to add you to our

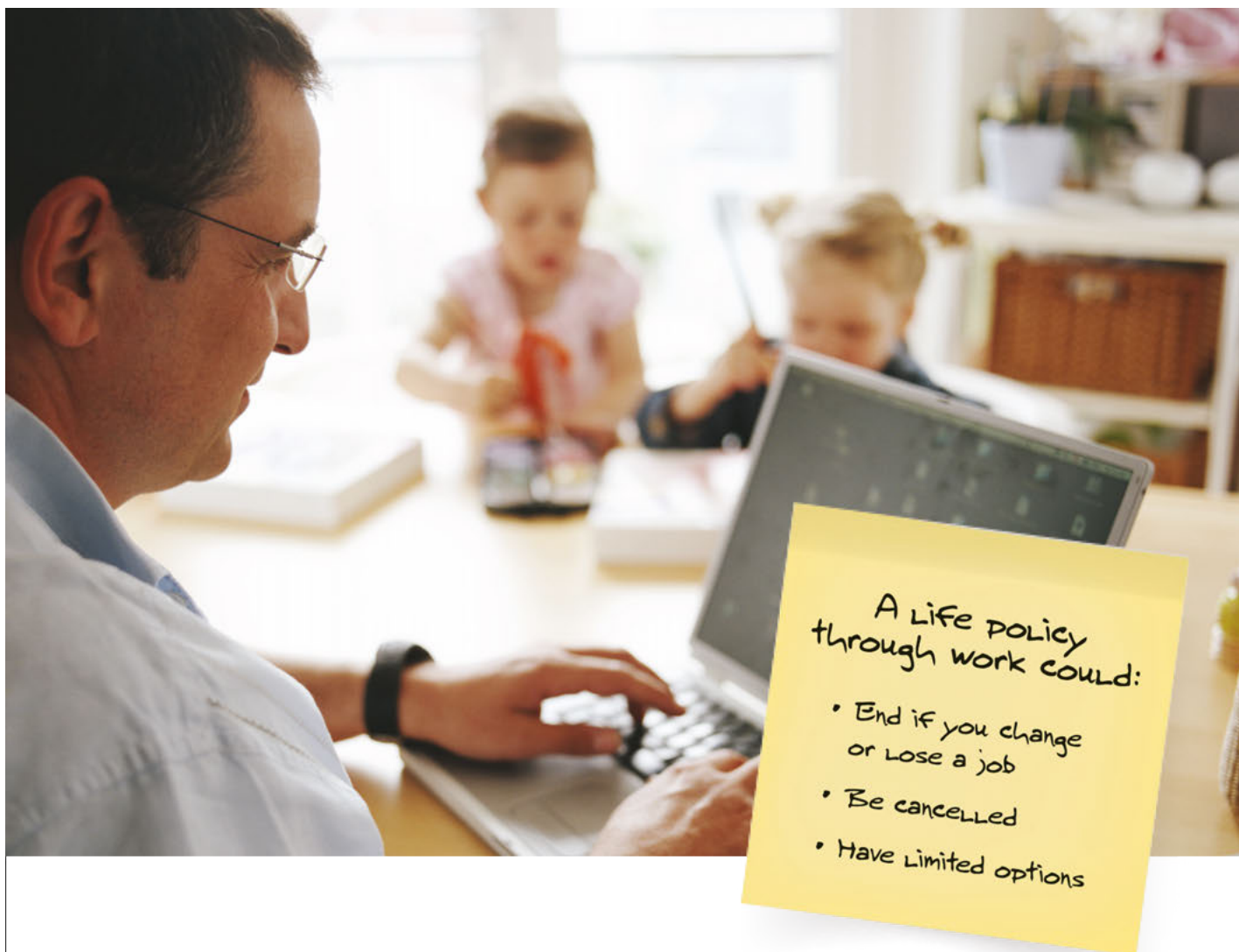
list of advocates. Details on how to get involved can be found on page 28 in our Lincoln to Local article.

Of course, it is imperative that Farm Bureau members connect directly with their legislators to make their voices heard. No matter if it is during a Farm Bureau event, or through a call to your senator's or representative's office, the direct contact with our state's elected officials is what sets OKFB apart.

In times like these, we are limited only by our creativity and our willingness to work. I know our state's agriculturalists do not lack either of these qualities. This session will be unlike anything we have ever seen, but as long as our grassroots members show up, stand up and speak up, our future is bright, no matter what may come. 

“In times like these, we are only limited by our creativity and our willingness to work.”

— Rodd Moesel



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OUR STORY

What our members can teach us

By Dustin Mielke

Vice President of Communications and Public Relations

People often ask me what is the best part of my job with Oklahoma Farm Bureau. The answer is simple and easy: our members.

We get to work with Oklahoma farmers and ranchers day in and day out. In fact, one of the highlights of my job is getting to crawl into a farm pickup, rearrange the feedbags in the passenger seat and roll the window down with a hand crank as we prepare to roll through a pasture.

Throughout the last year as our world drifted between unsure and unclear, we often looked to our members and our rural roots to find guidance. Our farmers and ranchers truly live out a shining example for those of us who found little to depend upon throughout the pandemic. After all, the sun was still shining, the wind was still blowing, and farmers and ranchers kept on producing food.

As an industry that rides the highs and lows based on conditions that cannot be controlled, our farm and ranch families know something about the power of steadfast, determined, deliberate effort. In agriculture, we start with a seed or a baby animal. Where we go from there often depends on how much effort, determination and faith we have.

Farmers and ranchers do not usually make a habit of sitting around and waiting for things to happen. With tenacity and a work ethic honed through generations, they reach for a shovel, reach for the keys and reach for opportunity.

Sure, there is a lot to discourage our farm and ranch families. Throughout the past few years, we have met Farm Bureau members who have faced catastrophic fires, devastating floods


and grueling drought. Each and every one of them, however, has played with the hand dealt to them, found the opportunities in their situation and carried on in the face of adversity. Farmers

and ranchers keep trying and striving because they know that while agriculture will never be a get-rich-quick scheme, it is a rich way of life.

And even more than forging forward for themselves, they step up and help their neighbors and communities in times of need. Our rural way of life is not best exemplified in the image of a farmer in a tractor plowing a quarter section of land. It is most vibrantly displayed whenever we see a need and reach out to help someone.

If you want to meet nine families who live this way

each and every day, simply start reading on the next page. These farm and ranch families – and many other across our state – demonstrate to us all the power of doing the next thing and coming alongside others to succeed together.

The lessons I personally learn from working with our members are lessons we can all use throughout this year: take what we are given, set our sights ahead of us and do the next thing. 

“Farmers and ranchers keep trying and striving because they know that while agriculture will never be a get-rich-quick scheme, it is a rich way of life.”

— Dustin Mielke



Carrying on

*tradition | dedication | family | hard work | stewardship | determination | faith
heritage | grit | agriculture | honesty | community | leadership | hope | drive*

Oklahoma's farm and ranch families pass along the traditions that have made agriculture, and in turn, our nation, great. Through adversity – whether it be drought, flood, fire or pandemic – Oklahoma family farmers and ranchers daily demonstrate the qualities that make agriculture a beacon of hope for the world.

Each year, the Oklahoma Farm Bureau Women's

Leadership Committee selects nine farm and ranch families – one from each OKFB district – to recognize as outstanding examples of family agriculture in our state.

Join us as we celebrate these nine families through photos and stories. They carry on in the face of challenges and blessings, and they will press on toward a brighter future for us all.

***Oklahoma Farm Bureau Farm & Ranch Family Recognition
2020***

District 1

Farm & Ranch Family Recognition
2020

One foot
in front
of the
other



excellence | tradition | dedication | family | farming | hard work | stewardship | determination | faith

Bernie & Dixie Smith Beaver County

photos and story by Brianne Schwabauer

Piled into three trucks on Bernie and Dixie Smith's ranch, located just a few miles south of Englewood, Kansas, the early fall air is filled with laughter from three generations of the Smith family as they drive up and down the gently rolling ravines.

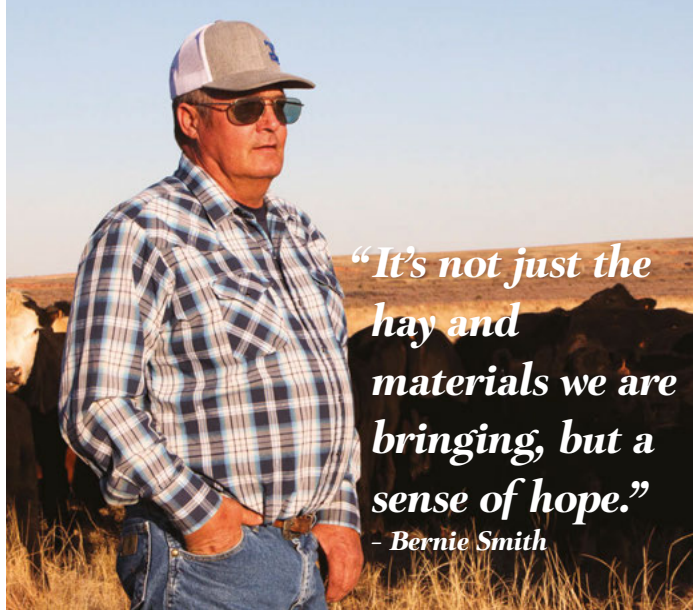
Like many in Beaver County, the Smiths faced devastating losses in the 2017 Starbuck fire through the loss of cattle, fence and feed. In the midst of their loss, Bernie, along with their two sons, were trying to save neighbors' homes as members of the Englewood, Kansas, volunteer fire department. Even with the loss surrounding the Smiths, they persevered.

For Bernie and Dixie, their continued strength and resilience is renewed through a combination of their faith, family and true grit and determination.

"I asked Bernie, 'What are we going to do,' Dixie said. "He just said 'We're going to get up and put one foot in front of the other.' And we did."

With no grass in sight to feed their cattle, the Smiths had to rely on the generosity of others in order to maintain what was left of their herd.

The kindness the Smith family was shown through the donations of feed, fencing and other vital materials from across Oklahoma and neighboring states provided them with a sense of hope and the additional



***“It’s not just the
hay and
materials we are
bringing, but a
sense of hope.”***
- Bernie Smith



n | ranching | heritage | grit | agriculture | honesty | community | leadership | hope | drive | passion

strength to face each day during one of the most challenging points in their lives.

In the midst of the Smiths’ recovery efforts working to treat injured cattle and mend charred fences, the nation’s agriculture community jumped into action to help. Mere months later, producers in other regions of the country faced their own challenges through similar natural disasters, including large wildfires in Montana.

In response, Bernie, along with other area producers, knew he needed to pay it forward for all of the assistance the area had received. Bernie and his neighbors established Ashes to Ashes, a small but mighty group of area farmers and ranchers, volunteer firemen and truckers with a heart for helping livestock producers following devastating natural disasters.

“It’s not just the hay and materials we are bringing, but a sense of hope,” Bernie said.

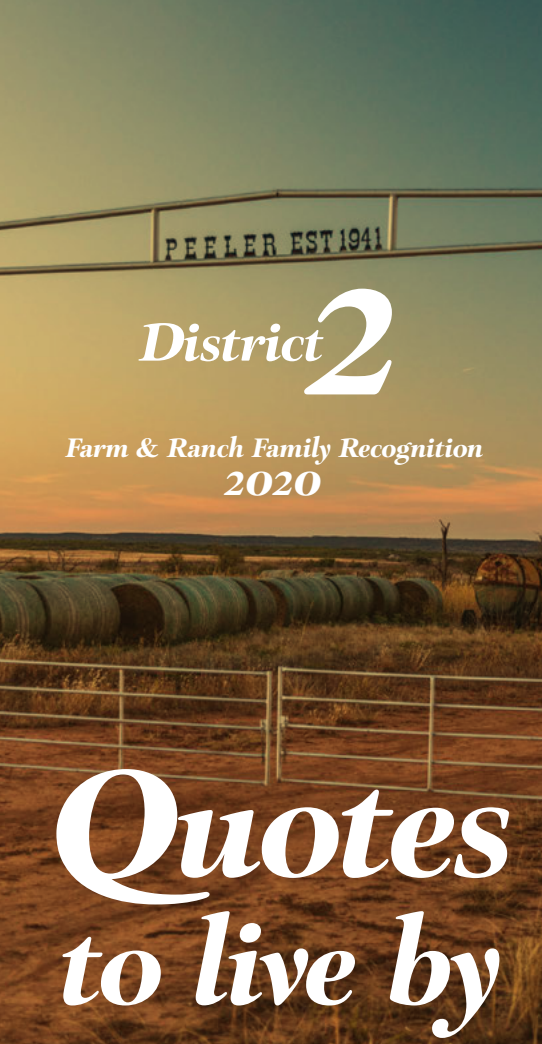
Since their establishment in the fall of 2017, Ashes to Ashes has traveled to Montana, Nebraska, New Mexico,

Kansas and Oklahoma with multiple loads of fencing and other necessities made possible through generous donations from as far away as Arizona, Ohio and New Jersey.

