

Oklahoma *Country*



The Magazine of the
Oklahoma Farm Bureau
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From the
**ground
up**

Farm Bureau members **answer the call** to serve their community in times of need as they **build and grow** their own volunteer fire department.

Tougher than dirt

Five farmers come together in hard times

Highway hero

Helping out the Farm Bureau family

Gathering, growing, giving

A preview of OKFB's 78th annual meeting



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Oklahoma *Country*

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ON THE COVER

Building their department from the ground up beginning in 2008, Nocona Cook and 15 others serve their community by volunteering as rural firefighters with the Cloud Chief Fire Department. Photo by Dustin Mielke.

HIDDEN NUMBER WORTH \$50

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.

The OKFB membership number hidden somewhere in *Oklahoma Country* must match the number on the face of your individual OKFB membership card for you to claim the cash prize. The membership number that appears on your magazine's mailing label is not the hidden number, but also must match the hidden number for you to claim the cash prize.

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2019 annual meeting preview

Join fellow OKFB members for a weekend full of speakers, events, awards, policy discussions and fun at the 78th annual meeting of the largest general farm organization in the state.



Tougher than dirt

By Hannah Davis

Facing tough times in agriculture, five Oklahoma farmers have learned for themselves how to best cope with the stress by leaning on their faith, their friends and their families.



From the ground up

By Brianne Schwabauer

Serving as rural volunteer firefighters with the Cloud Chief Fire Department, 16 men protect the 188 men, women and children for 100 square miles in times of need.



Highway Hero

By Becky Samples

One Oklahoma Farm Bureau member experiences the generosity and willingness to help from a Farm Bureau insurance agent in a neighboring state.



PRESIDENTIALLY SPEAKING

Farm Bureau works through the tough times

By Rodd Moesel

President, Oklahoma Farm Bureau & Affiliated Companies

Anyone in Oklahoma connected to the land knows this past year has been a difficult one.

From floods to droughts to low commodity prices, Oklahoma farmers and ranchers have faced an uphill battle for seemingly all of 2019. Our rural communities, as well, have felt the impact of the lower prices Oklahomans receive for converting our natural resources into valuable assets for our nation and our world.

But while our farm and ranch families – and our rural residents – have been tirelessly striving to carry on our agricultural legacy in less than ideal conditions, Oklahoma Farm Bureau has never stopped working to ensure our state’s agriculturalists are protected from the burden of unnecessary laws, rules and regulations.


As we look forward to celebrating our 78th annual meeting in November, OKFB members are bringing their best ideas to the table as we work together to improve agriculture through our policy development process.

We need the input of farmers and ranchers from across our state to improve our policy and raise awareness of emerging issues in rural Oklahoma and agriculture. Who better to propose ideas that will protect production agriculture and help rural Oklahoma grow than those with their hands in the dirt and their hearts in their local communities? This is the power that we have as an

organization as we all come together; this is the power of our grassroots.

I hope you’ll join with our fellow agriculturalists to propose ideas through our county Farm Bureau resolutions process and help discuss them all the way to the floor of our business sessions at our annual meeting in November.

I know your time is precious, especially with all that agriculture is facing right now. But with help and input from across the state, we can build our organization’s policies that will allow us to build upon 78 years of success as we continue to fight for agriculture and rural communities across our great state.

To me, the difficult times facing our agriculture community merely serve to highlight the importance of Farm Bureau. With the best ideas from our members, our organization can continue to work each and every day in the public policy arena to make sure our farm and ranch families can continue the work they love. This organization is our voice, and it speaks for us every day – especially when the going gets tough. When we all contribute a little, we all gain much. 

NOTICE OF ANNUAL MEETINGS

Oklahoma Farm Bureau

To all county Farm Bureaus of the Oklahoma Farm Bureau: You are hereby notified that Oklahoma Farm Bureau will convene in annual session Friday, Nov. 8, 2019, at 1:30 p.m. at the Cox Convention Center in Oklahoma City. This is the annual meeting of the delegate body. See that your delegates are properly certified and in attendance to represent your membership. This meeting will continue until all business is transacted.

– Board of Directors

Oklahoma Farm Bureau Mutual Insurance Co.

Notice is hereby given of the annual meeting of the Policyholders of Oklahoma Farm Bureau Mutual Insurance Company to be held at the Cox Convention Center in Oklahoma City on Saturday, Nov. 9, 2019, at 8:45 a.m. at which time a report of the activities of our company during the past fiscal year will be submitted together with a report of the financial position of the company; at which time any and all other activities of the company may be presented and considered.

– Board of Directors

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This *Joint Privacy Notice* is being provided to you to inform you of our practices and procedures regarding the sharing of non-public personal information. Non-public personal information is personally identifiable financial information about you, your family, or your household that we may obtain directly from you, that we may obtain as a result of our business dealings with you, or that we may obtain from any other source.

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- Information we receive from you on applications or other forms;
- Information about your transactions with us, our affiliates or others;
- Information we receive from consumer reporting agencies; and
- Information we receive from state or federal agencies.

It is important for us to collect and use this information to properly provide, administer and perform services on your behalf. We could not provide optimum service to you without collecting and using this information.

Information We May Disclose

We regard all of your personal information as confidential. Therefore, we do not disclose any non-public personal information about our customers or former customers to anyone except as permitted by law.

In the course of conducting our business dealings, we may disclose to other parties certain information we have about you. These disclosures are only made in accordance with applicable laws, and may include disclosures to reinsurers, administrators, service providers, consultants and regulatory or governmental authorities. Furthermore, certain disclosures of information will be made to your Farm Bureau personnel authorized to have access to your personal information for the purpose of administering your business and providing services to you.

We may disclose the following categories of information to companies that perform services on our behalf or to other financial institutions with which we have joint marketing agreements:

- Information we received from you on applications or other forms, such as your name, address, Social Security number, county Farm Bureau membership number, assets, income and beneficiaries;
- Information about your transactions with us, our affiliates or others, such as your policy coverage, premium, loss history and payment history; and
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- Financial service providers, such as life insurers, automobile insurers, mortgage bankers, securities broker-dealers, and insurance agents;
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If you wish to opt out of disclosures to nonaffiliated third parties, you may choose one of the following options:

1. Complete the opt-out form on our website located at okfarminsurance.com OR
2. Mail or Fax the attached opt-out form to us. Fax # 405-523-2581.

Your opt-out form must reach us within 30 days of your receipt of our privacy notice. Your opt-out

request will take effect on the 7th day following receipt of your request, to allow for notification to all applicable affiliated or nonaffiliated third parties.

If you share your account with another person, either of you may opt-out of disclosures (other than disclosures permitted by law) for both of you. Please indicate on the Opt-Out Notice form if you are opting out for one or both of you.

Conclusion

If you have any questions or comments concerning this Joint Privacy Notice or our privacy standards and procedures, please write us at Post Office Box 53332, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma 73152-3332. Our functional regulator is the State of Oklahoma, Department of Insurance. If we cannot resolve your concerns or answer your questions, feel free to contact our regulator.

This Joint Privacy Notice describes our company's privacy policy and practices in accordance with the Gramm-Leach-Bliley Act, 15 USC §6801, and with various state-specific privacy/financial information laws and regulations in the states in which our company does business.

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EXECUTIVE OUTLOOK

A working membership, a worthwhile organization

By Thad Doye
Executive Director, Oklahoma Farm Bureau

In the yearly Oklahoma Farm Bureau membership renewal pack you receive in the mail, we include a brochure that outlines the many benefits OKFB members receive. From discounts on Ford and Lincoln vehicles to savings on hotels, homeowners insurance, hearing aids, haying equipment, health care and horse trailers, we have a lot of ways to save money as Farm Bureau members.

Beyond the discounts and savings, your organization hosts conferences and events for our members to learn and grow. We have programs to help women in agriculture and young agriculturalists grow and shape our industry together. Our county Farm Bureaus even host annual meetings to showcase their efforts while providing a great evening to learn about the local activities Farm Bureau members take on.

However, the real value of a Farm Bureau membership is in the daily work we do for our fellow Oklahomans. There are many day-to-day ways that your organization fights for farmers, ranchers and rural Oklahomans to help keep them on the land, in the countryside and firmly rooted in local communities.

Every now and then we have the opportunity to share some exciting news about the benefits of being a Farm Bureau member. Perhaps it is a new discount for members, a bill that was passed at the state Capitol through our grassroots advocacy, or possibly a new program our Foundation for Agriculture is taking on.

But it is in the day-to-day work OKFB undertakes to tell

the agriculture story and advocate for a better future for our industry and the way of life we love that makes a Farm Bureau membership valuable to me.


As President Moesel mentions in his column and as you can read about in this magazine, times are tough in agriculture. As a farmer myself, I know it is not easy battling against Oklahoma weather, dipping commodity prices and rising costs.

That is precisely why I find value in my OKFB membership. While farmers and ranchers concentrate on running their farms and ranches to ensure their children have the opportunity to return the farm, your organization is working toward the same goal. While you may be focusing on how to keep your finances stable, Farm Bureau is focused on how we can ensure your production costs do not increase due to unnecessary regulations or undue burdens. In a time when Oklahomans have questions about the food they eat, we work to share the farm and ranch story. And as agriculture looks to the future, OKFB

is right there, standing beside our members – Oklahomans – to provide the help and support that is needed.

While I truly hope you take advantage of the discounts, savings, programs and events available to Farm Bureau members, my even bigger hope is

that every OKFB member knows that their organization will continue to work in the background – day after day, year after year – to ensure agriculture has a future in Oklahoma.

That is the reason I'm with Farm Bureau – and I hope you'll help us as we work to make your membership worth even more. 

“As agriculture looks to the future, OKFB is right there, standing beside our members – Oklahomans – to provide the help and support that is needed.”

— Thad Doye



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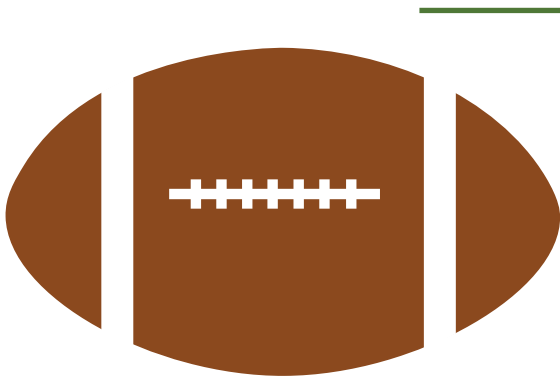
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Agricultural products are the key to your favorites this football season

It doesn't matter if you're cheering for the Cowboys, the Sooners or another gridiron team this season, agriculture is all around you as you prepare for game day; from the football itself to the food at your tailgate.