“When we make one of our Ashes to Ashes runs, we’ll put American flags and signs on the back of our trucks that say ‘Ashes to Ashes – paying it forward,’” Bernie said, smiling.

“A lot of people have lost everything they have, but the outpouring of appreciation we receive when we get there is indescribable. Everyone needs to go on one of those runs.”

Now almost four years after the Starbuck fire, when the wind blows just right on the Smiths’ ranch, Dixie describes the air as being filled with the faint smell of charred earth, taking her back to early March 2017. While the Smiths hope they are never faced with another loss like it, they know that by putting one foot in front of the other, they will continue on.



excellence | tradition | dedication | family | farming | hard work | stewardship | determination | faith

Robert & Kylie Peeler Greer County

photos and story by Dustin Mielke

Robert Peeler carried a small slip of paper in his billfold as he worked alongside his brother and dad on the family's farm near Mangum. The small quote he cut out from a magazine served as a simple piece of encouragement he could rely upon from time to time. While the slip of paper may be gone, its wisdom has stuck with Robert.

"I cut it out and I carried it with me for every time I'd get to thinking, 'Gosh this isn't worth it,'" Robert said. "And it simply said, 'Be what you are by nature, don't fight it, and you'll be successful.' And that has stuck with me."

Robert said farming in southwest Oklahoma is not for the faint of heart. He and his wife, Kylie, have witnessed both good times and bad on the farm. As the Peeler family tends to their cow/calf herd and grows wheat, cotton and hay for grazing, they live with the understanding that the fickle southwest Oklahoma climate can bring feast or famine.

Robert recalled a neighbor who tracked rainfall telling him that in 2015, their area received 51 inches of rain. In late 2020, the same area had received less than 11 inches of rain all year, meaning Robert was planting wheat into dry ground as he hoped for precipitation.

"It's in my DNA and my hereditary traits to not be afraid to fight the elements and always to be thankful for the good and just persevere through the bad," Robert said.

The Peeler family has farmed in the area for three generations, and Robert knows firsthand the importance of continuing on, no matter the

"I don't know what's going to happen tomorrow, I don't know what's going to happen in ten days, but I have to do my part or nothing's going to work."

- Robert Peeler



n | ranching | heritage | grit | agriculture | honesty | community | leadership | hope | drive | passion

circumstances – the subject of another quote he recalls from time to time: "Courage is taking the first step even when you can't see the rest of the staircase."

"That kind of drives me in that I don't know what's going to happen tomorrow, I don't know what's going to happen in ten days, but I have to do my part or nothing's going to work," Robert said.

Kylie has a quote of her own that appears on a sign in her office at the school where she works in Mangum: "Behind every successful rancher is a wife who works in town." Kylie serves as a school academic counselor for junior high and high school students. While she was not raised on a farm herself, she loves the community of Mangum where she and Robert grew up and where they now have the chance to raise their two young children, Eli, age 5, and Ava, age 1.

"I can remember in high school thinking that one day I want to come back and live and raise a family in Mangum," Kylie said. "That's just grown. Robert and I are members of the community, and we get to be involved in the community in the way the adults did when we were younger."

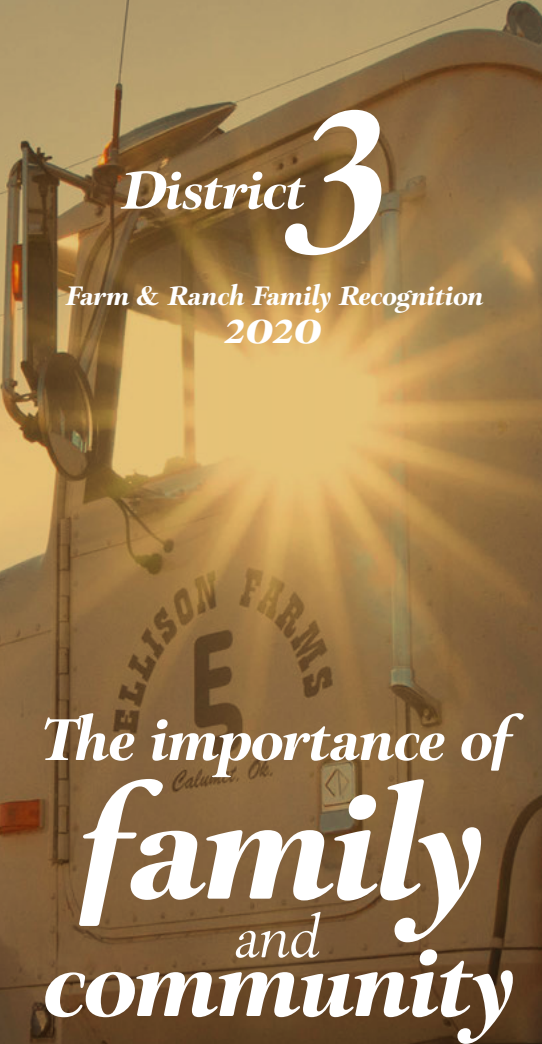
The chance to raise her children on the family's farm in a community they love is a dream come true for Kylie. She said the values learned living close to the land are important for Eli and Ava to understand.

"Rob has said many times that the cows wait for no one and the crops wait for no one, no matter what the weather is, no matter what the climate is, no matter what the temperature is," Kylie said. "For our kids to learn the skills of hard work and perseverance, that's something that farming can offer them. If they don't farm as adults, those are still lessons they can learn for no matter what their lives lead to."

Even as the Peeler family continued to plant wheat during a 45-day dry spell in late 2020 with no assurance of when rain would come, Robert has one more quote that keeps him hoping for the future.

"To quote my dad, my whole life he always said, 'The wheat's not going to come up if it's sitting in the grain bin,'" Robert said.

"When times get tough and I question whether or not I'm doing the right thing, I lean on those three things I've come across in my life, and it gives me the courage to go ahead and push on and know that what happens is what is supposed to happen."



excellence | tradition | dedication | family | farming | hard work | stewardship | determination | faith

Jonny & Mary Ellison Canadian County

photos and story by Brianne Schwabauer

Many agricultural producers know that family is crucial in the success of any farming operation. For Jonny and Mary Ellison of Calumet, nothing could be more true as they raised their family in rural Oklahoma.

While no one ever said farming is easy, the Ellisons would not have it any other way because of the values instilled in their two children – Luke and Regan – from a young age.

For many years at the beginning of their time farming together, Jonny and Mary would return home at the end of the day from their in-town jobs, each climb into the cab of a tractor with one of their children in tow and work late into the evening, providing their children with first-hand experience as to what it meant to work a full day.

“Thank God for the younger years, because I honestly don’t know how we did it all,” Mary said, smiling. “We made it work though, because this was our dream to be in this community and doing what we are now.”

The values that have been instilled in their children are evident as Luke works in the oilfield and Regan is a full-time college student pursuing a teaching career. Even with their own respective responsibilities, they both find the time to continue helping on the farm, often working late into the night before doing it all over again the next day.

“It’s a hard life, but it’s a good life,” Jonny said. “We are caretakers of the land and we do the best that we can to take care of it. I can’t imagine



n | ranching | heritage | grit | agriculture | honesty



doing anything else.”

Even with the long hours that farming requires, the Ellisons still ensure that they give back to the community that means so much to them, which they consider to be both their neighborly and Godly duty.

Jonny serves as a member of the Maple Rural Water Board and custom harvests for neighbors. The family also pitches in to lend a helping hand, working ground for neighbors when needed. The Ellisons would not have it any other way.

While it may have not been easy to get where they are today, it has been worthwhile for Jonny and Mary as they are now able to see the sixth generation of Ellisons raised on their land.

“When I’m working ground, I turn the radio off, listen to the tractor run and think about my family,” Jonny said. “I look next to me and there’s my daughter working ground right beside me and my son on the other side doing the same thing. It’s like something from a country song when you are listening to the radio.

“It’s in my blood. It’s what I’ve done all my life and I wouldn’t change it for anything.”

District 4

Farm & Ranch Family Recognition
2020

Cultivating faith



excellence | tradition | dedication | family | farming | hard work | stewardship | determination | faith

Kenneth & Jane Lake Carter County

photos and story by Hannah Davis

For Kenneth Lake, farming is much more than growing crops and raising cattle. It also serves as an opportunity to further cultivate his faith.

Watching seeds planted in the ground sprout and mature into crops and witnessing baby calves with wobbly legs learn to walk all seem to point to something greater.

“(Farming) is pretty close to working with God on a lot of different things,” he said.

A farmer and rancher near Ardmore, Kenneth and his wife, Jane, own a cow/calf and hay operation on pieces of land found throughout Carter County.

Kenneth grew up on a diversified farm in northwest Oklahoma, where his family has a long history of growing and custom-cutting wheat. Though he worked full-time as a mechanic for Michelin in Ardmore for more than three decades, he always maintained a connection with agriculture.

Throughout his career in mechanics, his farm served as his second job where he worked to grow his own herd. Now retired, Kenneth spends most of his time caring for his land and animals.

“I’ve just always done it and I guess it was what I was destined to do,”



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Kenneth said of farming and ranching.

His skills, knowledge and training in mechanics come in handy on his operation as he cares for his equipment. With the ability to personally repair and maintain his machinery, he brings financial freedom to his operation by avoiding the expense of brand-new equipment.

"So far my cows can't tell that I use old tractors to bale hay, so that's a financial reward for me," he said, laughing. "They're content with hay from old tractors."

Like all farmers and ranchers, Kenneth is accustomed to relying on the weather – and God – for any success.

This fall, he found himself waiting on rain to help his newly-planted wheat get out of the ground. Because his wheat is grown primarily for pasture, he relies on a successful crop to feed his cattle throughout the winter.

"It becomes a religious experience sometimes," he

said. "You can do your best and the weather can make it look really silly, or you can do something real stupid and the weather can rescue you. You never know. It's very uncertain."

Though all the uncertainty could become overwhelming, it actually leads the Lake family to trust in a higher power.

"I don't know of anything else, as far as a job, that you have any less control over," Kenneth said. "So, somebody that thinks they're going to (farm) without faith, they're just not seeing the whole picture."

And for Kenneth, working hand-in-hand with his creator provides a reward like no other.

"It's rewarding when you see something like putting the seeds in the ground and actually watching God make them grow. You know you can only do so much, but then it's just all in God's hands. And that's kind of neat to watch."

District 5

Farm & Ranch Family Recognition
2020

Lessons from the Bar-O Ranch



excellence | tradition | dedication | family | farming | hard work | stewardship | determination | faith

Mark & Sherri O'Hern Atoka County

photos and story by Dustin Mielke

As you cross the cattle guard and turn into the driveway leading up to Mark and Sherri O'Hern's picturesque ranch in Atoka County, the sign on the ranch gate that greets you reads "Bar-O Ranch."

The name of their place hints at the story of how the O'Hern family built their ranch, beginning with 32 acres Mark's dad let him use and six cows purchased from a rancher who was going out of business.

"The Bar-O ranch, that's just what it is – we borrowed, borrowed, borrowed," Sherri said of the ranch name as she laughed. "Now here we are, retired and enjoying every minute of it."

When the O'Herns refer to "retiring," it is not the typical retirement. Their retirement finds them caring for more than 350 head of cattle on their cow/calf ranch and harvesting pecans from the more than 1,200 trees that dot the rolling hills near the town of Caddo.

The only thing the O'Herns retired from are the jobs they held for decades, which allowed them to slowly build their ranch as they acquired parcels of land from neighbors who were themselves retiring.

Mark ran a wholesale milk distribution company, and Sherri worked as a hairdresser. They each spent about 35 years working off the farm, and now they have turned their attention solely to their cow herd, pecans, pastures and a small flock of chickens.

The desire to ranch full-time is a longtime dream for Mark. While Mark spent his early years in the Fort Worth area, his family eventually moved



“I think everyone that is involved in agriculture really needs to contribute to more than just the production part of it. You need to try to be a face for it and get it out in front of people.”

- Mark O'Hern



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back to southeast Oklahoma where Mark found a love for the land and nature.

“Whenever we were seniors in high school and we were graduating, our English lit teacher went around and interviewed each one of us and recorded it and wanted to know what we wanted to be,” Mark said. “And when I told her that I wanted to be a self-sufficient rancher, she just kind of looked at me like ...” Mark said, laughing as he recalled the memory.

“If I had only known at the time that they didn’t exist.”

The hard work and sacrifice to start the Bar-O ranch did not deter the family as they pieced together their place, which now covers 2,000 acres in Atoka and Bryan counties.

Mark and Sherri raised two sons, Chad and Dustin, as they grew their ranch, and today Chad pitches in to feed cattle and take care of the place.

Having built their ranch piece by piece, the O’Herns know the importance of helping younger Oklahomans get a solid start in agriculture, especially in an area of the state where real estate often sells for recreational purposes to people from the Dallas metroplex.

Mark said people who are established in agriculture

need to “go the extra mile” to lend their time, assets and resources to help young agriculturalists.

“If we don’t bring them along, there’s a lot of things that are going to grab their attention other than agriculture,” Mark said.

Mark and Sherri also give their time to Atoka County Farm Bureau where Mark has been on the county board for 15 years and has served as president for the last eight years. Mark sits on the local Farm Service Agency board, and the couple also serve as leaders in their local church.

“I think everyone that is involved in agriculture really needs to contribute to more than just the production part of it,” Mark said. “You need to try to be a face for it and get it out in front of people.”

While Mark and Sherri’s active retirement doesn’t involve a beach vacation or a cabin in the mountains, the sight of cattle on green hills is more their speed, anyway.

“People ask me all the time, they’ll say, ‘Man, why are you working all the time?’ And I say, ‘It’s not work if you’re having fun,’” Mark said.

Sherri added, “It’s just a passion.”

District 6

Farm & Ranch Family Recognition
2020

Road warriors

excellence | tradition | dedication | family | farming | hard work | stewardship | determination | faith

Kent & Diana Barnes Cherokee County

photos and story by Dustin Mielke

It is about 136 miles of Oklahoma highways between the towns of Hulbert and Perkins. It is a trail the Barnes family knows quite well after years of making the commute from their home in Cherokee County to the family's Lincoln County ranch that has been in the family for generations.

Kent and Diana Barnes, along with their children, K.C. and Hallie, live in Cherokee County where they have horses and some cattle that need a little extra attention. Their main herd, however, calls Lincoln County home. The Barnes carry on a 75-year-old family tradition of raising Hereford cattle as the core of their cow/calf herd. The family also takes on stocker cattle to maximize responsible use of the ranch's grass and wheat pasture.

Kent and Diana both had careers with Oklahoma State University Cooperative Extension, which brought them to Cherokee County. However, Kent's family has deep roots in Lincoln County where the Barnes continue to improve the land as the third and fourth generations of agriculturalists. Throughout the years, the family has logged countless hours together traveling between their two ranches each and every week as they split time between the two locations.

"We raised our family mainly between Hulbert and (Perkins)," Kent said. "We pushed the kids while we were on the road between Hulbert and here, they were always studying speeches or studying their meats judging or something. We talked and visited about things, and I think the kids were interested and they listened and they learned a lot about us and the things that are of interest to us."



n | ranching | heritage | grit | agriculture | honesty | community | leadership | hope | drive | passion

The time spent together sharing a love for agriculture has made the Barnes' ranching endeavors a real family affair.

"We all work hard, and everybody knows how to do everything," Diana said. "We have our special things that we do when we're working cattle, but everybody can pretty much do everything."

The family focuses on quality with the Hereford cattle that make up their main herd as they keep the overall number of animals low. K.C. and Hallie pick out the genetics the family uses in their breeding program, and the family uses artificial insemination to achieve the traits they desire. In fact, many of the animals on the ranch today are offspring of animals K.C. and Hallie showed as 4-H and FFA members.

Conservation efforts are a focus for the Barnes family, and Kent said he works to keep stocking rates low, ensuring ample grass is available for the family's cattle. Combined with a weed management program and efforts to maintain pipeline crossings across the property, the family constantly improves their land through conservation.

"We spend a lot of time trying to improve the property here," Kent said. "My granddad actually

accumulated the property. My dad and his generation improved it a whole lot, and we're trying to continue on with that and manage it."

The family's love for agriculture has been passed on to K.C. and Hallie, each of whom are pursuing master's degrees in agricultural economics and agribusiness, respectively – K.C. at the University of Arkansas and Hallie at Oklahoma State University. They each continue to be involved heavily in the day-to-day management and hands-on work at the family's two ranch locations.

K.C. and Hallie's interest in farming and ranching, their successful careers as 4-H and FFA members, and their desire to advocate for agriculture brings a smile to Diana's face.

"I wanted them to have a chance to live out in the country and to enjoy all that – and to be ranchers," Diana said. "Learning the work ethic and being a part of 4-H and FFA is what they got to do."

Though the miles spent traveling between their two ranches over the years are uncountable, so are the blessings for the Barnes family as they continue their agricultural legacy.

"We just love it," Diana said. "We just like being out here and working with the animals."

District 7

Farm & Ranch Family Recognition
2020

The big picture



excellence | tradition | dedication | family | farming | hard work | stewardship | determination | faith

Chad & Danielle Budy Woods County

photos and story by Dustin Mielke

In northwest Oklahoma's Woods County, the gravel roads are long and straight as they stretch between fields, pastures, farmsteads and small towns. It is out here where the view goes on for miles that the Budy family farms and ranches while keeping the big picture in mind.

Chad and Danielle Budy and their four children work together as they care for their cattle and grow wheat, milo, alfalfa, canola and sesame. They even plant cow peas on the sand hills that dot the area to prevent wind erosion during the summer months.

Chad and Danielle are proud to have raised their four children – Colton, Tabor, Sagelyn and Davin – the same way they grew up: on the family farm.

“It’s exciting to see our kids come back and help us and want to do what we were raised up doing,” Chad said. “It’s been a good living for Danielle and I, and we just hope they can do the same if they have that interest and love the industry that they have the opportunity.”

Chad and Danielle’s oldest son, Colton, is now farming with Danielle’s dad near Byron in Alfalfa County, with the goal of some day taking over for his grandpa. Tabor studies ag business at Northwestern Oklahoma State University in nearby Alva, and is building his own cattle herd. Sagelyn and Davin, both high school students, help with the farm work in numerous ways. Danielle also works off the farm teaching math at NWOSU.

Chad recalls that farming was the one thing he wanted to do as he was growing up around agriculture. The allure of being his own boss also came with deep responsibilities, which he and Danielle work to pass on to their children.

“If I don’t get it done, it’s my fault so I have to keep going,” Chad said of



“If you actually look at the big picture, it’s such an awesome thing that farmers do.”

- Danielle Budy



n | ranching | heritage | grit | agriculture | honesty | community | leadership | hope | drive | passion

farming. “That’s what I’ve tried to teach my kids living where we do. If you work hard, you can thrive. Yeah, we have a lot of obstacles thrown at us that are out of our control with prices and mother nature, but it’s just a way of life that I enjoy.”

When the COVID-19 pandemic shut down schools in early 2020, the family took the opportunity to harness the extra time together to replace fences and build new corrals to improve their cattle handling options well into the future.

While the pandemic disrupted life greatly in both rural and urban areas across our nation, Danielle said it served as another example of the perseverance of farmers and ranchers.

“It just proved how important farmers and ranchers are because their job never quits, no matter what,” Danielle said. “Rain, sleet, snow, hail, their job keeps going. High prices, low prices, no matter what they fling at us, we have to keep going and trudging through this.”

In addition to the full-time farming operation, the Budy family is heavily involved in their local community. From their county Farm Bureau to their church and from time spent on the volunteer fire department to their kids’ numerous activities, investing time to help their neighbors and their local area is a

priority for the Budys.

“Our kids are what makes us work hard to keep this community thriving and keep it a place they might want to live,” Danielle said. “If we don’t have our future to look forward to, then what do we have to look forward to?”

As they think about the time spent as a family on the farm, both Chad and Danielle look back to one critical time of year for all farmers that they feel is what being a farm family is all about: wheat harvest.

“I remember my dad saying this last harvest that it was a joy for him to be out there with all my kids, me and him – the generations that are there running the combines – and we were all family,” Chad said. “That meant a lot to him, and I’m looking at it now thinking, ‘Man, that really means something to me, too.’ Even if my kids choose to go off and do other adventures, I think they’ll still come back to the farm and want to help a little bit on days like that.”

“Harvest is a good example of it’s just one big family that works together to accomplish something that is so awesome: being able to harvest the wheat, being able to then take it to the elevator and to be able to feed America,” Danielle said. “If you actually look at the big picture, it’s such an awesome thing that farmers do.”

District 8

Farm & Ranch Family Recognition
2020

A new adventure



excellence | tradition | dedication | family | farming | hard work | stewardship | determination | faith

L.C. & Jaclyn Darling Coal County

photos and story by Brianne Schwabauer

Tucked amongst the dense clusters of trees and rolling hills in southeast Oklahoma's Coal County, Jaclyn and L.C. Darling stand atop a hill surveying their land and thinking of all that is to come for their new adventure together, both in life and on the ranch.

For the Darlings – third-generation cattle producers – ensuring both the land and their livestock are viable for generations to come is at the forefront of this young couples' mind, continually influencing each of their day-to-day decisions.

The couple recently started their own herd of cow/calf pairs, in addition to being actively involved in her family's third-generation, 2,500-acre cattle and hay operation spanning across portions of Coal and Atoka Counties.

To ensure they have a strong understanding of all facets of the ever-changing cattle industry, Jaclyn and L.C. currently are participating in the Oklahoma State University Master Cattleman course through the Coal County Extension office.

"We've always done things a certain way at our ranch, but never understood the why behind it all," Jaclyn said. "Through the class, we have been learning more about the science within the cattle industry and been able to interact with other area producers."

Though L.C. was raised in rural Oklahoma, he was not actively involved in the cattle industry. Starting with the basics, he decided to dive head-first into learning as much as he can about the industry, even with his full-time job as a seeding and fertilizing operator.

"Bull selection seemed to be you just went and looked at all the bulls and chose the one that looks better on the outside," L.C. said. "With the numbers and the EPDs, I've tried to learn as much as I can to improve the genetics



n | ranching | heritage | grit | agriculture | honesty

side of our cattle operation.”

Through all of their hard work, it is their hope to one day see the fourth and fifth generations raised on the same land they have worked so hard to preserve through routine maintenance of their pastures.

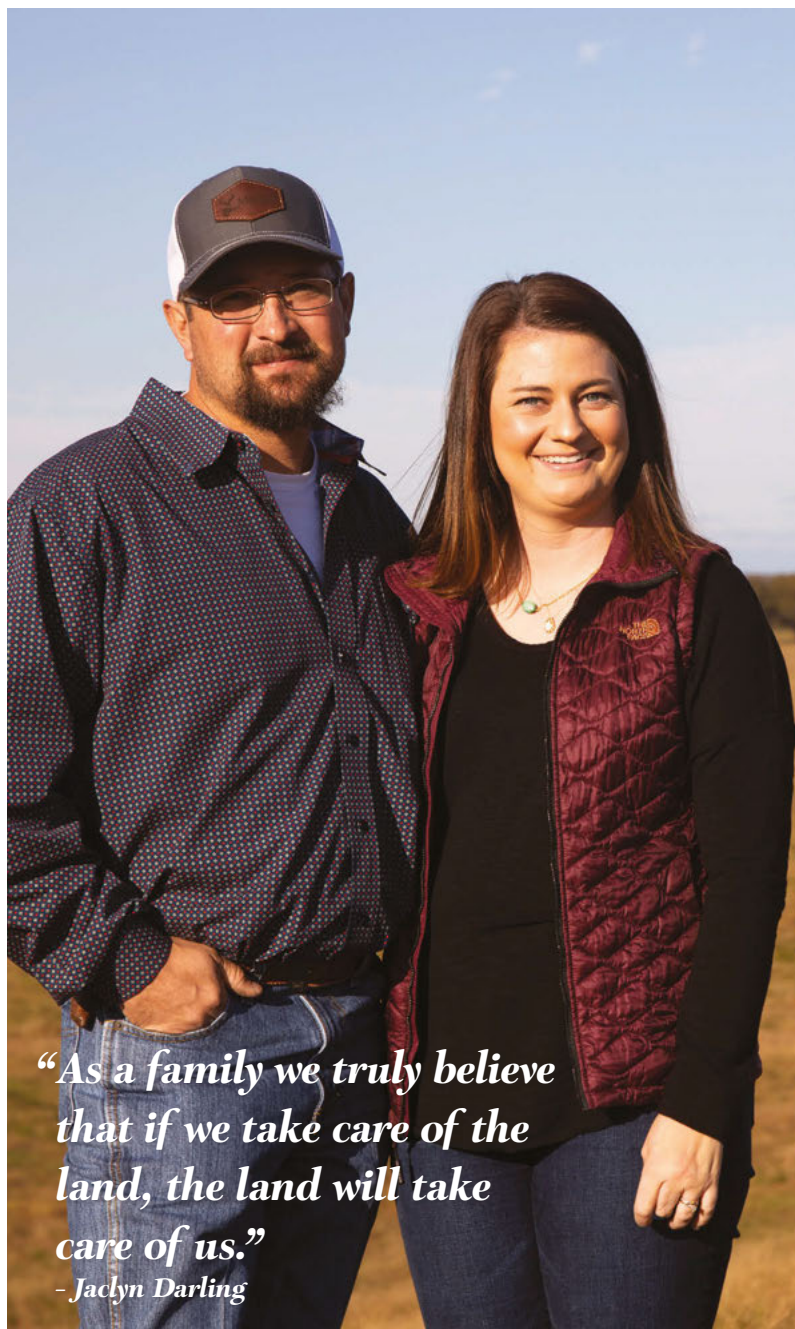
“As a family we truly believe that if we take care of the land, the land will take care of us,” Jaclyn said. “We firmly believe in weed spraying and brush hogging when we can to not only be beneficial to the land, but to our cattle as well.”