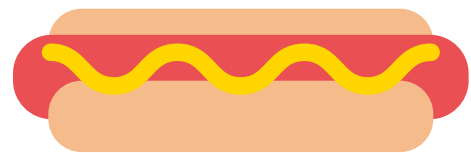


Although it may be known as the **'pigskin'**, footballs are in fact made out of cattle hides. With more than 2 million beef cows in Oklahoma, cattle are one of the state's top commodities.



With just shy of **1,000,000** cotton bales produced right here in Oklahoma in 2017, a portion of that will go on to produce game day items athletes wear before, during and after a game, like:

- sweatpants
- sweatshirts
- hats
- t-shirts
- jerseys
- socks
- bandages
- medical tape
- towels
- gloves



Mainly a combination of beef and pork, the hotdogs at your tailgate could have easily started at one of the many farms or ranches right here in the Sooner state. Oklahoma is home to nearly **2,000** hog farms that raise roughly **2 million** pigs yearly. Make sure to support Oklahoma pork producers by enjoying a hotdog at your next game.

Sources: USDA NASS, Oklahoma Agriculture in the Classroom, Oklahoma State University Turfgrass Management and the Oklahoma Pork Council

TOUCHDOWN

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ON THE FIELD

When working on a new grass variety, the researchers at Oklahoma State University Turfgrass Management have a long list of requirements before rolling out a new variety to the public, such as:

- fine texture
- high density
- dark green color
- uniformity
- drought resistance
- cold hardiness
- salinity tolerance
- ability to handle constant foot traffic
- shade tolerance
- ability to handle diseases, insects and weeds
- quick recovery after traffic injuries (a football game)



FUN FACT

Turf grass varieties produced at OSU have gone on to be used at facilities such as the U.S. Naval Academy Golf Course; practice fields for the Philadelphia Eagles Washington Redskins and the Tennessee Titans; the ballpark for the Texas Rangers; several fields for the University of Oklahoma; and the baseball field at the 2008 Beijing Summer Olympics.

TOUCHDOWN



Laboring for agriculture all year long

While farmers and ranchers work year round to feed the world, OKFB stands up for their needs at the state Capitol and beyond.

Farmers and ranchers stay busy all year working the land, caring for animals, raising their families and volunteering in their communities. They do not always have the time to speak up on issues that affect them at the state Capitol. While they take care of their various obligations at home, Oklahoma Farm Bureau serves in the legislative, regulatory and legal realm.

Throughout the fall season, OKFB members develop and create the policy they will push for in the upcoming legislative session. From private property issues and *ad valorem* taxes to rural health care and rural education, Farm Bureau members have the unique opportunity to write policy that will make a difference for agriculture and rural Oklahoma.

This past August, members kicked off the OKFB's grassroots policy development season. As they gathered in 11 meetings around the state, several issues rose to the top as some of the most common on the minds of farmers and ranchers.

Property taxes

Following the state Legislature's 2019 proposal that would allow municipalities to create "Public Safety Protection Districts" funded by *ad valorem* taxes, Farm Bureau members expressed concern about a potential expansion of property taxes. Money generated through the *ad valorem* tax could be used in several ways such as purchasing and maintaining public safety vehicles

and equipment; fire, police and jail operations; and salaries and benefits of the law enforcement or fire protection employees. OKFB members discussed ways to support public safety while balancing the impact of *ad valorem* tax increases.

Rural health care

As hospitals and medical facilities across rural Oklahoma continue to struggle, Farm Bureau members voiced frustrations regarding access to proper medical care without having to drive to Oklahoma City or Tulsa. Since 2010, 99 rural hospitals across the country have closed due to a combination of lack of proper funding and lack of essential care providers. Currently, 58% of Oklahomans are living in a primary care shortage area.

Mandatory animal identification

In April 2019, the U.S. Department of Agriculture plans to require beef cattle and bison 18 months and over to have an electronic radio frequency identification, or RFID, ear tag to be transported across state lines. The Oklahoma Department of Agriculture, Food and Forestry is currently exploring mandatory identification of cattle sold in state. Farm Bureau members discussed how the change could potentially impact their operations.

Feral hogs

Found in nearly every county within the state, feral hogs are a continual threat

to many farmers and ranchers. With an ability to destroy crops and serving as a potential risk for livestock health, feral hogs continually cause significant damage to the farms and ranches of Farm Bureau members across the state.


Black vultures

Cattle producers, mainly from the eastern and central parts of the state, shared their continual struggle to combat an increasing population of black vultures. The birds often prey on, and kill, newborn calves. Unfortunately for producers, black vultures are protected in the Migratory Bird Treaty even though their numbers are not declining.

Plant-based protein

With the growing amount of plant-based protein options available to consumers, OKFB members voiced concerns about the impact of these alternatives on the beef industry. Many members called for the plant-derived protein products to be accurately labeled.

After writing policy at the county level, Farm Bureau members will make their voices heard once again as they work together to finalize OKFB policy at the organization's annual meeting in November.

Farmers and ranchers do not always have time to stand up for their needs, but united as Farm Bureau members, they can make decisions that will free them to do what they do best: feed the world. 



All the benefits, all together

With a wide array of benefits available to every Oklahoma Farm Bureau member, it is easy to find ways OKFB saves you money.

Oklahoma Farm Bureau members are a pretty diverse bunch. From our state's farmers and ranchers to folks living in midtown Oklahoma City or downtown Tulsa, Oklahomans are as unique as they are friendly.

No matter where you live, what you do or how you enjoy living in our great state, there is likely an OKFB member benefit that can save you money. With an array of discounts on vehicles, hotel stays, medical services, farm equipment, household supplies and vacation destinations, it is easy to find something you can use.

But how do you find that special discount that will save you money and put a smile on your face?

OKFB has conveniently compiled our full list of member benefits in two different places: in our benefits brochure every Farm Bureau member receives with their membership renewal and on our website.

When you received your OKFB membership renewal for our 2020 membership year, a member benefits brochure was included in your renewal packet. Inside, you will find our full list of benefits and all the discount codes and information necessary to use each and every benefit we offer. You can throw it in your car's glove box, keep it next to your computer or keep it handy around the house – it is a great tool to peruse and find a way to save using our benefits partners.


When your paper benefits brochure is not handy or when you are out and about, you can always refer to the OKFB website for a full list of our member benefits. Simply find your way to okfarmbureau.org/benefits on your favorite web-connected device, and you can browse the full list of our benefits partners. Our newly rebuilt website features a wider array of benefits information than before, and it is easy to share or bookmark your favorite benefit to revisit as often as you need.

To make life even easier, you can use our handy links on the member benefits pages to find the member savings portal for several of our benefits. That means there are fewer codes to remember and less effort needed to use your member benefits.

When OKFB adds member benefits throughout the year, our

website is updated to reflect the latest host of discounts and savings available to OKFB members. Of course, we announce new member benefits along with special savings and new ideas on how to use OKFB's member benefits on our Facebook page at facebook.com/okfarmbureau.

If you still have questions or need assistance with using one of the member benefits, you can contact your county Farm Bureau office to get answers on the discounts and offers that come with your membership. Our updated website has a new county directory page if you need information to get in touch with your county Farm Bureau office. Visit okfarmbureau.org/counties to get the contact information for your local Farm Bureau office.

With more than 40 benefits available to OKFB members, it is a great time to browse our member benefits brochure or visit the member benefits page on our website to find savings and discounts that will save you money – even if you are planning some time away from our wonderful, diverse state. And we will have discounts you can use when you return, too. 



From the **GROUND UP**

EST. 2008

STORY BY: BRIANNE SCHWABAUER PHOTOS BY: DUSTIN MIELKE



Twelve miles southeast of Cordell lies the small community of Cloud Chief, Oklahoma. With no school, no gas station, nor even a post office, many drivers may not even realize they are traveling through “downtown” Cloud Chief. What was once a bustling town more than 100 years ago now only shows the remains of what was once there.

But in 2011, one building popped up along the town’s main street to better serve the community and the 188 citizens that live in the 100-square-mile area – the Cloud Chief Fire Department.

Farmer, cattle rancher and Oklahoma Farm Bureau Young Farmers and Ranchers committee member Nocona Cook established the department and currently serves as the fire chief, working alongside 15 other volunteer firefighters, 13 of whom are fellow Oklahoma Farm Bureau members.

“Well, I’ve always wanted to be a firefighter since I was a little kid,” Cook said. “I thought it would be neat to do, but I lived here in Cloud Chief and it was too far to Cordell to be on their fire department even though I went to school there.”

But in 2008, everything was put into perspective for Cook.

As he was driving just a few miles from Cloud Chief, Cook saw smoke and flames off in the distance from a grass fire. As he approached the fire, he could see the flames getting closer and closer to a neighbor’s house. With strong winds bearing down on the fire, Cook watched in awe as members of the Gotebo and Cordell Fire Departments worked together to extinguish the blaze.

With the Cordell Fire Department 10 miles away and the Gotebo Fire Department 14 miles away, he knew it had taken them some time to reach the scene of the blaze.



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BUNKER COAT
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HELMET
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NOT PICTURED

AIR PACK - NEW \$5,000

USED \$2,000
(HARNESS, PACK, MASK,
BOTTLE, REGULATOR)

GLOVES - \$150

NOMEX HOOD - \$30

SUSPENDERS
\$40

BUNKER PANT
\$1,200

BOOTS
\$450

TOTAL:
\$8,720

ALL IT TAKES IS FUNDING

With a passion for serving and helping his community, Cook set off to learn how to set up a fire department. Reaching out to fire chiefs in neighboring rural communities and the district rural fire coordinator, he was able to gather more information, learning what he was about to get himself into.

"I kind of jumped in with both feet, just running in blind," Cook said.

But first, he knew that he would need some more help if his idea was to become reality.

"I think at the first meeting we had 10 guys, roughly," Cook said.

"Basically, all of us are from the area. We're all farmers born and raised right here in this part of the county, and that was kind of our standing stipulation to be on our fire department."

As word got out within the community, roughly \$1,500 was raised through generous donations from area farmers and ranchers who saw Cook's vision and understood the need in that first meeting.

Officially established in August 2008, the Cloud Chief Fire Department started off with two donated pieces of equipment, both older than majority of the men on the force. At first, there was no fire station and no gear.

The department's first major donation was a 1976 Chevrolet ¾-ton pickup, which came from the Bessie Fire Department. Shortly after, the department received a 1977 Chevrolet one-ton pickup donated by the Crawford Fire Department. When neighboring full-time departments would purchase new gear, Cook would contact them, oftentimes being told he could have all the old gear but he couldn't pick through it.

Without a place to store the department's gear or engines, Cook's grandparents' farm shop became the stand-in fire station for nearly two years. No matter if the family happened to be in the middle of planting or harvest, all farming equipment was kept at the back of the shop to ensure the fire engines could be easily accessed in case of an emergency.

Soon realizing just how much money it was going to take to properly outfit each firefighter and gather the right equipment, the department began hosting an annual calf fry and catfish lunch – strategically held after church services were released.