While maintaining their pastures are vital, ensuring the welfare of their cattle is key to the success of their operation. In order to limit the amount of stress on their cattle, the Darlings continue to work their cattle on horseback.

“We’ve always worked on horseback, and when I was little, I never understood why,” Jaclyn said. “As I got older, I realized that the cattle remain calmer and their stress levels stay low, making it easier to work with them.”

To the Darlings, Coal County is where they call home, and forever will be.

“It’s so cool to be able to work alongside my family,” Jaclyn said. “You don’t always see that in agriculture as some of the kids have moved away, but we’ve all moved back here and adapted to the ranching way of life.”



“As a family we truly believe that if we take care of the land, the land will take care of us.”

- Jaclyn Darling



District 9

Farm & Ranch Family Recognition
2020

Building on the family heritage



excellence | tradition | dedication | family | farming | hard work | stewardship | determination | faith

James & Sharon Pittman Okmulgee County

photos and story by Hannah Davis

James and Sharon Pittman of Okmulgee always knew they wanted to be involved in agriculture. Each growing up on family farms and ranches in eastern Oklahoma, the couple longed to continue in their family tradition of agriculture.

"I guess I've been in agriculture all my life," James said. "It's a good life. I always felt like it was a good way to raise children as well as raise livestock. I wanted that experience for my children."

Though it took years of hard work and determination, together the couple has created for themselves – and the generations that follow them – an opportunity to continue in the way of life they love.

The Pittmans now run a black Angus cattle ranch in Okmulgee County that began with both of their families' operations.

Early on in their marriage, as James began a career in the oil and gas industry and Sharon worked as an elementary school teacher, the couple also continued to help on their family ranches while slowly growing their own cattle herd.

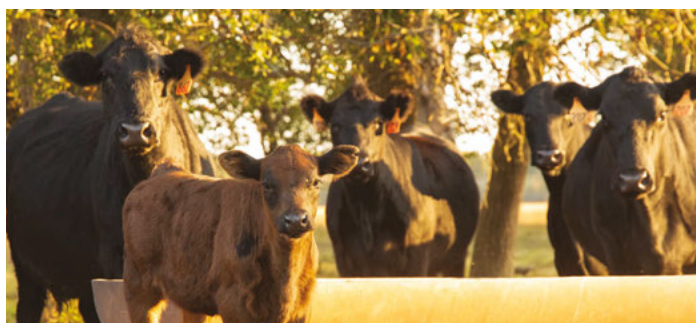
Just a few years later, the Pittmans purchased their own 80-acre tract of land and relocated their herd from their parents' ranches.

Deeply longing to pass down their love for agriculture to the next generation, the Pittmans taught the value of hard work and responsibility to their four children, Jeremy, April, Jamie and Emily, by raising them on the family ranch.



“There’s a certain satisfaction that comes from being able to produce food and fiber for not only my family, but many other families, and having the independence and the freedom to do that.”

— James Pittman



n | ranching | heritage | grit | agriculture | honesty | community | leadership | hope | drive | passion

“(Agriculture) is just what I always wanted to do,” James said. “Sharon and I both grew up on the farm, and it was just a way of life that we wanted. And it’s a way of life we wanted to share with our kids, also.”

After spending more than 20 years working in the oil and gas industry, the Pittmans had built their operation to a point that demanded James’s full-time attention. Today, the family ranch consists of more than 1,600 acres and 250 head of cattle.

The couple now has the chance to share the family’s legacy with two of their grandchildren, Matthew and Thomas, who both work on the ranch full time during the summer and as needed throughout the school year.

Though his grandchildren have yet to express a desire to return to the ranch full time, James said seeing his grandsons on the farm is a fulfilling experience.

“It’s rewarding that we can share this experience with our grandchildren to the level that we can,” he said. “There’s a lot of pride in knowing that they will have the experience that very few people in this country get to have.”

James’ passion for continuing the family’s tradition


in agriculture also means he is deeply committed to ensuring a bright future for the industry through involvement in multiple agricultural organizations.

“Being in production agriculture, regulations are one of the most difficult hurdles we deal with,” James said. “If we’re not using the voices available to us in production agriculture, we could be legislated out of business very quickly.”

A Farm Bureau member for decades, James plays his role in helping voice the concerns of farmers and ranchers as a nearly 20-year member of the Okmulgee County Farm Bureau board.

“I felt like Farm Bureau is the best organization in the state that’s trying to help us preserve our rural way of life,” he said. “I just wanted to do my part.”

Ultimately, the Pittmans take pride in knowing their agricultural heritage means providing for other families just like theirs.

“There’s a certain satisfaction that comes from being able to produce food and fiber for not only my family, but many other families, and having the independence and the freedom to do that,” James said. 



Overcoming obstacles

No matter what the 2021 Oklahoma legislative session looks like, Farm Bureau members can rise to the challenge to speak for farmers and ranchers.

Ingenuity and resourcefulness seem to come second nature to farmers and ranchers. When faced with a challenge, agriculture producers know how to adapt and adjust to solve the problem and get the job done.

As Oklahomans continue to face the ongoing impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, Oklahoma Farm Bureau members may encounter some obstacles when engaging in the legislative process this year. But farmers and ranchers are notorious for their ability to adjust and adapt to the hurdles that come their way.

Over the span of nearly 80 years, Farm Bureau has developed and nurtured relationships with the state Legislature thanks to the dedicated involvement of members across the state. Members not only travel to Oklahoma City to visit their lawmakers in person at the state Capitol, but also host county legislative events to engage legislators in their districts. These activities are critical in the organization's efforts to work alongside state leaders to develop policy that protects and preserves the rural way of life.

Though working with state lawmakers this year is likely to look different than normal, Farm Bureau members can remain active and involved in the policymaking process by using some of agriculture's trademark innovation and creativity. Below are some ideas for safely and effectively advocating for agriculture in the upcoming legislative session.

Stay updated on Farm Bureau's efforts

To help arm members with as much information as possible, OKFB will offer a unique opportunity to hear about the organization's latest efforts at the state Capitol directly from the public policy team each week. Beginning the first week of the legislative session, public policy staff will host a weekly Farm Bureau member-only Zoom call that will allow members to learn about the legislative process, ask questions and voice concerns. Please contact an OKFB field representative for details on how to join the weekly Zoom call.

A variety of legislative updates will continue as normal with weekly Lincoln to Local videos shared on OKFB's social media platforms. The biweekly *Perspective* newsletter sent to county leaders will provide an overview of the organization's work at the state Capitol every other week. And of course, most all Farm Bureau legislative content will be available for members to view on the OKFB website at okfarmbureau.org.

Visit with legislators from the safety of home

Though in-person visits may not be an option, county Farm Bureau members are encouraged to consider working with OKFB's public policy team and field representatives to schedule video calls with state senators and representatives.


Virtual events can create an easy opportunity for county Farm Bureau leaders to engage with lawmakers just like every other year, but from the comfort and convenience of their own communities. The option could even open the door to involving more county members in Farm Bureau's work for agriculture and rural Oklahoma. For assistance in coordinating a video call with state legislators, please contact your county's field representative.

Sign up for action alerts

Because most Farm Bureaus members are busy on their farms and ranches each day, they do not have time to visit with legislators about every agriculture or rural issue the Legislature considers. Members instead rely on Farm Bureau leaders and staff to carry out their message for them. But sometimes, state representatives and senators need to hear directly from farmers and ranchers.

Through OKFB's legislative action alerts, members have the ability to quickly and easily advocate for agriculture and rural Oklahoma right from their farm or ranch. By signing up for action alerts, members are opting to receive updates from Farm Bureau for policy initiatives. OKFB will send alerts only when the voices of members are needed most.

To sign up for legislative action alerts, visit okfb.news/takeaction or send "OKFB77" in a text message to the number 52886. Farm Bureau members who have signed up will receive a text message when state legislators need to hear from them. For more details on the action alert system, contact the OKFB communications and public relations staff.

Farmers and ranchers are never ones to back down from a challenge. No matter what 2021 holds, Farm Bureau members will remain dedicated to working toward a better tomorrow for agriculture and rural Oklahoma. Please join Farm Bureau this year as the organization continues its work for Oklahoma farmers, ranchers and the rural way of life. 

Roadside Rescue now available to OKFB members

OKFB's newest service is here to help members when facing car troubles and have no one to call.

Has your car ever broken down when you have no one to call? Have you ever run out of fuel on the way to a meeting? Oklahoma Farm Bureau members can now have peace of mind while on the road with Roadside Rescue.

OKFB Insurance is proud to provide this new service to all OKFB members to help them feel safe and secure while traveling through the U.S. and Canada. Even if you do not have an OKFB Insurance auto policy, you can use this free service.

No matter if you have a flat tire, end up with a dead car battery, lock yourself out of your vehicle or if you simply need a bit of fuel to get to the next gas station, Roadside Rescue can help you out when you find yourself stranded or in need of a little help with your ride. If your car troubles are a bit bigger and you need your vehicle towed for a more in-depth service, the program can help with that, too.

OKFB members can call the Roadside Rescue 24-hour toll-free service line at (833) 957-OKFB (6532), provide their OKFB membership number, and help will be on the way. Welcome packets were mailed to all members, which included a Roadside Rescue membership card and window cling to write your membership number on. Your membership number is on the card that is included in your membership renewal packet. Just remember, your membership number is not your OKFB Insurance policy number. Still cannot locate your Farm Bureau member number? No worries, you can call your county Farm Bureau office, and your county staff can provide it to you.

Roadside Rescue is more than just a towing service. Members can benefit from a vast array of services with Roadside Rescue.

Did you run over a nail? The flat tire service will cover removal of the flat tire and application of the spare tire, but if a spare tire is not available, the vehicle can be towed.

When using the towing service, disabled vehicles can be towed up to 15 miles to the nearest qualified facility or destination of your choice.


Leaving a light on in your car overnight can mean a dead battery in the morning, but no worries – Roadside Rescue can give you the jump start you need.

If you lock your keys in the car, call the Roadside Rescue toll-free number to get some help getting back into your vehicle. Just be sure to have your ID, membership number and be ready to

provide proof of ownership, but new keys will not be provided.

If your low fuel light comes on while you are a bit too far away from a gas station, Roadside Rescue can bring up to three gallons of gas, oil, fluid and water to your vehicle, but you must pay for the fuel upon delivery.

Active members have access to this service through their membership at no extra cost. OKFB Insurance will cover up to \$75 for each service call with Roadside Rescue. Members can use the program up to three times per membership year. If you have an auto insurance policy with OKFB Insurance, you can add extra roadside assistance coverage for an additional price.

For more information about Roadside Rescue, visit OKFBInsurance.com/RoadsideRescue or contact your insurance agent. 

**Terms and conditions apply. See website for details. OKFB Insurance does offer additional Roadside Assistance on our auto insurance policies for an additional price. If you are interested in additional coverage or have questions about your current paid Roadside Assistance policy, please reach out to your local agent.*





The U.S. Department of Agriculture is there to help all Americans in more ways than you may think.

When you hear about the U.S. Department of Agriculture, what do you think of? Some may associate it with the farm bill or the Farm Service Agency, while others may only know of their work through the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program. Either way, the USDA is comprised of so much more than the average American may realize.

The USDA can best be described as a large umbrella with 29 different agencies under it. In total, roughly 100,000 people in 4,500 offices across the United States are working daily to serve Americans in a variety of ways such as through the Rural Utilities Service, Agricultural Marketing Service, Food and Nutrition Services and the National Institute of Food and Agriculture.

With the establishment of the U.S. Department

of Agriculture by President Abraham Lincoln on May 15, 1862, he would address Congress just two and a half years later, referring to the USDA as “the people’s department.”

While the USDA has impacted generations of Americans since its inception, it will continue to do so through its endless work for food, agriculture, economic development, science, natural resource conservation and a variety of other issues.

One of the many ways USDA assists Americans is through several supplemental food programs established to ensure citizens of all ages know the importance of proper nutrition and can lend a hand when needed.

Learn more about some of those programs on the next page.

Source: U.S. Department of Agriculture

KNOW?

MyPlate Program

No matter your age, ensuring you are consuming balanced meals each and every day is a key step to maintaining a healthy lifestyle both now and long into the future.

Through the MyPlate program, participants of all ages learn how to ensure they are consuming the right amount of fruits, vegetables, proteins and grains for their age while limiting the amount of saturated fats, sodium and added sugars. With a new app, you can now easily begin to track your healthy eating habits in the palm of your hand.

MyPlate even includes tips on how to eat healthy while following a budget, recipe and menu ideas, and MyPlate, MyState, which provides consumers with an idea as to what is grown in their own state and how they can purchase from local producers.

To learn more, visit **ChooseMyPlate.gov**.

Farm To School

From buying locally grown produce to creating school gardens, the Farm to School grant program was established with the goal of increasing access to locally grown produce within schools.