"We've figured out that if you put 'fire service' in front of something, it basically triples the price," Cook said of the equipment the department needs. "You could buy the exact same thing at a hardware store – but it doesn't say 'fire service' on it – for a third of the price. It doesn't matter what it is."

Even with the fundraisers, many state and national grants, and donations here and there, Cook realized the money they had raised was not going to cut it if they really wanted to better serve their community. Nearly five years ago, though, things really began to change for the department.

During a meeting with fellow fire chiefs in Washita County, the group made a decision that the best way to help the county as a whole was to propose a special sales tax in the next election. On Oct. 1, 2014, a 5/8-cent sales tax was implemented. The funds generated by the new tax were evenly distributed among the 11 departments in the county, with each receiving no more than \$36,000 in a year.

"The newer trucks we have – the engine and the brush pumper – the majority of it was bought with sales tax money," Cook said. "We'd buy the truck with sales tax money and then use some money from the fundraiser to put some equipment on it. That way we could make the most with our money."

When the sales tax initially passed, Washita County was benefitting from strong oil and gas activity in the area. More recently, however, that has changed. The downturn in the energy sector means fewer crews are in the area. With fewer people spending money in rural communities and contributing to local sales tax, the funds allocated for the 11 fire departments had to be cut in the most recent election or property taxes would have needed to increase.

The fire departments agreed to do what was best for their community and supported a vote that prevented an increase in property taxes while figuring out how to run their departments using \$1,500 in tax revenues compared to the \$3,000 they had been receiving.

One grant the department has come to rely on is funded by the Oklahoma Forestry Service. Every year, rural fire departments with a population below 10,000 people receive an operational grant varying anywhere from \$2,500 to \$5,000 to help offset expenses. If a department was to receive a \$5,000 forestry grant, it would only amount to an additional \$416 a month.

The Washita County fire departments understand that every dollar counts, especially when it comes at an expense to local residents.

WILDLAND GEAR

WILDLAND COAT – \$500

WILDLAND PANT – \$400

BOOTS – \$400

SUSPENDERS – \$40

TOTAL:

\$1,340

THE TRUCKS

Although the vehicles and trucks the Cloud Chief Fire Department maintains now are very different than what they had in 2008, they have been very resourceful in how they spend tax payer dollars.

For example, while the department has \$14,500 into the purchase of Engine No. 2, the large metropolitan fire department that previously owned it had listed the engine for \$75,000. Through negotiations, Cloud Chief Fire Department and two other rural Oklahoma fire departments were each able to purchase their own state-of-the-art fire engine.

Through negotiations and donations, the Cloud Chief Fire Department continues to go the extra mile to better serve their community.

Cloud Chief is a small town.

WHY DO THEY NEED ALL OF THIS EQUIPMENT?

Yes, the community of Cloud Chief may be small, but through mutual aid, they assist many neighboring departments and communities.

Located in Western Oklahoma, these communities have each been faced with their fair share of large grass fires in recent years. With the two large tankers and two brush pumps, the department is able to spend more time saving homes, cattle and pasture instead of continually refilling a single fire engine.



2016 FORD F-550 Brush pumper No. 2

Uses: grass fires, traffic control, small structure fires

Accessories: bumper, skid, lights, sirens, tools, foam, 500 gallon tank

\$95,000

*Purchased through county sales tax funds



1995 PIERCE Engine No. 2

Uses: structure fires, vehicle wrecks, vehicle fires, rescue extraction

Accessories: Two jaws of life, grain bin rescue tube, medical gear, generator with scene lights, cascade system, airpacks, 2,500 ft. of hose

\$14,500

*Worth \$75,000. Purchased through county sales tax funds



2007 STERLING Tanker No. 2

Uses: delivering water to grass or structure fires, can be used to fight structure fires

Accessories: 3,000 gallon tank, remote controlled front nozzle that can be operated by one person from the cab

Donated

Tanker #2 was donated by Dolese Bros. Co.





PREPARING FOR ALL SITUATIONS

Even though Cloud Chief Fire Department is a volunteer fire department, each and every member goes through extensive training within their first year as a member to ensure they are prepared for any situation. The initial training is followed by a minimum of 24 hours of annual continuing education.

Because of their unique geographic location, the department has implemented a specific training requirement that may not even be a consideration for departments in a larger city.

"When we started, 98% of our calls were either car wrecks or grass fires," Cook said. "So just a requirement that I've put on everybody is a class called Wildland Fundamentals, which is a 16-hour class on grass fires."

In the 11 years since the establishment of the Cloud Chief Fire Department, they have only had one structure fire in their district. Although when neighboring departments encounter large structure fires within their own district that become more than they can handle, Cloud Chief is always there to lend a helping hand through mutual aid.

In addition to the Wildland Fundamentals training, all new volunteer firefighters must

complete the Firefighter 1 training course. Geared mainly towards structural training, this 100-hour class is a national certification that can be earned anywhere in the nation. This is the same training that new firefighters across the country must complete, from the Los Angeles Fire Department to the New York City Fire Department.

"The Firefighter 1 class is the same class that if you got a full-time job at a fire department somewhere and did that for a living," Cook said. "It's the same class our volunteers are taking, so they basically have to live up to the same standards as full-time paid firefighters, but they're volunteer."

During Firefighter 1 training, trainees learn the ins and outs of their uniform and equipment, such as learning about their bunker gear and how to properly put it on; how to use their breathing bottles and ensure they are working properly; and how to extinguish a variety of different fires.

With the frequency that the department was responding to vehicle accidents, many volunteers took the initiative to further their training to better serve victims once they

arrive on scene. Cook began training as an emergency medical technician, even riding in an ambulance for a while to gain more hands-on experience, while others within the department have spent many hours to become emergency medical responders.

With other nationally required training such as extrication (how to safely dismantle a car with a victim inside), medical training, structure fire training, national incident management training and instant command structure training – along with additional training requirements for anyone serving as an officer – many individuals who would want to serve as a volunteer firefighter within their rural community back away because of the time commitment and training program.

"The training really stacks up and that hurts the recruitment, in my opinion, with this list of requirements," Cook said. "It's good training, and they need the training, and training is great, but the requirements on a volunteer – they are volunteering their time, they're taking away from their job, and they've got hours upon hours upon hours of classes that are required."



IT IS ALL A BALANCING ACT

Balancing the duties of being a husband, a father, a farmer, a cattle rancher and a fire chief mean Cook's day is never over.

"I've got 15 guys on this department that rely on me no matter where I'm at," Cook said. "I was in Washington, D.C., at the Congressional Action Tour or I was at the annual Farm Bureau meeting – our page goes off, my phone rings and instantly all my firefighters start calling me. It doesn't matter where I'm at, anywhere in the United States, they start calling me."

Arguably one of the most important duties is the behind-the-scenes work. After long days in the field or at the station, Cook returns home where he and his wife, Jordan, ensure all paperwork is up to date and completed, such as vehicle insurance, workers compensation and grant applications that would help the department purchase much-needed supplies.

With the stress most farmers and ranchers are already facing, coupled with the long days and nights of calving season, planting,

harvest and general day-to-day requirements to keep their business operational, farmers and ranchers do not have a lot of time to spare to begin with.

"It really takes a different cut of person to want to take out that much of their personal time away from their job, away from their farms, away from their families to go do all this training to become a firefighter," Cook said. "It's really a strain."

Although it is not easy, each and every volunteer has managed to find their own special way of balancing time on the farm, time at their job in town, time at the fire department and time with their family.

"A lot of times guys will show up (to the station) for a fire with their wife in the pickup. We'll go to fires and (their wife will) go somewhere and come back and pick them up," Cook said. "It's kind of a family affair a lot."

But for most of the Cloud Chief Fire Department volunteers, things have not always

been this way. Many of the volunteers have been involved since the beginning, but in 2008, most were not married.

"Actually, when I started the department here I was just married," Cook said. "We got married in 2007 and we established the department in 2008. So I was still in college and my wife was still in college, being in our first year of marriage and starting a fire department and doing the farming."

Even with all the long days and long nights, Cook would not have it any other way. Every time he arrives at the station, he sees all the hard work he and his team have put in throughout the years to ensure the safety of their community.

"It's just hard to think about what my life would be like without the fire department right now," Cook said. "From the trucks we first had to the trucks we have now, it's just blood, sweat and tears from everyone on the department. Me and all my guys." **FB**



- 1 Each of the 16 volunteers requires structural and wildland gear, costing more than \$10,000 in gear per person.
- 2 The newest addition to the department, the 'great wall of rescue,' is used to help people escape grain entrapment.
- 3 Capable of holding more than 3,000 gallons of water, Tanker No. 2 has aided the department when fighting large fires.
- 4 In a matter of 11 years, the Cloud Chief Fire Department has vastly expanded its capabilities, facilities and equipment.





GATHERING GROWING

GIVING

OKLAHOMA FARM BUREAU
78TH ANNUAL MEETING

NOVEMBER 8-10 • COX CONVENTION CENTER • OKLAHOMA CITY

Oklahoma Farm Bureau members return to the Cox Convention Center in Oklahoma City for the organization's 78th annual meeting November 8-10. Packed with speakers, events, awards, policy discussions, fun and fellowship, we hope you will join us as we celebrate with the largest yearly gathering of Oklahoma Farm Bureau members.

CONVENTION HIGHLIGHTS



FOUNDATION NIGHT OUT

Join your fellow Farm Bureau members for a fun night of entertainment and fellowship on Friday evening. The evening includes music by Jimmy Dale & The Beltline, a reception featuring games, and plenty of time to swap stories.

BREAKOUT SESSIONS

Information-packed breakout sessions on Friday afternoon will provide updates on a host of agricultural and rural topics. Topics and speakers will be announced on the OKFB website.

SILENT AUCTION

OKFB members will once again be able to bid on a variety of donated products and services to support the activities and mission of the OKFB Foundation for Agriculture.

SATURDAY AWARDS BANQUET

Join us to celebrate the achievements and accomplishments of Farm Bureau members from the past year during our awards banquet on Saturday night.

SUNDAY WITH SEN. LANKFORD

We will wrap up our time together with a Sunday morning breakfast, worship service and a message from U.S. Sen. James Lankford.



CONVENTION SCHEDULE

Below is a schedule of selected activities and events planned for our 2019 annual meeting. For the latest convention news, updates and the full schedule, visit our website at okfarmbureau.org. The final schedule will be published at convention.

FRIDAY | NOVEMBER 8

9 a.m.	Convention registration opens
10 a.m.	YF&R Discussion Meet begins
11 a.m.	Silent auction opens
11 a.m.	OKFB Expo trade show opens
11:30 a.m.	OKFB Women's Leadership Committee conference and luncheon
11:30 a.m.	YF&R Discussion Meet final round luncheon
1:30 p.m.	Opening general session
3:15 p.m.	Breakout sessions start (sessions repeat at 4:15 p.m.)
5:30 p.m.	County presidents reception
5:30 p.m.	YF&R dinner and caucus
6:30 p.m.	Foundation Night Out

SATURDAY | NOVEMBER 9

7:30 a.m.	Committee breakfasts: Credentials, Financial Review & Resolutions Committees
8 a.m.	Convention registration opens
8 a.m.	OKFB Expo trade show opens
8 a.m.	Silent auction opens
8:45 a.m.	OFBMIC policyholders meeting
9:30 a.m.	General session begins
1 p.m.	District Farm Bureau caucuses (Districts 3, 6 and 9)
1:30 p.m.	General session begins
5:30 p.m.	OKFB Ag Fund reception
6:45 p.m.	Banquet and awards session
8:30 p.m.	Cupcake social

SUNDAY | NOVEMBER 10

7:15 a.m.	County Presidents coffee talk
7:15 a.m.	Women's Leadership Committee coffee talk
7:15 a.m.	Public Policy coffee talk
8 a.m.	Worship service and breakfast

story by HANNAH DAVIS • photos by DUSTIN MIELKE

TOUGHER THAN DIE




START

Facing tough times in agriculture, five Oklahoma farmers learn to cope with the stress by leaning on their faith, their friends and their families.





GARY WILLIAMS
Red Rock



Farmers have always been known as a tough and resilient people. And for good reason. Many in Oklahoma come from a long line of pioneers who toiled long and hard to tame a rough and rugged prairie. Facing whipping winds, extreme droughts, dangerous tornadoes, destructive hail storms and harsh conditions, farmers have always faced challenges and uncertainty.

When times get tough, they put their head down and slug away. But what happens when the stress of their way of life begins to become too much to bear?

Today, farmers day after day battle against ever-increasing input costs, plunging commodity prices, unpredictable trade disputes and devastating natural disasters.

Across the country, farmers are facing record-high debt that has grown by nearly 40% over the past seven years, according to the American Farm Bureau Federation. And the number of farm loans that are at least 30 days past due is at its highest this year since 2012. In Oklahoma, the number of farm bankruptcies more than doubled over the last year.

Coupled with the responsibility of carrying on their family's generations-long legacy of farming, the stress can quickly take its toll on the will of the farmer.

Often, all of that stress is dealt with silently. Farmers are supposed to be tough; it's in their blood. If generations before



BRYAN VINCENT
Ponca City

them endured just as much if not worse, why should they complain? Instead, they bury the stress, the pain and the fears.

But at a small table in a local café in north central Oklahoma, five area farmers find a place of solace in each other over coffee and breakfast once a week.

Yes, farmers have been meeting at the local diner or co-op over coffee for decades. It is not a new thing. But this is different.

It is a community built on a bond of trust, where it is OK to be vulnerable and share their deepest burdens.

Around two years ago, Tom Cannon and Joseph Tripp - both farmers in the Blackwell area - found themselves at a local basketball game. Already friends, they discussed their operations and the plethora of

struggles they had been facing as they watched the game.

"Tom and I are in this gym and we look around and we don't have anything in common with anyone else," Joseph said.

In the midst of a multitude of trials on the farm, Tom and Joseph both walked away from the conversation that evening feeling a bit of the burden lifted.

"It was amazing how much it helped me just that day," Tom said.

The conversation sparked an idea in the two farmers. Why not get a group of producers together to meet and talk?

Originally, the plan was to talk about business. They invited a local crop consultant, Bryan Vincent, and Red

Rock area farmers Marty Williams and Gary Williams. The group they created consisted of self-proclaimed progressive farmers who are always looking to implement new production practices in a profitable manner.

But the purpose of the group quickly evolved into something much more.

"I know Tom and Joe came into it thinking it was going to be helping us to make business decisions, bounce ideas off each other," Marty said. "I went up there needing therapy."

The group began meeting once a week over eggs, bacon and toast at Mary's Grill in downtown Tonkawa. From reading scripture and praying over one another to

MARTY WILLIAMS
Red Rock



sharing pictures of their kids or venting about their latest frustrations on the farm, the group has become a safe place for each man to reveal his greatest victories and his darkest struggles.

"It's way past farming," Bryan said. "It's a chance to meet with like-minded people. It's a chance for us to let some things out. We laugh, we may cry together, we may be disgusted together. We share our emotions, whether good, bad."

But admittedly, it's not easy for farmers to share their struggles.

"The mentality is just shut up and work harder, it'll be all right," Marty said.

"Because of that independent nature of who our ancestors were, I mean these were mostly land run people - fiercely independent, tougher than a boot," Tom said. "I hear stories of my great-grandparents and my grandparents and how tough they were and the hard times they went through, and I think what I'm going through isn't hard."

Most of the farmers in the group were skeptical at first.

"When I first got invited, I thought, 'Yeah, we're going to sit around and cry on each other's shoulders? And this is going to be an hour and a half once a week when I could be doing something else?'" Gary Williams said.

Yet after meeting time and time again, the men began to recognize that their pain and their trials were real and that they were not alone in them.

"As it went on there for about a year, it got a little deeper, maybe a little darker," Gary said. "Everybody kind of started opening up and I think that's good. Because you can't keep all that bottled up."

Much of the stress producers face comes from the day-to-day management decisions they are each forced to make.

"Our ancestors worked hard physically and their pain was felt," Joseph said. "This deal's all management and mental."

Though many producers across the country have just now begun to feel the effects of the struggling farm economy, Oklahoma farmers have been dealing with it for years.

When commodity prices were at record highs in the early 2010s, Oklahoma farmers grappled with a devastating



JOSEPH TRIPP
Blackwell

drought that prevented them from reaping the benefits.

"In other states, they're not worried about managing a whole lot of risk because they can raise crops consistently," Marty said. "Here we can't. It's so risky with the weather and what Mother Nature throws at us here in Oklahoma. So it's really hard to manage any risk."

While production costs such as rent, seed, fertilizer and fuel have skyrocketed,

commodity prices have remained at levels similar to decades ago.

"Right now, with our cost of production, you can't have a hiccup," Marty said. "If you have one little weather hiccup, there's no room for error anymore."

Because production agriculture is a capital-intensive business, farmers are required to borrow money to operate - and to make a living.

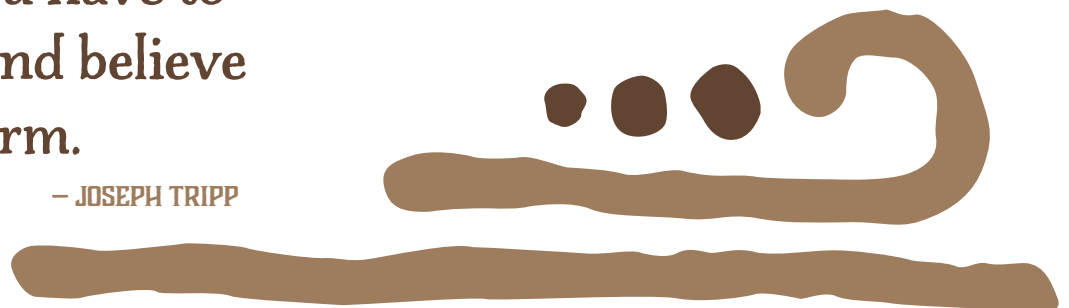
"You keep a line of credit and pretty

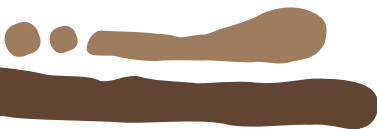
soon that sucker's full, so you have no more to borrow from it," Marty said. "Well, we have no other income to pay for our family either. So you borrow that money to raise the family, but you have to be careful.

"And then, all of a sudden there is no money and you don't know what to do. So you borrow a little more. Then it doesn't rain and all your crops die and you have nothing to put back to pay that loan back. So it's kind of a vicious cycle."

“Golly, a farmer’s faith is tested. You have to have faith and believe in God to farm.

— JOSEPH TRIPP





In some cases, farmers have lost decades worth of work in a matter of three or four bad years.

"In recent years, probably the last four or five years, the cash flow situation has been pretty dire," Gary said. "I'm burning a lot of equity that was built up over the last 20 years just to stay afloat through this deal. There's an end point eventually where you don't have any equity left to keep going."

Despite doing their best to manage risk and make good business decisions, many of the difficulties producers are facing are unable to be prevented.

"It seems like the stresses come at us in so many different ways, so many different angles," Joseph said. "I'm just in a situation right now where I can't hardly make anything work on paper.

"I told a guy last night I feel like I'd be better off if I just went and sat at the coffee shop all winter. That's sad to say, but I might lose less money. That's kind of the feeling you get after you've been whipped around. We're demoralized a little bit."

When things go wrong on the farm, it is not just a bad day and it is not only losing money. It hits at the core of who they are as farmers.

"I had three great-grandparents that all made the (land) run," Bryan said. "They were all dedicated to the farm. And it's what we are. It's who we are."

Though they admit that it shouldn't, the ability to plant a seed in the ground,

nurture and care for it for months and witness it produce a crop often gives their lives meaning and purpose.

"That's what our identity often is placed in - how much we can produce," Tom said.

As the third, fourth or fifth generation on their family's farm, the pressure of maintaining the farm that their ancestors built and tended for decades weighs heavy.

"It's not so much the money," Joseph said. "For me, I'm the fourth generation. I grew up on a tractor wondering if I was going to be the generation that was going to lose the family farm."

Fewer and fewer people involved in agricultural production can also lend to a sense of isolation for farmers.

"I can sit in a Walmart parking lot or be anywhere, and I can just feel the



TOM CANNON
Blackwell

disconnect as I interact with people," Joseph said. "And that is huge. A lot of that disconnect is a portion of the root cause of our stresses."

Decades ago, when more of the population was still living on the land, farmers were able to feel a stronger sense of community with one another.

"Used to, everybody did get together and they would have a once-a-month card party or a dance or whatever it might be. There was more of a sense of community back then," Gary said. "But since there's so few of us out here and we're all going different directions, there's just not that sense of community that there was 50 years ago. And that makes it even tougher."

Sometimes it is difficult to speak even with close family members about their struggles, simply because it is hard to convey the weight of all the challenges to someone who is not in the middle of it.

"I get pretty upset about some stuff and they (the group) are the only people that understand," Joseph said. "Some of this stuff I talk about my wife doesn't even understand."

"Yes I could talk to my wife, but I got tired of that," Marty said. "I wanted to talk to some guys about what they had gone through, so it was neat and really helpful."

And that's part of what makes this group so unique.

"Those guys are in it with me," Joseph said. "We are kind of in a battle and the only people that truly realize what's really happening on the frontline are those that are in the foxhole with you. And those guys are in the foxhole with me as far as farming goes, so they truly understand what I'm dealing with from day to day."

Week by week and struggle by struggle, these men rise up and support one another in their greatest times of need.