With the implementation of Farm to School in Oklahoma, there are now more than 45 school gardens across the state.

Today in Oklahoma, 63 school districts with 442 schools participate in Farm to School, providing more than 233,000 students access to local, fresh produce. In addition, more than \$4.3 million has been invested into Oklahoma through the program.

If you know of a local school, Indian tribal organization, agricultural producer, nonprofit entity or state/local agency that could benefit from a grant to implement Farm to School in your local community, visit **fns.usda.gov/cfs**.

Fresh Fruit & Vegetable Program

In an effort to combat childhood obesity, the Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Program strives to introduce new and delicious fresh fruits and vegetables to school children each and every day.

Through the introduction of fresh produce in an easily identifiable and delicious way, the goal is to encourage children of all ages to reach for fruits and vegetables when in need of a snack, along

with sharing the importance of consuming unprocessed produce.

For more information on how your local school can participate, visit **fns.usda.gov**.


Commodity Supplemental Food Program

Food insecurity does not only affect children, so are there programs for individuals that are aged 60 or more?

Yes! Through the Commodity

Supplemental Food Program, low-income seniors that are 60 years old and over qualify to receive food packages to supplement their diet, helping to ensure they receive

the proper nutritional requirements for a healthy lifestyle.

If you or someone you know could benefit from CSFP, visit **fns.usda.gov/contacts**. 



OKFB hosts successful online business meeting

Oklahoma Farm Bureau members elected new leaders, conducted organizational business and heard from speakers during the organization's 2020 online business meeting held Thursday, Nov. 5.

Held in place of the organization's typical in-person convention, the meeting was streamed online and at nine in-district gatherings held across the state.

New state directors were elected by Farm Bureau members in districts one, four and seven during in-person caucus meetings held at 5:30 p.m. Leon Richards of Texas County, Kerry Givens of Comanche County and Stacy Simunek of Kay County were chosen by members to represent districts one, four and seven, respectively, on the OKFB board of directors.

Farm Bureau members across the state tuned in to the streamed session at 6:30 p.m., which featured remarks from Gov. Kevin Stitt, American Farm Bureau President Zippy Duvall and OKFB President Rodd Moesel, in addition to various organizational reports.

In his welcoming address, Stitt

thanked Farm Bureau members for their dedication to feeding the world despite the myriad of challenges they have faced over the past several years.

"I know a virtual meeting is probably not what any of us had in mind, but if anyone is equipped to make the most of the circumstances this year, I know it is our Oklahoma farmers and ranchers," Stitt said. "Agriculture producers – especially here in our home state – are known for their resiliency and ability to take the cards they are dealt and still make something grow."

American Farm Bureau Federation President Zippy Duvall provided members with an overview of the national organization's efforts for farmers and ranchers over the past year, including work on tax reform, regulatory reform, trade issues and more. He also encouraged them in light of a difficult 2020 for the agriculture community.

"Our nation seems to be very divided, but I believe that we still are united in the vision and hope of America: life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness," Duvall said. "I believe the unity that we have in Farm Bureau – knowing that we are

stronger together – sets a great example for America. Farm Bureau members represent the best of our nation."

In his address to members, OKFB President Rodd Moesel offered an update on various organizational programs.

"I want to thank you for your continued support and dedication to our organization," Moesel said. "Your ideas and your input is what makes Farm Bureau work. Together, let's press on for agriculture and continue to rise to the occasion to make Oklahoma's future brighter."

Members also heard various reports from across the organization including the OKFB Foundation for Agriculture, Women's Leadership Committee, Young Farmers & Ranchers and OKFB Insurance.

Other leaders elected

Mignon Bolay of Noble County was re-elected chair of the OKFB Women's Leadership Committee during the group's online business meeting held Thursday, Nov. 5 at 12 p.m. During the in-person caucus meetings, Farm Bureau women also elected Robin Bryant of Dewey County to represent district one on the

Payne County earns top OKFB awards for 2020

Payne County Farm Bureau was honored with Oklahoma Farm Bureau's top county awards during a special awards presentation on Friday, Nov. 13.

The county was presented with the John I. Taylor Award, which serves as OKFB's highest county honor. Named for the organization's first president, the award recognizes excellence in program areas of public policy, local affairs service to members, membership, Women's Leadership Committee and Young Farmers and Ranchers Committee.

Payne County also was honored with the OKFB Lewis H. Munn Award, also known as the Farm Bureau Builders Award. The honor is given to the county that conducts the strongest program in a chosen area. This year, the county program area was membership involvement.

"Our board and members have worked hard in the past few years to put together more and more programs," said Nancy German, Payne County Farm Bureau president. "It tops off what we do to try to excel in our communities. We've tried really hard to put Payne County Farm Bureau back on the map."

Due to challenges from the COVID-19 pandemic, Payne County looked for creative ways to get members involved in their annual events. A highlight event of the year is county resolutions meeting, which allows members to send their solutions to agricultural and rural issues in their communities to be considered for

inclusion in the OKFB policy book.

Instead of holding an in-person meeting, Payne County Farm Bureau this year mailed letters to voting members, encouraging them to send their top resolutions to be considered by the county board. More people participated this year than ever before, and German said it proved that farmers and ranchers want their voices heard – especially during a difficult year.

"Farm Bureau, even on a local level, has such a voice," German said. "Things affecting farmers and ranchers, and even people in cities, Farm Bureau has a hand in. In the year 2020, we've all learned a little about how important it is to be supportive of agriculture."

Payne County also worked to continue their involvement through the community, despite the challenges of the global pandemic.

Members also hosted the county's first coat drive to support local children in need during the cold winter months. In total, the county collected 201 coats and \$250 in gift cards to be donated to the county's department of human services.

"Here in Payne County, if there is an activity that involves children, we want to educate children and their parents about what Farm Bureau does, as well as what agriculture is about," German said.

As the winner of both the John I. Taylor Award and the Lewis H. Munn Award, the county received two traveling trophies to be displayed in the county office.

OKFB WLC, while Sandra Berry of Stephens County and Terry Pederson of Alfalfa County were re-elected to serve three-year terms for districts four and seven, respectively.

Comanche County's Cody and Kara Goodnight were elected to serve as chairs of the OKFB Young Farmers and Ranchers committee by delegates to the group's in-person caucus held Saturday, Oct. 24 in Oklahoma City. Other members elected to serve on the OKFB YF&R committee include Chism and Heather Sander of Dewey County, district one; Dustin Ratliff of Noble County, district seven; John and Myiul Morris of Cotton County, at-large; and River Mitchell of Comanche County, at-large.

OKFB's awards recognizing excellence in Farm Bureau members and county Farm Bureaus were featured throughout the month of November, and are featured on the following pages.

For more information about OKFB's online business meeting, visit okfarmbureau.org/meeting2020.



Payne County Farm Bureau members receive traveling trophies for winning the John I. Taylor and Lewis H. Munn awards.



Payne County named top county YF&R

The Payne County Farm Bureau Young Farmers and Ranchers committee was honored with the Oklahoma Farm Bureau YF&R Charles L. Roff Award as part of a special awards presentation on Friday, Nov. 13.

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 as a whole.

Payne County YF&R committee earned the award for its work to promote Farm Bureau and agriculture throughout its local community.

"Everyone has been struggling this year with the COVID-19 pandemic," said Sara Rush, Payne County YF&R committee chair. "We were trying to find different ways to be involved in the community and spread the importance of agriculture throughout these tough times."

The Payne County YF&R planned, coordinated and hosted a bucket calf competition for children ages 5 to 12 at the county livestock show, giving local youth an opportunity to showcase all of the hard work on their livestock projects through an in-person interview and showmanship competition.

The YF&R committee, alongside other Payne County Farm Bureau members,

hosted a coat drive throughout the community. They collected coats at six locations to donate to Payne County Children's Welfare. In total, 201 coats and \$250 was donated to the organization.

"We were looking outside of our organization to see who needed help during the pandemic," Rush said. "Since we knew people were struggling with jobs and food, we helped out at Our Daily Bread in Stillwater and the food bank in Cushing."

Many Payne County YF&R members

were active on the state level, attending legislative events, YF&R conferences and OKFB events.

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

"We have a solid group of young leaders in Payne County, and they are servant leaders and have hearts are in agriculture," Rush said. "Next year, we plan on being more involved in the community than ever before."



Members of the Payne County YF&R were awarded a plaque for the Charles L. Roff Award for their efforts to strengthen their community and county Farm Bureau.

OKFB, counties recognized for reaching membership quota

Oklahoma Farm Bureau is proud to announce that 54 counties and the state organization have reached their membership quota for 2020.

OKFB's membership is dedicated to promoting the organization's mission – supporting the agriculture community to improve the lives of Oklahomans.

"Thanks to the efforts of our members, leaders and staff across the Farm Bureau family, our organization was able to reach

its goal for membership growth in 2020," said Thad Doye, OKFB executive director. "I'm proud to see so many Oklahomans interested in supporting the mission of Farm Bureau, and I look forward to continuing our hard work for agriculture and rural Oklahoma in 2021."

The counties that met or exceeded their membership quota for 2020 include Adair, Atoka, Beaver, Beckham, Blaine, Canadian, Carter, Cimarron, Cleveland,

Coal, Comanche, Cotton, Craig, Creek, Custer, Delaware, Dewey, Ellis, Garvin, Grady, Grant, Greer, Harper, Haskell, Hughes, Jackson, Jefferson, Johnston, Kay, Kingfisher, Kiowa, Latimer, Love, McClain, McCurtain, McIntosh, Mayes, Murray, Muskogee, Nowata, Okfuskee, Oklahoma, Okmulgee, Ottawa, Payne, Pontotoc, Pottawatomie, Pushmataha, Roger Mills, Rogers, Seminole, Texas, Wagoner and Washington.



YF&R elect new leaders, host discussion meet during annual caucus

Cody and Kara Goodknight of Comanche County Farm Bureau were chosen to serve as chairs of the Oklahoma Farm Bureau Young Farmers & Ranchers committee by delegates to the OKFB YF&R caucus held Saturday, Oct. 24 in Oklahoma City.

“We are honored to have the opportunity to serve as chairs of the YF&R committee this year,” Cody Goodknight said. “We greatly enjoy networking with other agriculturalists around our state and country and are excited about the activities Farm Bureau has planned for next year.”

Other members elected to serve on the committee include Chism and Heather Sander of Dewey County, district one; Dustin Ratliff of Noble County, district seven; John and Myiul Morris of Cotton County, at-large; and River Mitchell of Comanche County, at-large.

The YF&R committee opted to host the small in-person caucus and discussion meet following the cancelation of this year’s in-person OKFB convention in Norman.



During the YF&R annual caucus Oct. 24, YF&R delegates elected Cody and Kara Goodknight to serve as the OKFB YF&R committee chairs.

Find more OKFB award details online including:

John I. Taylor Award

Lewis H. Munn Award

Presidential Stars

YF&R Charles L. Roff Award

YF&R Discussion Meet Winner

District Secretary of the Year

Journalist of the Year

Quota Counties

For more content about OKFB’s 2020 award winners, including videos, photos and more, visit okfb.news/awards2020.



OKFB Foundation for Agriculture, WLC donate ag books to educators

Twelve Oklahoma educators from across the state were presented with a basket of agriculture books for their classrooms.

The Oklahoma Farm Bureau Foundation for Agriculture, alongside the OKFB Women's Leadership Committee, sponsored this year's Bushels for Books program. The program takes donated bushels of any commodity crop, as well as monetary donations from farmers and ranchers, and provides bushel baskets of accurate agriculture books to Oklahoma educators.

"Agriculture is the foundation of our state," said David VonTungeln, OKFB Foundation for Agriculture president. "Many do not understand what it takes to produce food, fiber and fuel in Oklahoma and across the nation. We are hoping

these accurate agricultural books will assist educators in teaching the next generation about farming and ranching."

Applications were accepted from teachers across the state, and winners were chosen by the WLC state board. The books cover various agriculture topics and were picked from the American Farm Bureau Foundation for Agriculture's list.

"It's so important that classrooms across our state have access to accurate agricultural books," said Mignon Bolay, OKFB WLC chair. "We are excited to provide educators with the opportunity to incorporate these books in their curriculum as they educate the next generation of Oklahomans."

Educators receiving books include **Dr. Shelly Beach**, Maysville; **Sherri Biggs**, Edmond; **Jayla Craig**, Poteau; **Karee**

Grim, Perry; **Teresia Harrison**, Stratford; **Patti Horne**, Indianahoma; **Lori Hotfelt**, Claremore; **Melanie Huston**, Tishomingo; **Laura Jackson**, Snyder; **Sharon Lantelme**, Shattuck; **Becky Owings**, Cushing; and **Laura Payne**, Mountain View.

For more information on the Bushels for Books program, please visit www.OKFBFoundationForAgriculture.org/Bushels-For-Books/.



Money named OKFB Journalist of the Year

Jack Money of The Oklahoman recently was honored with Oklahoma Farm Bureau's 2020 Journalist of the Year Award.