"I don't know what it would have been like not meeting with them," Marty said. "There was one time this year that I sent out a text, 'Guys, I need to meet with you.' It was just an emotional thing for me. I needed to meet with them. I don't even remember what we talked about but I just wanted to be there."

They've developed an unbreakable bond through which they can help each other face any struggle or challenge that arises.

"You know, we mimic Christ's relationship in our relationship with others," Tom said. "Having that relationship with those men has been

“ There’s an intimacy that we have with our farms, too, that other businesses don’t have. There’s a deep and personal intimacy with something that you’ve grown up with. And it’s not inanimate; it’s a living thing and it’s cared for you. It’s put food on the table for you, it’s bought your jeans, it’s put your kids in school, it’s done all that for you. And then when that failure happens, it’s tough.

— TOM CANNON

huge. Huge. Like-minded men facing the exact same struggles that I am, in the same environment, in the same area."

Each of these men has fought varying degrees of depression and mental health illnesses. For them, the key has been relying on their faiths, their families and their friends.

"Everybody has (stress), and it's nothing to be ashamed of," Tom said. "You've got to put light on it. Don't stay alone and in the dark. Put light on it. Expose it for what it is and get some help."

"The first place I'd look for it is your neighbor that you trust or a friend that you trust. You've got to talk it out."

People are not meant to go through life alone - in good times or in bad times. Gathering and talking with trusted friends or family can often help lift some of the heavy burden.

"I would encourage anybody - any group of farmers, friends, whatever - to form a group," Gary said. "Even if it's a poker night on Friday night and you sit around and drink a few cool ones or whatever and just blow off some steam and talk. Not just in bad times, I think you should do that regardless, even in good times. Share your victories and triumphs with one another, support one another."

After leaning on each other to get through various trials, the men now recognize the need - and feel equipped - to reach out to friends and neighbors, too.

"For me, I've come to a point where the farming stuff doesn't matter as much as it used to," Marty said. "I worry about these guys. I come just to see how they're doing."

A phone call, text or even a visit to a fellow farmer can make all the difference.

"I don't know really how to do anything but just be there for each other," Joseph said. "I wish I could think of some way to

“ It’s tough. It’s pretty discouraging. You start questioning yourself a lot. I guess you have to eventually come to terms with that and have confidence in yourself. It’s just out of your control. You can control yourself, but you can’t control the thousand other variables that come with the business.

— GARY WILLIAMS



relax the stresses we deal with, but the society that we’re in and the financial situation we’re in, we’ve just got to get through this the best that we can.”

It is not enough to wait on a fellow farmer to ask for help.

“Mental health is serious,” Bryan said. “It can be overcome, but it takes more than just one. You can’t do it yourself. It takes help. Dadgummit, a farmer’s independent. He won’t ask for it.

“Don’t let your neighbors and your friends become a hermit. If you don’t see a guy coming around, he doesn’t speak, he quits waving, sometimes just look over the fence. Just be aware of what’s going on.”

United by a strong faith, each of the men leans upon their belief that ultimately they are not in control.

“The way I look at it, if God doesn’t want me to do this, it’s not going to happen,” Joseph said. “I pretty much just leave it up to Him.”


“I pray about it and trust the Lord is going to provide,” Marty said. “If He takes it all, He takes it all. It’s not mine.”

Though the past handful of years have tested the patience, will and grit of these men, they’re not giving up. If anything, they’ve discovered what is most important to them.

“Maybe it’s good for all of us,” Joseph said. “Maybe it’s just a painful experience

that is going to force us to put things in perspective. Farming doesn’t have to be as important as we make it. It’s somewhat our identity, but it’s not what God wants.”

The tough times have caused each of the members of the group to evaluate what they truly value most in their lives.

“Going through these rough times, I can see what really matters,” Marty said. “And what really matters is that I’m a good man of character, I’m loyal to my friends and family, I try hard. I want to keep that integrity - that’s important to me. I want to be a man of faith, praise God, and really everything else will fall into place. And if it doesn’t, it’s OK.” 



**READ MORE STORIES ABOUT THE
REALITIES FACING FARM COUNTRY AT
OKFARMBUREAU.ORG/REALFARMTALK.**

HIGHWAY HERO

STORY BY: **Becky Samples**

In the comic book world, superheroes often have a set of values that they pledge to protect and uphold. This ever-present creed is what serves as their moral compass. Service, experience and integrity are characteristics that our policyholders and members have come to expect from Oklahoma Farm Bureau Insurance and our agents. Although it is not every day that our agents have an opportunity to experience the importance of these intrinsic values in their own lives.

Chad Haberman has served as an OKFB Insurance agent for more than 20 years in Sapulpa, Oklahoma. In that time, he has faithfully served his community in many ways, such as serving as a volunteer firefighter, member of the Woody Guthrie Coalition, president of the Sapulpa Kiwanis club and a volunteer coach. Serving his policyholders is just one other way he can help take an active role his local community.

"OKFB Insurance has allowed me to take a more personal role in supporting my friends and neighbors in Sapulpa," Chad said. "I have the opportunity to help protect our policyholders in a very real way. I just never knew how I might someday be on the other end of this type of relationship."

In May, Chad's daughter, Rachel, a senior at Central Arkansas State University, was traveling with friends on an Athletes in Action trip to Gulf Shores, Alabama, when the group hit a snag. Outside of Dumas, Arkansas, the group found themselves stranded in unfamiliar territory, both physically and metaphorically. Their car had a flat tire, and as it happened, no spare.

As the group assessed the situation, Rachel called her dad. Chad, who was on his way to the office, assured her that as soon as he got there, he would look up any Farm Bureau agents in the area. Before Chad had a chance to finish his conversation, Rachel said someone had pulled over.

Lawrence Hudson, or "Bubba," as his friends and colleagues refer to him, was traveling the same stretch of highway when he came upon the group on the side of the road.

"I saw a group of young ladies sitting on the side of the road who obviously had some car trouble," Bubba said. "I know that even in the time of need, a stranger pulling over to help can seem threatening, so I told them who I was and where I worked."

After Bubba approached the group

and introduced himself, he told them that he was an agent for Arkansas Farm Bureau Insurance.

"I thought how crazy that we would happen to have this flat and the first person to stop would be a Farm Bureau agent," Rachel said. "Knowing my dad as a Farm Bureau agent and how hard he works to take care of his clients, I knew we were in good hands."

Rachel, still on the phone with her dad, explained the remarkable coincidence. To Chad's relief and peace of mind, a local Farm Bureau agent had beat him to the punch. Through his own experience of working for OKFB Insurance, he was confident that he could trust that his daughter and her friends were safe in Bubba's care.

True to his word, Bubba retrieved tools from home, purchased a tire from a local tire shop and returned to the stranded group. With a new tire, the group continued safely onto their beach destination.

Bubba has served as an agent for the company for more than 30 years. Not surprised about Bubba's act of kindness and willingness to jump in, his colleagues say this is just the type of friend he is.

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special guy," said Randy Lloyd, associate state sales director for Arkansas Farm Bureau Insurance. "Bubba has been one of the key leaders with the transition into our new insurance product for farmers and was one of the first to become certified through Ag Promise, a certification that through educational and experience requirements can better provide risk management services that address the needs of farmers and ranchers in Arkansas. It does not surprise me one bit that he would go above and beyond for a stranger."

"I'm proud to work for a company whose values are so deeply ingrained, it can be found in other Farm Bureaus across the country," Chad said. "I know other fellow agents who have exemplified the same 'service before self' attitude in various situations. You never know when you might be on the receiving end of that commitment."

Although they may not wear a large "FB" across their chest, OKFB Insurance agents stand ready to help protect our members whenever and wherever they need it most. Rachel is just one person among thousands who have learned first-hand that everyday heroes do not need a mask and cape to save the day. **FB**

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Member benefit creates pilot program in six FFA programs across the state

A data-driven tool for livestock producers of all sizes, AgBoost has joined efforts with the Oklahoma Farm Bureau Foundation for Agriculture to implement a pilot program at six schools across the state.

AgBoost, established to help producers with everyday herd management, breeding and marketing of genetically superior animals, can be used right from a producer's phone or computer in the field.

With the flexibility of AgBoost, teachers are able to create profiles for each student, write lesson plans specific to their program and monitor the students' work. This fall, Chickasha, Apache, Moore, Norman, Broken Arrow and Strother FFA chapters will be implementing AgBoost within their classrooms. Based on results from the trial period, the hope is to implement the program for free to all Oklahoma classrooms.

Melinda Tague, a Norman High School FFA adviser, is excited for the opportunity to implement AgBoost in her own classroom and see what her students can learn through the program.

"My biggest goal is to let the kids see how technology has really influenced the beef industry and agriculture in general," Tague said. "So many times we just hit the basics of anatomy and breeds, but we want to take it a step further."

As a company, AgBoost strives to invest in the next generation of agriculturalists and believes it is the key to the sustainability of the industry as a whole.

"When you look at the challenges the livestock industry is facing, such as limited land and water, a growing population, more demand for food and lack of consumers' trust, now more than ever, technology has to play a big role in food production," said Sean Akadiri, AgBoost president and CEO. "Not only do we have to provide tools that will allow all livestock producers to be more efficient and economically viable, but also educate and invest in the next generation of farmers and ranchers."

With several of Tague's students already having existing breeding programs, she hopes the knowledge and resources her students gain by using this program can be implemented within their families' operations.



Above: Norman High School FFA adviser Melinda Tague works with Canaan Carman, a Norman High School senior and president of their FFA chapter, as they navigate through the AgBoost program. Norman High School, along with five other FFA programs across the state, was selected to be a part of a pilot program so students can better understand the technology that has been developed within the beef industry.




Foundation makes donation to food banks with help of OK FFA members



Above: OKFB Executive Director Thad Doye (center), alongside the 2019-2020 Oklahoma FFA officer team, presents a check to the RFBO and CFBO for the 'Food for Kids' nutritional backpack program.

Through the joint efforts of FFA chapters from across the state that participated in the FFA Hunger Challenge, the Oklahoma Farm Bureau Foundation for Agriculture presented a check for more than \$35,000 Aug. 20 to be divided between the Regional Food Bank of Oklahoma and the Community Food Bank of Eastern Oklahoma.

The money raised will help both food banks distribute protein sticks through their backpack programs to help the one in four Oklahoma children facing inconsistent access to nutritious meals. In 2018, the Regional Food Bank of Oklahoma distributed more than 1 million protein sticks.

Roughly 800 animals were donated by students from across Oklahoma to create the protein sticks, while those who donated money helped offset the costs of processing, inspections and labeling. 

Bolay attends AFBF Women's Communications Boot Camp in Washington, D.C

Mignon Bolay, Oklahoma Farm Bureau Women's Leadership Committee chair and Noble County Farm Bureau member, was recently recognized by the American Farm Bureau Federation as one of 15 farm and ranch women leaders who completed the organization's Women's Communications Boot Camp summer session.