The award honors journalists for their contributions through reporting accurately and regularly about agricultural and rural issues.

"It was quite the unexpected honor and I'm most appreciative for it," Money said of being named the award winner. "I hope I'm around to keep an eye on your all's world as we go into 2021."

Money was chosen for the award after his coverage of various issues facing the agriculture community over the last year including depressed commodity prices, farm bankruptcies and disruptions from COVID-19.

Several of his stories on the agriculture industry were featured on the front page of The Oklahoman, giving consumers throughout the state a glimpse into the difficulties facing farmers and ranchers.

With more than 30 years of experience in journalism, Money worked for The Oklahoman beginning in 1988 through January 2009. He took a job in media relations for an oil and gas company for around six years before returning to The Oklahoman in 2016.

Upon his return, Money quickly realized a need for coverage of the agriculture industry in the state's largest daily newspaper. The veteran writer successfully pitched to his editor the idea of incorporating production agriculture into his reporting.

Though he now focuses primarily on the energy industry, Money said he still monitors activity in the Oklahoma agriculture industry because of its significance in the state.

"It's probably the oldest industry in the state and it still has a big ultimate impact on how well Oklahoma's economy does, particularly in rural parts of the state," he said. "That's why, to me, I feel

like keeping an eye on (the agriculture industry) is so important because when agriculture's doing well, rural Oklahoma is doing well. And when agriculture is hurting, then so is rural Oklahoma."



Jack Money



OKFB presents district secretary of the year awards

Oklahoma Farm Bureau recently named nine secretaries for its District Secretary of the Year Awards.

The District Secretary of the Year Award is presented to one county Farm Bureau secretary from each

OKFB district for their contributions to the overall success of their county Farm Bureau. County secretaries conduct the daily operations of the county Farm Bureau and help meet the needs of members.

District One

Cheslea Collins

Texas County

District Four

Fay Foster

Jefferson County

District Seven

Lea Anne Steelmon

Kay County

District Two

Shelby Monroe

Harmon County

District Five

Trudie Towler

LeFlore County

District Eight

Teresa Wilson

Seminole County

District Three

Billie Coffman

Logan County

District Six

Gail Plummer

Nowata County

District Nine

Donna Wayland

Lincoln County

Payne County member wins YF&R discussion meet

Jenny Haken of Payne County Farm Bureau was named the winner of the 2020 Oklahoma Farm Bureau Young Farmers and Ranchers Discussion Meet held in conjunction with the group's caucus on Saturday, Oct. 24.

Haken competed against other participants in debate-style discussion where performance was evaluated on the exchange of ideas and information on pre-determined topics. Participants were judged on their ability to offer constructive criticism, cooperation and communication while analyzing agricultural problems and developing solutions.

"I'm proud to have been selected as this year's discussion meet winner," Haken said. "Farmers and ranchers across America are privileged to have YF&R provide the discussion meet to allow in-depth discussion and thought exchange on important topics facing agriculture

today. With platforms such as the discussion meet, American agriculture can and will find effective and efficient ways of diversifying and adapting."

As the state discussion meet winner, Haken received a John Deere X330 Lawn Tractor, sponsored by P&K Equipment.



Scott Eishenhauer, P&K Equipment general manager, presents Jenny Haken, right, with a John Deere X330 Lawn Tractor, sponsored by P&K Equipment for being named the winner of the 2020 OKFB YF&R Discussion Meet.

County Farm Bureaus recently honored for excellence

County Farm Bureaus across the state were recently recognized for their efforts to further Oklahoma agriculture and rural communities.

Each year, OKFB recognizes 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.

Six Star Counties

Caddo County
Comanche County
Okfuskee County
Okmulgee County
Payne County
Woodward County

Five Star Counties

Kingfisher County
Kiowa County
LeFlore County
Nowata County
Washita County

Four Star Counties

Alfalfa County
Custer County
Rogers County
Stephens County
Texas County

Three Star Counties

Choctaw County
Kay County
Lincoln County
Love County
Jackson County
Washington County
Woods County



Stacy Simunek



Leon Richards



Kerry Givens

A CALL TO SERVE

Three Oklahoma Farm Bureau members answer the call to represent farmers, ranchers and rural citizens within their district.

story by: Brianne Schwabauer photos by: Dustin Mielke

While agriculture may have its ups and downs, a dedication to the future of the industry found within each producer pushes them each and every day.

That same deep-rooted dedication is what motivates them to become leaders within their local communities by serving as school board members, volunteer firefighters, coaches, church leaders and so much more. For some, however, there is a calling to serve at an even higher level.

Members Leon Richards, Kerry Givens and Stacy Simunek were given a special opportunity to exercise their passion for agriculture by fellow grassroots members who chose them to serve on the OKFB board of directors.

Comprised of directors from each of the nine OKFB districts, in addition to the president, the OKFB board together represents all of Oklahoma's farmers, ranchers and rural citizens.

In the following pages, we invite you to learn about the newest board members at Oklahoma Farm Bureau.

LEON RICHARDS

DISTRICT ONE

Fourth-generation farmer and Texas County Farm Bureau board member Leon Richards always knew that one day he would work the land. Today, Richards and his family do just that, producing wheat and grain sorghum on their dryland farming operation spanning portions of Texas County, Beaver County and on into Texas.

A member of OKFB for nearly 30 years, Richards has served as county Farm Bureau president for most of that time in addition to being active on the state level. From serving on a variety of state Farm Bureau committees including resolutions, finance and credentials to helping the organization prepare for the future through a peer review and strategic planning process, Richards has taken on the opportunity to understand the organization from a variety of different angles.

As a full-time farmer in Oklahoma's panhandle, policy and regulatory issues that could impact him are always on his mind. Like most producers, Richards is not able to commit the time needed to build relationships with legislators or track key pieces of legislation or regulations. Instead, he relies on OKFB to be his voice.

"Each individual farmer doesn't have the time or the opportunity to go to the state Capitol every time there's an issue, whereas Farm Bureau has the policy division where they are able to stay on top of the bills," Richards said. "They know when bills are coming up and they know when it's going to be voted on. For me as an individual producer, I don't have all of that knowledge or the time to get that information every single day. If there's an issue, they're on top of it."

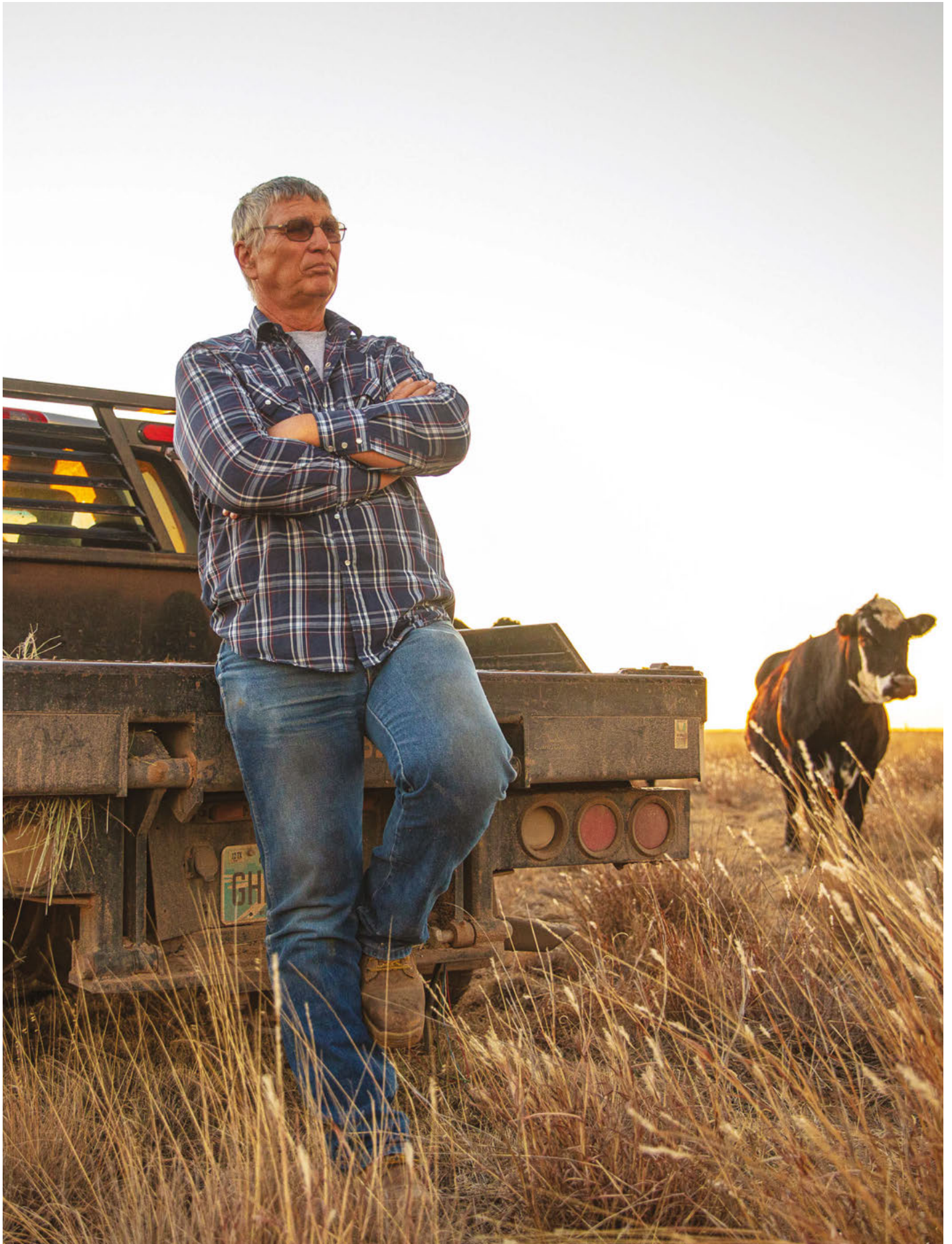
When legislation or new regulations arise, OKFB relies on its grassroots members to share how they will be personally affected. Being a member for roughly three decades now, Richards has seen first-hand what can be accomplished when members work together.

"The more involvement we have from the grassroots members, the more weight that it will carry when you go talk to the state legislature," Richards said.

Active within his local community, Richards knows personally the importance of building leadership skills from a young age and the affect it has had on him as adult.

"Farm Bureau helps develop leadership skills, particularly for younger people through the Young Farmers & Ranchers program," Richards said. "They also have other leadership opportunities whether it's at the college level with Collegiate Farm Bureau or through the Women's Leadership Committee. The more situations that you can be placed in that help you develop those leadership skills, the better."







KERRY GIVENS

DISTRICT FOUR

For the last 40 years, Comanche County Farm Bureau member Kerry Givens has had a front-row seat to all of the ups and downs of the cattle industry. As the owner of a local cattle buying business and a cattle producer in his own right, Givens has a unique perspective on the volatility of the cattle markets.

“I’ve been around the sale barn all my life,” Givens said. “I used to skip school to get the cattle penned for the Lawton Stockyard back in the late 60s, and my ag teacher actually let me take off with the consent of my parents when I was only 15 or 16 years old.”

While agriculture has always run through his veins, Givens was not initially active within Farm Bureau after joining nearly 30 years ago. However, in true OKFB grassroots fashion, a former Comanche County Farm Bureau board member approached Givens, suggesting that he join the county board and begin attending events.

“After I got involved, I was able to see how important the grassroots organization was – to talk with people right here in Comanche County,” Givens said. “I can share with them how they can be involved at the county level all the way up to the state or national level and see how the grassroots policy is made.”

Beginning in 2006, Givens began serving on the county board, eventually becoming president of Comanche County Farm Bureau in 2014.

“I’m so involved in it (Farm Bureau) because I want people to know the story of agriculture and the rich heritage within it,” Givens said. “If we don’t stand shoulder-to-shoulder with our farmers and ranchers and promote agriculture, we are always going to be behind.”

From the Women’s Leadership Committee to the Young Farmers & Ranchers program at the county and state level, Givens believes Farm Bureau programs serve as a unique resource to meet the needs of local communities across the state through education and advocacy.

“As an organization made up of members from all 77 counties, we can have an affect on the legislature and talk with the legislators to let them see the needs of the people in our rural areas,” Givens said. “A lot of farmers, ranchers and the general public as a whole have been the beneficiary of Oklahoma Farm Bureau even though they don’t know it.”



STACY SIMUNEK

DISTRICT SEVEN

Kay County Farm Bureau member Stacy Simunek never envisioned himself becoming a county board member, let alone a state board member, when he first joined Farm Bureau 19 years ago.

For the last 14 years, however, Simunek has served as the Kay County Farm Bureau president as a full-time farmer with 115 momma cows, numerous crops and even a hay equipment business just outside of Blackwell.

Oklahoma's agricultural youth are where Simunek's passion lies, and are what ultimately made his decision to run and represent OKFB's district seven.

"It was a Sunday evening and two of my grandsons were over helping me feed," Simunek said. "The oldest one looks over at me and says, 'Someday it will be us out here feeding and you can be up at the house watching.' That evening I came back in the house after they'd left and I told my wife I'd made my mind up. It was done."