The intensive four-day course completed by the agricultural leaders was comprised of hands-on sessions related to public speaking, working with the media and messaging to the public.

"Women's Communications Boot Camp is the experience of a lifetime," said Isabella Chism, an Indiana row crop farmer and vice chair of the AFBF Women's Leadership Committee. "It's gratifying to see the increased confidence of these women leaders, all of whom are passionate advocates for agriculture. Graduates of this program are effective in connecting with influencers at the local, state and national levels."

Special guest speaker Anne Hazlett, senior adviser for rural affairs at the White House Office of National Drug Control Policy, shared highlights of her journey to leadership with Boot Camp attendees. Hazlett's insights included thoughts on the

courage it takes to know when to say "no" to ensure that you remain focused on reaching your goals, and to not be afraid of new opportunities and taking risks. She also emphasized the importance of building a strong and honest support system when pursuing leadership roles.

Other Boot Camp graduates include Ashley Jeffers-Sample, Arizona; Adrienne DeSutter, Illinois; Ann Margaret Hughes, Kentucky; Rachel Lee, Louisiana; Danielle Bauer, Maryland; Chris Catterton, Maryland; Heidi Cooper, Massachusetts; Makenzi Blakeney, Mississippi; Shannon Higginbotham, New Jersey; Jane Gardner, North Carolina; Ashton Walls, Ohio; Kristie Glaser, Oregon; Terra Davis, Tennessee; and Stacey Righter, Washington.

The American Farm Bureau Women's Leadership Committee, in partnership with AFBF staff, hosts and provides training for the Women's Communications Boot Camp. This the 13th year of the program, which has 195 graduates and is open to all women involved in Farm Bureau. An application process is used to choose the participants.



Above: While in Washington D.C., WLC Chair Mignon Bolay visited with U.S. Rep. Frank Lucas about Oklahoma the difficulties facing Oklahoma agriculture.



Above: Fifteen women from various state Farm Bureau organizations, including OKFB's Mignon Bolay (second from right), spent four days gaining intensive training so they can become influencers at the local, state and national level. Sessions consisted of hands-on opportunities related to public speaking, working with the media and messaging.



OKFB hosts 10 high school students at OYLA conference

Ten high school seniors from across the state recently participated in Oklahoma Farm Bureau’s Oklahoma Youth Leading Agriculture conference June 25-28, 2019.

OYLA is a four-day annual event hosted by the OKFB Young Farmers and Ranchers to prepare high school students for a future career in agriculture and to advance youth leadership skills.

The 10 students included Tori Booker, Altus, Jackson County; Jaden Brunner, Cushing, Payne County; Ryan Clark, Henryetta, Okmulgee County; Laramie Coffey, Morrison, Noble County; Zachary Evans, Mangum, Greer County; Abby Jeffrey, El Reno, Canadian County; Sarah Knowles, Keota, Haskell County; Callee Lester, Cheyenne, Roger Mills County; Dassie May, Shawnee, Pottawatomie County; and Katelynn Williams, Yale, Payne County.

“The students that participated in our OYLA conference are some of the best and brightest our state has to offer,” said Brent Haken, OKFB YF&R chair. “We always appreciate the chance to invest in the agriculturalists of tomorrow.”

Throughout the week, the group had the opportunity to tour local agricultural

enterprises including American Plant Products, Oklahoma National Stockyards, Lopez Foods and the First Oklahoma Ag Network radio studio. Students also volunteered at the Regional Food Bank of Oklahoma, learned how to communicate their agriculture story with the media, and discovered how to share agriculture in their communities with the Oklahoma Ag in the Classroom program.

The conference also served as a way for students to learn more about Farm Bureau’s work for the future of agriculture and rural Oklahoma by visiting with OKFB President Rodd Moesel, Women’s Leadership Committee Chair Mignon Bolay and YF&R Chair Brent Haken.

Participants of the conference are selected through an application process. The students represent some of Oklahoma’s most promising high school agriculturalists.

The students attending the conference plan to pursue a wide variety of agricultural degrees including agribusiness, agricultural communications, animal science and pre-vet, and plant and soil sciences.

“During my four days at OYLA, I learned so many new things about the agricultural industry and all the great things Oklahoma Farm Bureau has to offer. One of my main takeaways was the vast career opportunities our industry has to offer. We were fortunate enough to listen to many different speakers that were all employed in agriculture, but weren’t farmers or ranchers. It really opened my eyes to all the career opportunities there are in ag. We also got to learn about all the amazing scholarships and programs the Oklahoma Farm Bureau has to offer for its young members. I learned that Farm Bureau is much more than just an insurance agency. I had an amazing time at OYLA and can not wait to further my involvement in Oklahoma Farm Bureau.

— Abby Jeffrey, El Reno
Canadian County Farm Bureau member



Above: Throughout the four-day event, OYLA participants learned about potential career opportunities within agriculture while advancing their leadership skills.



Above: Ryan Clark learns how to properly communicate his agriculture story.

YF&R members gather in northeast Oklahoma for summer conference

More than 30 young Oklahoma Farm Bureau members from across the state met in northeast Oklahoma to tour local agriculture businesses and farms and network with fellow young agriculturalists during the 2019 OKFB Young Farmers and Ranchers Summer Conference July 12-14.

The weekend conference featured tours of local ranches including Circle C Angus Ranch owned by Osage County Farm Bureau member Will Cabbage and Strom Ranches, run by Washington County Farm Bureau members John and Macy Strom.

Conference attendees learned more about Oklahoma's pecan industry during a visit to Flying G Ranch in Sand Springs - owned by Tulsa County Farm Bureau members Mike and Lotsee Spradling - where former YF&R committee member and pecan producer Chad Selman of Skiatook explained how the nuts are grown, harvested and shelled. During a visit to Mock Brothers Saddlery and Western Wear in Sand Springs, members had the

chance to discover how the store creates custom leather saddles and goods.

Oklahoma Secretary of Agriculture Blayne Arthur visited the conference to share how the Oklahoma Department of Agriculture, Food and Forestry is working to help provide relief to farmers and ranchers as they face various challenges in the agriculture industry.

YF&R members also learned about agricultural business management practices and financial planning from Jared Kelle of Farm Data Services, Inc., heard about Noble Research Institute's work to help farmers and ranchers improve their operations from YF&R committee member Josh Anderson, and witnessed the opportunities available for young farmers and ranchers in Farm Bureau from various committee members.

To learn more about the opportunities available through OKFB YF&R, visit okfarmbureau.org/yfr.



Above: More than 30 OKFB YF&R members from across Oklahoma traveled to the Bartlesville area where they visited several agricultural businesses to better understand the diversity found within the state.



Top: YF&R Chairmen Brent and Jenny Haken speak with Macy Strom regarding some of the challenges she and her husband face at Strom Ranches. Bottom: YF&R members sample pecan products while touring Flying G Ranch in Tulsa County.

Logan County Farm Bureau member discusses farm land values

With Oklahoma farm land values up by 3.9% according to a recent report, Logan County Farm Bureau member John Pfeiffer told KOKH FOX 25 News on Aug. 21 the rise could make it more difficult for young producers to get started in the industry.

“If we don’t produce, then it’s either going to have to be imported from out of the country where we don’t have any control over how it’s being produced or what’s going into it, or people aren’t going to have enough to eat,” Pfeiffer said.

In addition to concerns about not being able to produce enough to feed the American population, Pfeiffer expressed concerns about the difficulty that young farmers are already facing.

“It makes it very expensive for a young person to get started,” Pfeiffer said. “If a young person has to buy the land to begin to farm, then he can’t afford to do it. He has to be able to find somebody that will work with him or has to be able to rent it as he goes through it.”

For the full length clip, visit okfb.news/2HoDWLU.

OKFB selects Steve Thompson to lead public policy efforts

Oklahoma Farm Bureau has named Steve Thompson as the farm organization’s senior director of public policy.

In his new role, Thompson will lead OKFB’s public policy team as they work to implement Farm Bureau’s grassroots policy goals at both the state Capitol and in Washington, D.C.

“Steve has a heart for serving Oklahoma’s agriculture community, and his depth and breadth of experience working on agriculture issues make him an ideal leader for our policy efforts,” said Rodd Moesel, OKFB president. “With Steve at the helm of our public policy department, we are excited to continue serving our members’ interests in the policy arena.”

Thompson, who was raised on a Lincoln County farm his family settled in the land run of 1891, joined OKFB’s public policy department in February as an assistant director of public policy.

“I’m excited to build upon the relationships and accomplishments that Sen. Ron Justice earned for Farm Bureau members as our policy department continues to advocate for Oklahoma agriculture,” Thompson said. “Oklahoma Farm Bureau is known for active engagement and respectful advocacy on behalf of our members. The policy team will continue to work hard every day as we strive to uphold this tradition.”

Prior to joining OKFB, Thompson served as director of government relations and ag programs for American Farmers and Ranchers. Thompson also

worked for nine years at the Oklahoma Department of Agriculture, Food and Forestry, first as legislative liaison, then as associate commissioner. He studied agricultural education and agricultural economics at Oklahoma State University.

Thompson also serves as a livestock show superintendent at the Oklahoma Youth Expo and Tulsa State Fair. He received the okPork Ambassador Award from the Oklahoma Pork Council in 2019, the Honorary State FFA Degree in 2018 and the Distinguished Service Award from the Oklahoma Cattlemen’s Association in 2007. He and his wife, Jana, have one son, Will, and they reside in Yukon.



Steve Thompson

WLC participates in 'Read an accurate ag book' day held Sept. 6



Above: OKFB WLC members (left to right) Mary Sloan, District 6; Cindy Schoenecke, District 9; and Mignon Bolay, WLC chair; were among many OKFB members who participated in ‘Read an Accurate Ag Book’ Day at schools within their local communities on Sept. 6.

OKFB WLC attends AITC Summer Conference July 11 in Shawnee

Members of the Oklahoma Farm Bureau Women's Leadership Committee participated in the Oklahoma Agriculture in the Classroom Summer Conference held July 11 in Shawnee.

WLC assisted teachers as they led workshops, participated in a Q&A panel discussion, and spoke with teachers from across the state on the Bushels for Books program during the trade show.

"Agriculture In the Classroom always has a lot of great resources," said Tammy Will, Morrison Public Schools high school science teacher and Noble County Farm Bureau member. "Summer Conference is

always a great place to go and collaborate with others and learn new things."

Throughout the last six years, Will has used the curriculum developed by AITC to use in her own classroom.

"I have hatched chicks in my own classroom for several years," Will said. "It's amazing even in a small rural school kids are just enamored by chicks coming out of their shell."

This annual event is free to all teachers in Oklahoma. For information on other opportunities available through Ag in the Classroom, visit agclassroom.org/ok/.



Above: Tammy Will, Morrison Public Schools high school science teacher and Noble County Farm Bureau member, leads a workshop highlighting biotechnology within agriculture.