Simunek knows the look of excitement in the eyes of his grandsons, who range in age from two to seven years old, as they feed and check cattle. As agriculture continually changes, he wants to ensure there will be something left for them once they are ready to begin farming on their own.

"If someone who has been involved in agriculture all their life doesn't step up to do this, they won't have that opportunity," Simunek said of his grandkids.

Simunek believes that for the last 10 to 15 years, the door for agriculture to communicate with consumers had been shut, so to speak. Prior to 2020, the average American consumer was not concerned about the day-to-day successes or failures within the agricultural industry as long as grocery store shelves were stocked with food at a reasonable price. At the onset of COVID-19, Simunek saw things quickly begin to change.

"I honestly didn't think anything good would come out of this pandemic," Simunek said, chuckling as he looked back on 2020. "Now you see all of these signs for farm-fresh eggs and everyone wants things right off the farm. That door has opened up and I can't wait to find out how we can not only put our foot in that door, but go through it."

As 2021 begins, Simunek is optimistic in what the OKFB board of directors can do for its grassroots membership.

"It's like we are all a big puzzle of putting agriculture together and we are not complete without each one of us," Simunek said. "As a whole, we can make some movement, but I don't think we would be as successful if we were doing this on our own." 





OKFB secures success in 2020 elections

Oklahoma Farm Bureau members celebrated a fruitful 2020 election cycle after the Nov. 3 general election resulted in successful races by numerous candidates supported by the organization's grassroots-driven political action committees.

All six congressional candidates endorsed by OKFB's federal Ag PAC were elected, while 87% of candidates supported by the organization's state-level political action committee, the OKFB Ag Fund, were chosen to serve in public office in 2020.

"Both the Ag PAC and the Ag Fund exist to give farmers and ranchers a voice in the elections that impact our very livelihoods," said Keeff Felty, Jackson County farmer and OKFB Ag PAC and Ag Fund chair. "After all of our work to carefully research and consider each race, it's great to see success for a large majority of the candidates we supported. We look forward to working with each of them in our efforts to secure a bright future for agriculture and the rural way of life."

Congressional candidates supported by the federal OKFB Ag PAC included Sen. Jim Inhofe; Rep. Kevin Hern, 1st Congressional District; Rep. Markwayne Mullin, 2nd Congressional District; Rep. Frank Lucas, 3rd Congressional District; Rep. Tom Cole, 4th

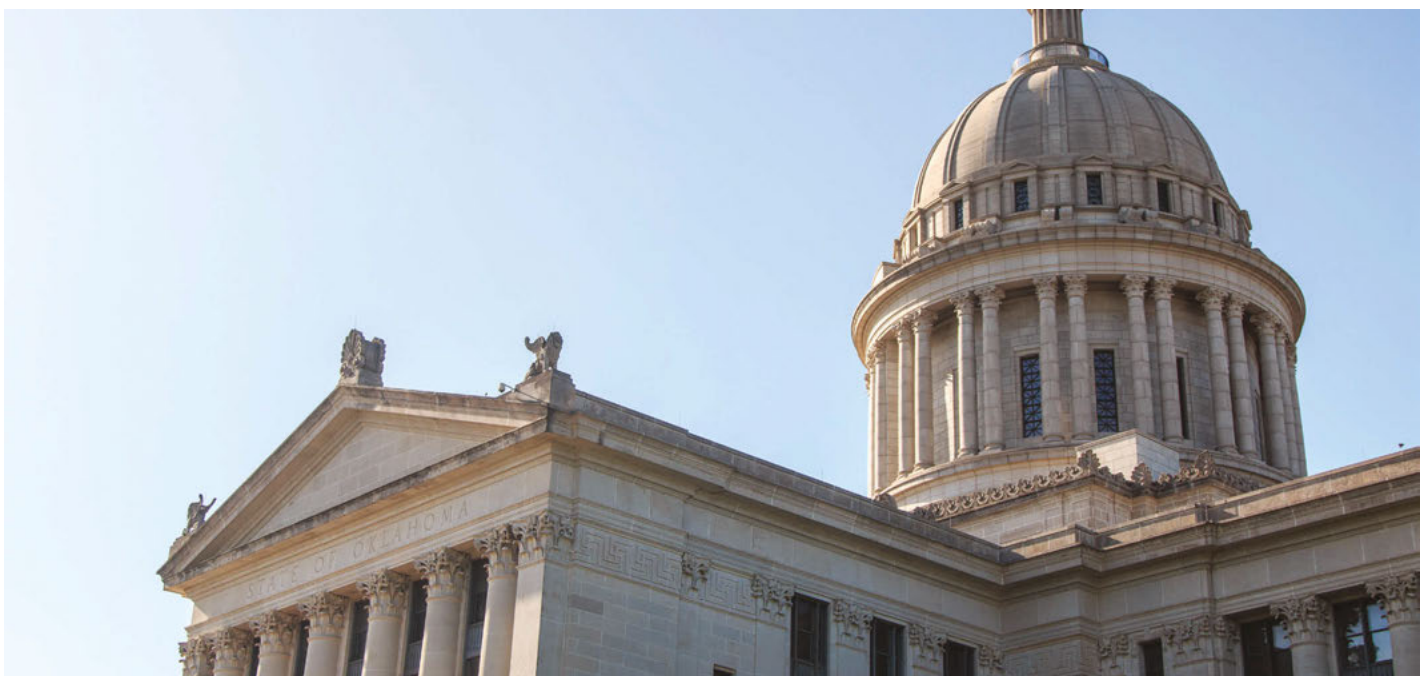
Congressional District; and newly elected Rep. Stephanie Bice, 5th Congressional District.

Throughout the 2020 election cycle, the Ag Fund gave \$77,750 to 55 candidates and endorsed 13 candidates in state-level races.

The decisions to support or endorse candidates were voted upon by the Ag PAC and Ag Fund boards, which are comprised of farmers and ranchers in each Farm Bureau district. The board members gathered input from OKFB grassroots farm and ranch members in their districts to help guide their decisions. The PACs are supported by voluntary contributions from Farm Bureau members as an optional portion of membership dues.

As a member of a coalition against State Question 805, OKFB was successful in helping defeat the measure that would have banned sentencing enhancements for offenders of repeat nonviolent felonies including many agriculture and livestock crimes.

OKFB also supported State Question 814, which would have helped the state Legislature secure federal matching dollars for the Medicaid expansion program approved by voters in June. The measure also was defeated by Oklahoma voters.





OKFB supports ag youth at 2020 Tulsa State Fair premium sale

Oklahoma Farm Bureau helped support the state's agriculture youth by purchasing \$30,000 in premiums at the 2020 Tulsa State Fair Night of Champions Premium Sale held online from Wednesday, Oct. 7 through Friday, Oct. 9.

Farm Bureau partnered with fellow agriculture and rural organizations and individuals to purchase premiums on the animals of 121 students, including

the grand-champion barrow and grand-champion goat.

"Oklahoma Farm Bureau is always proud to support our state's incredible 4-H and FFA students at the Tulsa State Fair," said Rodd Moesel, OKFB president. "We know the lessons and life skills these students develop as they raise, care for and show animals will carry on as they lead our industry and our state in the future."

Nash joins OKFB as communications specialist

Oklahoma Farm Bureau recently hired Rebekah Nash as a communications specialist.

Nash is re-joining OKFB after completing the organization's three-month summer communications internship program in 2019.

She will assist the organization in creating and managing content for social media, overseeing the website, and providing support for written content.

"Growing up in agriculture ignited my passion for the industry, but after my internship with OKFB, I knew I wanted to tell the stories of farmers and ranchers," Nash said. "I am looking forward to meeting members from across the state and learning more about Oklahoma's extensive agricultural industry."

Originally from Moweaqua, Illinois, Nash was raised on a grain farm and graduated from Oklahoma State University with an agricultural communications degree in May 2020.



Rebekah Nash

OKFB YF&R scholarship application open

The Oklahoma Farm Bureau Young Farmers and Ranchers Committee is now accepting applications for its annual \$1,000 scholarships for high school seniors who will pursue a higher degree in agriculture after graduation.

Nine \$1,000 scholarships, one from each OKFB district, will be awarded to high school seniors pursuing a career in agriculture at an Oklahoma institution of high learning as a full-time student.

Applications must be postmarked no later than March 1, 2021. Applicants must meet all of the following eligibility requirements:

- **Must be a graduating high school senior.**
- **Must enroll full time in an agriculture program at an accredited Oklahoma college, university or technical school.**
- **Must be a member of a Farm Bureau family (father, mother or legal guardian memberships qualify; grandparents', siblings' or other relatives' memberships may not be used). Membership must remain in good standing for the duration of the scholarship.**
- **Children of paid employees of Oklahoma Farm Bureau and**

Affiliated Companies are not eligible.

Applicants must also provide the following materials along with the scholarship application:

- **A copy of the applicant's official high school transcript.**
- **A copy of the applicant's resume with activities and honors listed.**
- **Two character reference letters.**
- **Three essays (500 words maximum for each essay), double-spaced, typed in Times New Roman, 12-point font.**
 - **Explain your preferred career and describe why you have chosen it.**
 - **How can Farm Bureau encourage young people to engage in agriculture?**
 - **Explain how receiving this scholarship will help you achieve your educational goals.**

The application can be found on the OKFB website at okfarmbureau.org/applications. For more information, contact OKFB YF&R Coordinator Zac Swartz at (405) 523-2300.

2021 YF&R Collegiate Farm Bureau Scholarship application open

The Oklahoma Farm Bureau Young Farmers and Ranchers Committee is now accepting applications for its inaugural \$1,000 scholarship for Collegiate Farm Bureau members who are pursuing an agricultural degree.

One scholarship will be presented to an active Collegiate Farm Bureau member attending an Oklahoma college or university.

"We are excited to support collegiate members as they are working toward becoming agricultural professionals," said Cody Goodnight, OKFB YF&R chair. "We cannot wait to see more collegiate members involved in YF&R throughout the year."

Applications must be postmarked no later than March 1, 2021. Applicants must meet all of the following eligibility requirements:

- **Must be enrolled full time in an agriculture program at an accredited Oklahoma college or university with a Collegiate Farm Bureau chapter.**
- **Must be a Farm Bureau member in good standing for the duration of the scholarship.**

- **Collegiate Farm Bureau members from out-of-state can apply with a valid Farm Bureau membership.**
- **Children of paid employees of Oklahoma Farm Bureau and Affiliated Companies are not eligible.**

Applicants must also provide the following materials along with the scholarship application:

- **A copy of the applicant's résumé.**
- **Two essays (500 words maximum for each essay), double-spaced, typed in Times New Roman, 12-point font, answering each of the following questions:**
 - **How can Farm Bureau get**

collegiate members more involved?

- **Explain your preferred career and why you have chosen it.**

The application can be found on the OKFB website at okfarmbureau.org/applications. For more information, contact OKFB YF&R Coordinator Zac Swartz at (405) 523-2300.

With six chapters across Oklahoma, Collegiate Farm Bureau is an on-campus club designed to introduce young agriculturalists to the Farm Bureau organization early in their careers. To learn more about Collegiate Farm Bureau, contact Zac Swartz at (405) 523-2300.



NEO A&M Collegiate Farm Bureau awarded \$500 AFBF grant

Northeastern Oklahoma A&M College Collegiate Farm Bureau recently was awarded a mini-grant from the American Farm Bureau Federation.

The chapter received \$500 to aid in recruitment, leadership development, community service outreach, officer development and the purchase of educational materials and/or registration costs for conferences.

“This mini grant from AFBF is a tremendous opportunity to show our students a wide variety of different commodities and enable us to still provide them agriculture opportunities in a COVID climate,” said Alisen Anderson, NEO A&M Collegiate Farm Bureau adviser.

On the campus of NEO A&M in Miami, Anderson said the Collegiate Farm Bureau program offers students an opportunity to discover the diversity

of the agriculture industry, develop leadership skills and give back to the community. The chapter hosts discussion meets on-campus, mini commodity tours throughout the year, as well as campus and community service projects.

Other Collegiate Farm Bureau chapters earning a grant included Colorado State University, North Dakota State University, Penn State University, The Ohio State University, University of Arkansas-

Monticello, University of Georgia and University of Missouri.

The Collegiate Farm Bureau program is part of Oklahoma Farm Bureau’s Young Farmers & Ranchers program and works to engage agricultural students from college campuses, introducing them to Farm Bureau. For more information, contact OKFB YF&R Coordinator Zac Swartz at (405) 523-2300.



NEO A&M Collegiate Farm Bureau members visit the state Capitol in early 2020.

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OKFB praises USDA's \$26.4 million investment in rural broadband

Oklahoma Farm Bureau applauded the Oct. 29 announcement by the U.S. Department of Agriculture to invest \$26.4 million to provide broadband service in unserved and underserved areas in rural Oklahoma.

The investment, part of the \$550 million Congress allocated to the second round of the ReConnect Program, will grant internet access to 5,996 people and 228 farms across Atoka, Comanche, Haskell and Muskogee counties.

"OKFB appreciates the USDA's additional \$26.4 million investment in rural communities to provide broadband access in four Oklahoma counties," said Rodd Moesel, OKFB president. "Reliable internet access is no longer a luxury but a necessity for day-to-day life in 2020. Expanding broadband throughout our rural communities has been a priority for Farm Bureau members for years, so we're hopeful this investment is one of many to come as we work to bring all rural Oklahomans online."

To learn more about the ReConnect grant program, visit www.usda.gov/reconnect. 00183935



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OKFB recognized for member programs and membership achievement

Oklahoma Farm Bureau has been awarded State Awards of Excellence in four out of four possible program areas by American Farm Bureau.

The four areas in which OKFB received the State Awards of Excellence are advocacy, engagement and outreach, leadership and business development, and membership value. OKFB was one of 30 state Farm Bureaus that received awards for demonstrating outstanding achievements during the 2020 membership year.

The State Awards of Excellence program recognizes state Farm Bureaus for outstanding programs conducted throughout the year while encouraging states to develop and implement new programs.

OKFB will be recognized for excellence in implementation of outstanding member programs and membership achievement during American Farm Bureau's 2021 Virtual Convention Jan. 10-13.

As Oklahoma's largest general farm organization, OKFB works to support the agriculture community to improve the lives of Oklahomans with a variety of programs and activities throughout the year.



Poll shows American's trust in farmers and approval of sustainability practices

A majority of U.S. adults have a positive view of farmers' sustainability practices, and an overwhelming majority trust farmers, according to a new national public opinion poll from the American Farm Bureau Federation.

The survey of 2,200 U.S. adults found that more than half, or 58%, rate the sustainability practices of U.S. farmers positively, with broad agreement from a majority of adults across demographic groups.

Nearly nine in 10 adults trust farmers, a 4% increase from AFBF's June 2020 polling, which is evidence the public recognized that food supply chain challenges brought on by the pandemic were not within the control of farmers and ranchers.

The survey also explored public attitudes about the environmental sustainability achievements of farmers and ranchers, as well as future direction to advance climate-smart farming. Overall, the public agrees farmers shouldn't be expected to bear the financial burden alone. More than four in five adults say environmental sustainability and economic sustainability are both important for farmers, and most adults say both are very important. More than four in five adults also say feeding the world and farmers passing farms on to future generations are important.

"Americans have a high level of trust in farmers, and they understand that we're committed to protecting the soil, air and water," said AFBF President Zippy Duvall. "We want to leave the land better than we found it for our children and grandchildren, as well as our nation. Our survey demonstrates that Americans are impressed by advancements in climate-smart farming and we look forward to building on that success."

Support for farmers' sustainability efforts swelled when government data was shared about achievements. More than eight in 10 Americans were impressed when they learned that, according to the Environmental Protection Agency and Agriculture Department, farmers have put 140 million acres in conservation

programs, more than doubled the amount of renewable energy sources they use, and nearly tripled the amount of food grown in the last 70 years with the same or fewer resources.

Looking to the future, the survey explores how Americans think sustainability efforts on farms and ranches should be funded. Seventy percent of adults say government incentives to encourage farmers to adopt additional sustainable agricultural practices would be effective. More than three-quarters of adults believe it is important for the government to fund science-based research and improve infrastructure to support agriculture.

At a time when some corporations are making sustainability commitments that include or impact agricultural production,

a bipartisan majority of adults say corporations should compensate farmers for the additional cost of implementing environmental practices to help achieve sustainability goals.

The survey also revealed there is still work to be done to increase awareness of agriculture's comparatively small contribution to greenhouse gas emissions in the U.S. More than four in five adults were not able to correctly identify agriculture's impact. On a brighter note, nearly half of adults correctly ranked agriculture as the smallest contributor to greenhouse gas emissions by economic sector. According to the latest EPA data, agriculture accounts for 10% of total U.S. emissions, less than the transportation, electricity production, commercial and residential, and industry sectors. **AFBF**



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Where to find technical guidance for land management and conservation

By Steven Smith

Noble Research Institute wildlife and fisheries consultant

If you are a land manager, you probably have encountered issues for which you need more advice than a Google search or a YouTube video can provide. Fortunately, land managers have access to several different nongovernment organizations as well as state and federal entities to assist them in solving issues from erosion to brush management.

These entities offer a wide range of services, such as consultation both on-site through property visits and off-site through office, email, text and phone visits; cost-share programs for land management practices; educational materials and programs; and temporary use of equipment. This article gives a brief summary of eight entities that provide technical guidance to land managers focused on natural resources.

NOBLE RESEARCH INSTITUTE

Noble Research Institute exists to help land managers, with a focus on soil, forage, range and cattle stewardship. We also work with pecans and other crops, wildlife and more. Even though we are based in Ardmore, Oklahoma, we have national reach, especially involving offsite consultation, research, publications and educational programs. We offer multi-disciplinary, integrated onsite and offsite consultation to land managers by providing them with non-biased recommendations to achieve their specific goals. Our mission is to deliver solutions to great agricultural challenges. For more information about us, visit www.noble.org.

NATURAL RESOURCES CONSERVATION SERVICE

As the Natural Resources Conservation Service website states, "NRCS conservationists provide technical expertise and conservation planning for farmers, ranchers and forest landowners wanting to make conservation improvements to their land." NRCS is a federal agency with field offices in most counties across the United States. NRCS offers onsite and offsite consultation, educational materials and programs to land managers. They also offer cost-share programs for land management practices such as brush management, fence construction, water development, etc. For more information about NRCS, visit www.nrcs.usda.gov.

STATE WILDLIFE/NATURAL RESOURCE DEPARTMENTS

Every state has an entity focused on wildlife and fisheries management. Depending on the state, onsite and offsite consultation, cost-share programs for land management practices, educational materials and programs are available. Oklahoma has biologists who assist land managers. Some examples of assistance offered by these departments include deer management and the Oklahoma Farm Pond Management programs. These departments partner with other entities such as Noble, NRCS, and state extension for educational programs.



U.S. FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE PARTNERS FOR FISH AND WILDLIFE PROGRAM

According to the website of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Services, “The Partners Program provides technical and financial assistance to private landowners and Tribes who are willing to work with us and other partners on a voluntary basis to help meet the habitat needs of our Federal Trust Species.” USFWS is a federal agency with regional offices in each state across the United States. USFWS offers onsite and offsite consultation, educational materials and programs to land managers as well as cost-share programs for land management practices such as wetland development, habitat restoration, etc. For more information about USFWS and the Partner Program, visit fws.gov/partners.

PRESCRIBED BURN ASSOCIATIONS

Numerous states are fortunate to have prescribed burn associations. An example of a state burn association is the Oklahoma Prescribed Burn Association.

The OPBA is an incorporated nonprofit, created to support local burn associations and develop new ones across Oklahoma. OPBA's goals are to increase landowners' capacity to do neighbor-to-neighbor prescribed burns to reduce fuel loads and improve wildlife habitat, while increasing grassland production and enhancing public health and safety of all Oklahomans. Its goal is to provide Oklahoma landowners with access to support, training and equipment to safely implement prescribed fire on their lands. OPBA provides onsite consultation to help plan and implement prescribed burns. Many burn associations offer educational materials and programs and temporary use of equipment for association members. For more information about OPBA, visit ok-pba.org.

STATE COOPERATIVE EXTENSION SERVICE

A Cooperative Extension Service in each state is charged with helping rural communities with resource management and other issues, with offices housed in courthouses, post offices or federal

buildings in every county. Extension personnel develop and deliver educational materials and programs, which are typically based on research in the respective state. Most offices offer offsite consultation, with some also able to provide offsite consultation.

QUAIL FOREVER

The Quail Forever website states, “Quail Forever's Farm Bill Biologist program is designed to educate farmers and landowners about the benefits of conservation programs, as well as assist those landowners after programs have been implemented. We call it the ‘One Stop Shop’ for anything conservation and wildlife-related.” Quail Forever partners with the NRCS, state wildlife departments and other entities to assist land managers improve habitat in the name of upland grassland game birds. Quail Forever offers onsite and offsite consultation as well as educational materials and programs. To find a biologist in your area, visit quailforever.org.

Starting seeds indoors can be an enjoyable winter garden project

By Trisha Gedon
Oklahoma Cooperative Extension Service

With gardening season slowing down into the winter months, many people with green thumbs are eager to get back outdoors and put a little dirt under their fingernails.

There is good news for those gardeners: Starting seeds indoors not only provides a jumpstart on spring, it also is a relatively inexpensive way to grow a wider variety of plants, said David Hillock, Oklahoma State University Extension consumer horticulturist.

"Seeds are available through many sources, including your local gardening store, mail order catalogs and online," Hillock said. "One advantage of buying seeds is gardeners will have a much greater variety to choose from compared to waiting until spring to buy starter plants. You can pick up seeds for some unusual hybrids that may be difficult to find in plant form in the spring."

How much seed is enough? Do not buy more than what can be used within two or three years. The fresher the seed, the greater the chance the seeds are viable. Leftover seeds can be stored in an air-tight container in a cool place such as a refrigerator.

Hillock said to keep the humidity low in the storage container, add a packet of silica gel. An alternative is a teaspoon of powdered milk in a piece of facial tissue or paper towel.

Fortunately, it does not take a lot of equipment and tools to start planting. Other than the seeds, all that is needed is some good potting mix and cell flats with small, individual containers. Small, individual pots also are a good choice.

"It is better to use divided containers so each plant can contain its own root system. Seedlings grown together in one large pot likely will be injured during the transplant process," he said. "Seedlings such as cucumbers and squash do not transplant well, so use fiber or paper pots that break down in the soil. When the seedling is ready to be planted, simply plant the pot."

Hillock recommends using a commercial seed-starting mix to grow seedlings. Those mixes are composed of vermiculite and peat – without any true soil – and they are lightweight and free of weed seeds. The texture of the mix is well-suited to the needs of germinating seeds and tiny seedlings.

Be sure to follow seed packet or catalog instructions when starting. Each species has its own requirements for seed depth, water and light. Consider when the seedling will be ready for transplant and work backward on the calendar to determine when the seeds must be started. Remember to identify each container or tray with a tag. Seedlings can be different species but still look alike, so

marking each tray will be a big help when it is time to transplant them outside.

Once the seeds are planted, they need to be kept in an area where the temperature is above 60 degrees Fahrenheit. Avoid placing the seed flats on a windowsill. Hillock said a more reliable method is to use fluorescent lights, which may be marketed as grow lights. This will help plants develop strong, sturdy stalks.

"Plants need 12 to 16 hours of light every day," Hillock said. "Installing a timer on the lighting system is an easy way to help ensure the plants get the required light."

The potting mix needs to be kept moist while seeds are germinating. A spray bottle to water the surface on the plants without washing away any of the potting mix is a handy tool. This will help avoid overwatering and root rot. Seedlings also will benefit from a weak, general-purpose, water-soluble fertilizer mixed at one-quarter strength. Use that mixture once per week and use plain water as needed the rest of the week.

"As your seedlings grow out of the cell packs, transplant them into larger containers," Hillock said. "You can use larger peat pots or plastic cups with holes punched in the bottom for drainage. If you started the process with small peat cups, transplant those into your larger peat cups."



As time draws near to get the seedlings in the ground, Hillock said they need to go through a process called hardening off. They have been protected from direct sunlight and wind, two environmental factors that can be harsh on unprepared, young plants.

A couple of weeks before planting, move them outside in the shade for a few hours each afternoon. Bring them back indoors before the temperature drops at night. Each day leave the plants out for a little longer and expose them to a bit more direct sunshine. Unless there is a risk of abnormally cold weather, by the end of the two weeks the plants should be ready to stay outside in a sunny area until gardeners are ready to transplant them into the garden.

More information about growing vegetable transplants is available on the OSU Extension website, along with a wide variety of general gardening topics.

1. Choose a commercial seed-starting mix when planting seeds. These mixes are well-suited to the needs of germinating seeds.

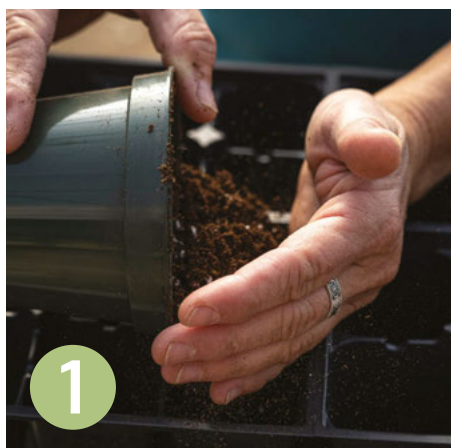
2. Be sure to follow the directions on the seed packets when planting.

3. Gardeners typically have a much greater variety from which to choose if starting with seeds instead of starter plants.

4. Using plant markers for each container helps gardeners identify plants.

5. Keep the potting mix moist while the seeds are germinating, being careful not to overwater.

*All photos by Todd Johnson,
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