Above: Members of the OKFB Women's Leadership Committee participate in the Oklahoma Agriculture in the Classroom Summer Conference held July 11 in Shawnee.



Above: Sandi Berry, District 4 WLC member, shares about her experience with agriculture in western Oklahoma and how she incorporated agricultural products into her art classes.

Women's Leadership Committee awards Nurse's Training Scholarships

The Oklahoma Farm Bureau Women's Leadership Committee recently awarded four \$500 scholarships to nursing students.

The recipients included Joyce Taylor of Creek County, Jordan Roper of Custer County, Kylee Campbell of Alfalfa County and April Hale of Okmulgee County.

The WLC recognizes the significant role nurses play in ensuring a high quality of life for all Oklahomans, especially those in rural areas. With the cost of education

rising yearly, the committee is proud to provide four students with scholarships to aid in their pursuit of a career in nursing. #03242850

"Our committee is passionate about investing in quality health care professionals in rural Oklahoma," said Mignon Bolay, OKFB WLC chair. "We are proud to support these outstanding students who will work to serve the needs of rural residents across our state."

The WLC awards scholarships annually

to students studying nursing at an accredited college, university or trade school. The students also must be an OKFB member or be a member of a Farm Bureau-member family.

The OKFB WLC promotes the importance of family and health, safety and crime prevention, state and national agricultural issues, voter awareness and citizenship, Agriculture in the Classroom and much more. To learn more about the program, visit okfarmbureau.org/women.

Carroll returns to OKFB as membership, foundation for ag director

Oklahoma Farm Bureau has named Holly Carroll director of membership and OKFB Foundation for Agriculture.

In her new position, Carroll will work to promote membership and the benefits available to OKFB members. She will continue to oversee the programs and day-to-day activities of the OKFB Foundation for Agriculture, under the direction of the foundation board.

“I am excited to come back to serve the agriculture industry, which is where my passion lies,” Carroll said. “The Farm Bureau family has always held a special place in my heart, and I am excited to help Farm Bureau members as we educate consumers and promote our organization as a whole.”

Carroll hopes to increase educational

activities for the OKFB Foundation for Agriculture while increasing funding for current and future programs.

Carroll began working as director for the OKFB Foundation for Agriculture in January, helping promote and implement foundation programs. She started her career as an agricultural educator before joining OKFB in 2009 and working in the field services department. After initially leaving OKFB in 2016, Carroll returned to the classroom to teach.

Carroll grew up on a beef and tobacco farm in central Kentucky. She served as Kentucky’s state FFA president and graduated from Western Kentucky University before moving to Oklahoma. She lives in Cashion with her husband, Chris, and children, Maggie and Reed.



Holly Carroll

Amber-Pocasset student wins YF&R High School Discussion Meet

Jackson Caves from Amber-Pocasset was named the winner of the 2019 Oklahoma Farm Bureau High School Discussion Meet held July 16 in Stillwater.

Held in conjunction with the Oklahoma State University Big Three Field Days, 11 students from across the state competed in the event. Through the discussion meet, participants gained valuable experience in basic discussion skills while developing an understanding of agricultural issues that the industry is currently facing.

Cassidy Baughman of Ardmore placed second in the contest, followed by Ryan Clark of Henryetta placing third and Sydney Williams of Calera placing fourth.

“Through this discussion meet, we hope the skills these students gain in preparing and participating in the event will serve as a valuable opportunity no matter their path,” said Brent Haken, YF&R chair. “We as the YF&R committee are honored to do what we can in preparing the next generation of agriculturalists.”

The participants competed in two rounds of discussion before being

narrowed to the final four. As top four finalists, the students earned

\$1,500, \$1,000, \$500 and \$250 college scholarships.



Above: Sydney Williams, second from right, shares her views during the final round of the YF&R High School Discussion Meet.



Above: OKFB YF&R Committee member Ethan Mock (far left) and Brent Haken (far right) present certificates to the top four students in the high school discussion meet, which include (left to right) Jackson Caves, first place; Cassidy Baughman, second place; Ryan Clark, third place; and Sydney Williams, fourth place.

OKFB hosts USDA, SBA, ag organizations for discussion on rural economic development

Oklahoma Farm Bureau hosted representatives of the U.S. Small Business Administration, U.S. Department of Agriculture and fellow state ag organizations on Aug. 23 to discuss public-private partnerships available to small businesses and rural communities through the two agencies. State leaders had a chance to learn more about opportunities to improve and advance rural communities across the state.

Right: OKFB President Rodd Moesel addresses representatives of USDA and SBA on Aug. 23.

Far right: Dr. Lee Denney, USDA State Director for Rural Development of Oklahoma, discussed opportunities for rural communities to partner with USDA and the SBA.



OKFB sponsors OSU Big 3 Field Days in Stillwater July 16-18

Oklahoma Farm Bureau was a proud sponsor of the annual Oklahoma State University Big 3 Field Days July 16-18 at the Totusek Arena in Stillwater.

Oklahoma Farm Bureau is a title sponsor of the event providing the winners of each age group with a plaque or banner for each species and presenting the sweepstakes winners a plaque or banner.

4-H and FFA members from across the state spent three days carefully evaluating cattle, swine, sheep and goats with the skills they have gained through the help of their leaders and advisers.

While in Stillwater, participants also had the chance to tour the campus and several agricultural businesses around Stillwater. Visits included Oklahoma Animal & Disease Diagnostic Laboratory, Robert M. Kerr Food & Agriculture Products Center, Gallagher Iba Arena and Heritage Hall, OSU Athletic Facilities, Reproduction Enterprises, Inc., and OSU Veterinary Teaching Hospital.



Above: YF&R committee member Leslie Lewis poses for photos with OSU Big 3 sweepstakes winners. For a full list of winners, visit judgingcard.com.

Tulsa County Farm Bureau member pushes for H-2A reforms at field hearing

Chad Selman, a Tulsa County Farm Bureau member and pecan producer, recently shared his concerns about agricultural labor during a congressional field hearing with Congressman Kevin Hern on July 22 in Tulsa.

The hearing, hosted by the U.S. House Small Business Subcommittee on Economic Growth, Tax and Capital Access Republican Ranking Member Kevin Hern and Chair Andy Kim, aimed to highlight the challenges small businesses – including farms and ranches – face in trying to comply with federal regulations.

Selman emphasized the U.S. Department of Labor’s recently proposed rules to modernize the H-2A program, which is used by farmers and ranchers to secure reliable and skilled farm workers from foreign countries. The new proposed rules would streamline and simplify the H-2A application process.

“We need revision of the H-2A program to remove those things that don’t make

sense and that are overly burdensome,” Selman said during his testimony at the hearing. “The process should be simpler so it’s better for me as the producer and better for them as the workers.”

Selman is forced to hire independent contractors each year to file H-2A paperwork because completing it himself would be a full-time job and hinder his responsibilities on the farm. In some years, he said the complicated process of receiving workers through H-2A has cost him significantly in both crops and money.

“One of the most challenging aspects of my business is having the right number of workers when I need them,” he said.

Encouraged by the Department of Labor’s recent proposals, Selman offered suggestions to improve the H-2A program including approving guest workers’ visas for five years and allowing workers to come and go as work is needed.

“What we will do is take this (Selman’s

written and oral testimony) back and help distribute it to the right committee with our endorsements behind it, and use it to create bills,” Hern said.

Selman was joined at the hearing by other industry leaders such as Christopher Jordan, president of Farmers State Bank in Stigler; Howard “Bud” Grounds, director of regulatory affairs for the Petroleum Alliance of Oklahoma; and Elizabeth Osburn, senior vice president of government affairs for the Tulsa Regional Chamber.



Above: Chad Selman, Tulsa County Farm Bureau member and pecan producer, presents his testimony at the congressional field hearing.



Above: Howard “Bud” Grounds, Christopher Jordan and Chad Selman listen to the opening remarks from Rep. Andy Kim.



Above: Rep. Kim and Rep. Kern will use Selman’s testimony to create new legislation.

NEO A&M Collegiate Farm Bureau elects officers for 2019-2020 year

More than 55 students turned out for the Northeastern Oklahoma A&M Collegiate Farm Bureau kickoff meeting held Aug. 29.

The group elected its officers for the year, which include Shelby Hubbard, freshman representative, Miami, Oklahoma; Roy Stovall, vice president, Wyandotte, Oklahoma; Katie

Krehbiel, sophomore representative, Inman, Kansas; Derek Strawn, treasurer, Columbia, Missouri; Mattie Haynes, president, Jay, Oklahoma; and Owen Coon, secretary, Wingate, Indiana.

The students will promote agriculture on campus while also learning about Oklahoma Farm Bureau.



OSU Collegiate Farm Bureau selects new officer team

Members of Oklahoma State University Collegiate Farm Bureau gathered for their first meeting of the school year Sept. 12 to elect officers to guide them throughout the next year.

The new officer team was elected by more than 40 of their peers. The team includes (front row) Allison Wilton, vice president, Fort Sumner, New Mexico; Katey Freeman, student

council representative, Columbus, Kansas; Madelyn Gerken, secretary, Kingfisher, Oklahoma; Barrett Cosby, treasurer, Buffalo, Oklahoma. Back Row (left to right): Blain Ball, president, Sentinel, Oklahoma; Cole Eschete, reporter, Bokchito, Oklahoma; Trever Stelzig, student council representative, Lindsay, Oklahoma; and Kade Killough, communications, Stillwater, Oklahoma.



OKFB YF&R proud sponsor at OK State Fair livestock judging contest

Oklahoma Farm Bureau Young Farmers and Ranchers hosted more than 1,300 4-H and FFA members at its annual Oklahoma State Fair livestock judging contest Sept. 12 in Oklahoma City.

4-H and FFA members from across the state traveled to the Oklahoma State Fair where they judged seven classes of sheep, cattle, goats and swine with three classes of questions. The top teams and individuals are listed below.

TEAMS

Senior FFA

- First: Amber-Pocasset FFA
- Second: Lindsay Orange FFA
- Third: El Reno FFA

Junior FFA

- First: Tuttle FFA
- Second: Mulhall Orlando FFA
- Third: Minco FFA

Senior 4-H

- First: Kay County 4-H
- Second: Lomega 4-H
- Third: 4Him 4-H

Junior 4-H

- First: Kay County 4-H
- Second: Amber-Pocasset 4-H
- Third: Marshall 1 4-H

INDIVIDUALS

Senior FFA

- First: Cammie Stehr, Ninneka Grady FFA
- Second: Braylon Spears, Hartshorne FFA
- Third: Kade Pendley, Cyril FFA

Junior FFA

- First: Chyann Emerson, Tuttle FFA
- Second: Brody Scroggins, Hartshorne FFA
- Third: Kamryn Oakes, Arapaho Butler FFA

Senior 4-H

- First: Kale Campbell, 4Him 4-H
- Second: Caleb Edens, Kay County 4-H
- Third: Rylee Glazier, Lomega 4-H

Junior 4-H

- First: Ainslee McComas, Amber-Pocasset 4-H
- Second: Baler Lott, Marshall 4-H
- Third: Hadley Bell, Marshall 4-H

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Harmon returns to OKFB as safety and special projects coordinator

Oklahoma Farm Bureau has named Burton Harmon as the organization's safety and special projects coordinator.


In his new position, Harmon will travel the state visiting with students to educate them on bicycle, bus and fire safety measures. In addition, Harmon will lead defensive driving courses and share the dangers of driving under the influence with high school students.

"I'm excited to return to Oklahoma Farm Bureau and help educate students and share agriculture's story," Harmon said. "There's a lot of great things Farm Bureau can do around our state, and I'm looking forward to working with our organization's programs to better serve our members."

Harmon began his career with OKFB where he served members as the north central field representative. For the last six years, he has run his own agricultural spraying business.

Harmon graduated from Oklahoma State University with a degree in animal science. As active members of Young Farmers and Ranchers, Burton and his wife, Audrey, were state committee members and excellence in agriculture state winners, even making it to the top

10 at the AFBF National Convention.

The couple lives in Morrison with their sons Benjamin, Aaron and Jared. Active within his local community, Harmon also serves as the youth pastor at Hilltop Country Church in Morrison. 



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Fixing hairy vetch's bad reputation

Noble scientists are using the gene editing technique CRISPR to improve legume cover crops.

By Dana Smith, Ph.D.

Noble Research Institute

Like a professional sports team, what producers do in the offseason can make a big difference when it comes to their bottom line. And one of the most important decisions a producer makes is which crop to use as a cover.

Cover crops protect the soil from erosion due to wind and water and help suppress weeds. They should have deep roots and cover the ground completely, and many double as a forage crop for cattle. Different regions may also have specific requirements, such as cold tolerance in the North or drought and heat tolerance in the South.

Small grains such as rye, oats and wheat are the most common type of cover crop and are used in more than half the acreage. However, scientists at the Noble Research Institute think that legumes, which currently constitute less than 20 percent of cover crops, could be a viable – and valuable – alternative.

Legumes add nitrogen back into the soil through a symbiotic relationship with certain species of bacteria. The bacteria live in the roots of the legumes and convert nitrogen from the air into a form that is beneficial for plants. When the legume is decomposed back into the soil, the nitrogen is released, providing nutrients for the commodity crop. This “green manure” can reduce growers’ nitrogen fertilizer needs and may be a cheaper alternative to traditional fertilizers.

“The advantage of using legumes as a cover crop is they are kind of a protein punch, like those power bars that we eat, because they fix nitrogen in the soil,” said Suresh Bhamidimarri, Ph.D., who leads

Noble’s Forage and Cover Crop Legume Breeding Laboratory. “In comparison, other plants used as cover crops are nitrogen hogs.”

One legume in particular stands out for its regional versatility. Hairy vetch has good cold tolerance and can be used as a winter cover crop in northern latitudes to protect the ground from ice and snow. It can also be grown in southern states, where it is used as a dual forage and cover crop.

Despite its potential advantages, many producers see hairy vetch as a liability. The plant’s bad reputation is rooted in its hardseededness, which is present in roughly 25 percent of the crop. Hard seeds lie dormant in the ground for years.

In a forage environment, this can be an advantage because growers don’t have to worry about replanting every year. But producers consider hairy vetch to be a weed because if the plant grows at the wrong time, it can interfere with their commodity crop.

“Many farmers frown upon using hairy vetch because it’s perceived as a noxious weed,” says Twain Butler, Ph.D., a research agronomist at Noble and project manager for the national cover crop research initiative funded by Noble and the Foundation for Food and Agriculture Research. “Due to this perception, many producers won’t even try to plant it. If we could solve the seed problem, it would allow it to be more widely adopted.”



Bhamidimarri carefully inspects the root system of a hairy vetch plant.



A better cover crop

Bhamidimarri is trying to fix this seed problem using CRISPR/Cas9 to edit the plant's genome. He hopes to produce a new variety that only has soft seed by deleting the hardseededness genes.

"We want to provide farmers and ranchers with more options," he said. "This way, they could choose an exclusively hardseeded or softseeded variety depending on their needs for a forage or a cover crop."

The CRISPR/Cas9 system acts like a pair of genomic scissors. The CRISPR part of the package is designed to exactly match a section of DNA so it can hone in on a specific gene. Once the section is located, the Cas9 protein snips the DNA, inactivating the target gene.

One benefit of using genome editing in hairy vetch is that it eliminates the chance of the hardseededness trait being reintroduced when the plant reproduces. Hairy vetch is an outcrossing plant, which means it needs pollen from a different plant to reproduce. With traditional breeding methods, there is no guarantee that a bee that has been pollinating a wild variety of hairy vetch won't fertilize the bred variety. The next generation of plants could be contaminated with a new copy of the hardseededness gene and potentially carry that trait. With CRISPR, both copies of the hardseededness gene are edited out, removing this possibility.


The process is easier said than done, however. Because hairy vetch is not a popular plant like wheat or corn, its genome has not been sequenced. So the first step for Bhamidimarri's team is to find the genes responsible for hardseededness. Fortunately, they have a template in soybean, a related legume in which two hardseededness genes have already been identified.

Once they confirm the relevant genes, the researchers will get to work knocking them out. Amr Ibrahim, Ph.D.,

a postdoctoral fellow in Bhamidimarri's lab, is currently perfecting the process to introduce the CRISPR/Cas9 package into the plant's cells. Eventually, they will help the edited cells grow into a new variety of hairy vetch, one that hopefully only produces soft seeds.

"If Suresh is successful in producing a softseeded hairy vetch, the potential for crop farmers could be huge," Butler

said. "All of the corn and soybean acreage in the U.S. needs a cover crop of some sort. Producers typically use a rye or a wheat, but they understand the legume's potential benefit because of its ability to fix nitrogen. If this works, the sky's the limit."

For more information about the national cover crop initiative, go to www.noble.org/ffar. 



Bhamidimarri, who leads the Noble Research Institute Forage and Cover Crop Breeding Laboratory, collects leaf tissue from hairy vetch plants.

Preparing for pruning season

By Trisha Gedon
Oklahoma Cooperative Extension Service

With cooler temperatures finding their way into Oklahoma, gardeners around the state may be preparing for fall garden cleanup. Raking leaves, preparing gardening equipment for storage and maybe even getting a jump start on spring garden planning are activities occupying the time of gardening enthusiasts.

However, before one starts pruning those trees and shrubs, consider leaving that task until a bit later, said David Hillock, Oklahoma State University Cooperative Extension consumer horticulturist.

“As we begin to experience colder weather, it’s natural to want to take care of those end-of-season gardening tasks,” Hillock said. “But, pruning chores really can wait a bit longer,” Hillock said. “When the leaves fall from the trees and expose their imperfections, it’s understandable to want to shape up the tree right then, but it’s best to put your pruning shears back in the gardening shed for a few weeks.”

The reason it isn’t the best idea to prune in the fall is because pruning stimulates new growth just as the plants are starting to go dormant. The last thing

a gardener wants is new growth to get damaged in the first cold snap of the season. Instead, most trees, shrubs and plants should be pruned in the winter or early spring before new growth appears; however, if they are spring blooming plants like redbud, crabapple, forsythia or flowering quince, wait until after they have flowered in the spring.

So, what are the advantages of pruning? There are several. First of all, it helps improve and maintain the health of the tree or shrub. It also can improve flowering and fruiting. In addition, plants that produce more flowers and



Pruning will help remove diseased parts of the trees and shrubs as well as make the plant more attractive in the landscape. *Photos by David Hillock, OSU Cooperative Extension.*



fruit can be of benefit to wildlife.


“Another positive effect of pruning is it removes dead, diseased and broken wood, which affects both the look and health of the tree,” Hillock said. “You can remove crossing or rubbing branches, which can cause damage, as well.”

With proper pruning, gardeners are able to control the natural shape and size of a tree or shrub and can restore balance and symmetry.

“Pruning also allows more sunlight and air to filter through the trees and shrubs, which can help keep them healthy,” he said. “When you begin to prune, focus on removing dead and dying branches first. Cut between the diseased spot and the body of the plant. You also may want to focus on low branches that can interfere with foot traffic or lawn mowers.”

If possible, time your pruning activities when the weather is dry. Damp weather encourages the growth of bacteria, which can damage your trees and shrubs.

No matter when you prune, whether it be in the dead of winter or in the early spring, be sure to keep all of your pruning tools clean. If you have cut out diseased branches, make sure to clean the tools thoroughly before moving on to another tree. This helps prevent the spreading of disease. Gardeners may want to consider disinfecting tools by using just a teaspoon or two of bleach in warm water. Hot, soapy water also kills most germs. Remember to dry tools well after washing, too, to help prevent rust. Keeping your tools clean and in good working order will help get the next gardening season off to a great start.

“Pruning is an important aspect of gardening and has many benefits for the landscape,” Hillock said. “But, if you can’t trim branches and limbs from the ground using a pole pruner, or if the limbs need pruned are near power lines, be sure to hire a professional for the job. Your safety and wellbeing are important.” 



When gardeners finish pruning chores, they should properly clean and store their tools. This helps to ensure the tools will be ready for the next gardening job.

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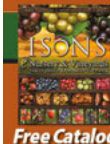
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Beef Tenderloin Steaks with Blue Cheese Topping

Courtesy of BeefItsWhatsForDinner.com



Ingredients

4 beef tenderloin steaks, cut one inch thick (about one pound)
1 large clove garlic, halved
1/2 teaspoon salt
2 teaspoons chopped fresh parsley leaves

Topping

2 tablespoons cream cheese
4 teaspoons crumbled blue cheese
3 teaspoons plain yogurt
2 teaspoons minced onion
Dash of ground white pepper

Instructions

Combine topping ingredients in small bowl. Rub beef tenderloin steaks with garlic.

Place steaks on rack in broiler pan so surface of beef is two to three inches from heat. Broil 13 to 16 minutes for medium rare (145 degrees Fahrenheit) to medium (160 degrees Fahrenheit) doneness, turning once. One to two minutes before steaks are done, spread topping evenly across the top of each steak.

Cook's Tip: To grill, place steaks on grill over medium, ash-covered coals. Grill covered for 10 to 14 minutes for medium rare to medium, turning occasionally. One minute before steaks are done, spread topping evenly across the top of each steak.

Season with salt and sprinkle with parsley. 

If you are a Farm Bureau member and want to see your recipes featured in *Oklahoma Country*, send a full list of ingredients along with preparation and cooking instructions to Brianne.Schwabauer@okfb.org or mail a hard copy to Oklahoma Country Recipes, 2501 N. Stiles Ave., Oklahoma City, OK 73105.



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