

# Oklahoma Country

Spring 2024  
The magazine of  
Oklahoma Farm Bureau



## Striking out on their own

A **first-generation** ranch family builds a future as they **care for the land** and connect with their **community**.

### Chairman of the board

*OKFB member Jimmy Taylor's year of service on the Cattlemen's Beef Board*

### Delivering hope

*OKFB helps provide relief efforts after springtime wildfires in Oklahoma*

### Unraveling a challenge

*Cherokee County Farm Bureau members build a program to improve their county*

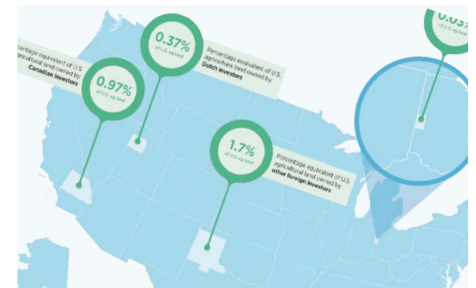


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# Oklahoma Country

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Photo by Dustin Mielke

The Decker family, Noble County Farm Bureau members, stand in their cattle pens on their ranch near Orlando.

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## ABOUT OKLAHOMA COUNTRY MAGAZINE

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

## ABOUT OKLAHOMA FARM BUREAU

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



**Rodd Moesel**

*President  
Oklahoma Farm Bureau  
& Affiliated Companies*

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***There is a place for  
each and every  
OKFB member to  
help create the  
future we all desire  
for our industry,  
our communities  
and our state.***

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## Building the future we want, building the future we need

**W**e all have hopes and dreams for the future that go beyond ourselves and our day-to-day lives that envision a better world for generations to come. I am proud to be part of an organization – Oklahoma Farm Bureau – that takes an active role in crafting programs and policies to empower people to make a positive impact for the future of agriculture and Oklahoma.

As an organization with more than 80 years spent supporting agriculture, developing rural Oklahoma and investing in the next generation of leaders for our state, OKFB provides a full slate of activities, events and opportunities that will help our way of life prosper for years to come.

Our youth programs look to the future as we work to connect our state's future leaders with opportunities to grow in agriculture and serve our rural communities.

OKFB is a proud supporter of organizations that develop the next generation of leaders in Oklahoma agriculture. From our recent support of students at the Oklahoma Youth Expo to ongoing sponsorships of Oklahoma 4-H and Oklahoma FFA through numerous events and programs, we are proud to come alongside these organizations and be partners in crafting the future leaders of our state.

We are also proud to provide opportunities for Oklahoma's youth through several programs that enrich and enhance their understanding of agriculture and rural issues. From our Capitol Camp youth legislative experience to our Oklahoma Youth Leading Agriculture leadership conference as well as our FFA Communications Conference, we get to see first-hand the excitement and dedication Oklahoma students have as they look to make an impact on the future of our

state, our nation and our world.

It is with an eye to the future that we are excited to begin our second year of rural development programming with the Oklahoma Grassroots Rural & Ag Business Accelerators program. With our Activate Oklahoma track for rural entrepreneurs and our Accelerate Oklahoma track for production agriculture innovations, we are proud to help Oklahoma innovators bring their brightest ideas to life in an effort to provide new opportunities and quality jobs in our rural communities.

Agricultural advocacy has been a cornerstone of our organization since its inception, and the hard work of our public policy team to provide a voice for our family farmers and ranchers is as important as ever.

So far in the 2024 Oklahoma legislative session, we have tackled numerous issues ranging from ensuring fair taxation for our members to standing up for private property rights. An overarching issue this session has been water rights, and OKFB has been a leader in bringing agriculture and industry to the table to protect landowners' rights while encouraging responsible use of water. Agricultural producers understand the critical role water availability and water quality play in our state, and Farm Bureau is proud to bring folks from around the state together to ensure we have the water we need today while protecting water rights for future generations.

These are just three ways that Farm Bureau is facing the future with excitement and action. There is a place for each and every OKFB member to help create the future we all desire for our industry, our communities and our state. That is the power of our grassroots organization. Thank you to each and every Farm Bureau member for taking time to help us shape our future together.



# WHAT MAKES A CHAMPION? CHAMPION CHAMPION CHAMPION



## PREPARATION.

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## Growing together as Oklahomans

**O**n our family farm, spring is an exciting time that we all anticipate. It is a season of plans and dreams as we gear up for another year of growing crops, seeing cattle on green grass and enjoying the longer and warmer days as we ease into summer.

I know our fellow Oklahomans who live in our state's urban centers feel a similar uplifting of their spirits as winter temperatures fade. From preparing gardens and flower beds for new seeds and plants to gearing up for lawn-mowing season – or even just enjoying budding trees on a walk – springtime brings hope for all of us.

No matter if you live in downtown Tulsa or in one of our many small, rural communities throughout the state, Oklahomans are tied together with a shared sense of expectation: we all like to see things grow.

The farm and ranch products our Farm Bureau members proudly raise and grow provide food, nutrition and daily necessities for all Oklahomans from our rural communities to our urban centers. But no matter if you are a farmer buying fertilizer in bulk or a family making a weekly trip to the grocery store, another thing we all unfortunately share is the shock of dealing with higher prices for the daily necessities that make our households and businesses go.

As a cattle rancher, I can tell you first-hand that the strong price of cattle, while always nice to see as an ag producer, is a double-edged sword. While prices we receive when selling our cattle are high due to the lowest U.S. cattle inventory in 73 years, the prices we have to pay for replacement heifers and bulls as we continually look to improve our herds are sometimes difficult to swallow.

The effects of a shrinking U.S. cowherd are also felt at the meat counter by consumers as they make decisions on how to stretch their seemingly shrinking food dollar. The impact of the droughts and high agricultural input costs that farmers and ranchers have dealt with the past few years have come home to roost in the supermarket.

While the effects of on-farm pressures eventually trickle down into consumers' pocketbooks, the impact of urban influence comes back to the farm and ranch through policies proposed at our state Capitol.

Oklahoma Farm Bureau has always been vigilant in protecting agricultural producers from policies proposed by a wide array of groups outside of agriculture, ranging from well-intentioned ideas to proposals that look to chip away at agriculture's ability to feed our state, our nation and our world.

Each legislative session is unique, and this year, OKFB hit the ground running at the start of session working through legislation dealing with an issue that serves as the lifeblood of agriculture: water. I am proud that our Farm Bureau team has worked with numerous stakeholders both in agriculture and beyond not only to craft strong water policy for our state, but also to educate others about the way farmers and ranchers work to conserve our natural resources.

No matter if it is our members' daily work on their farms and ranches or the agricultural advocacy work our organization takes on in Oklahoma City and Washington, D.C., the impacts of Farm Bureau members' efforts are felt both on the farm and around the state. I'm proud to say that we will continue working for the future of all Oklahomans to help ensure that together, we can continue to watch our state grow.



**Thad Doye**

*Executive Director  
Oklahoma Farm Bureau*



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# Striking out on their own

*Noble County Farm Bureau members Jake and Kelly Decker blaze their own trail as first-generation ranchers.*

*Photos and story by Dustin Mielke*

## **J**ake Decker grew up loving baseball.

While Jake technically grew up in Piedmont, Oklahoma, with a love for the game of baseball instilled in him by his dad, a professional baseball scout, Jake said he really grew up on baseball diamonds.

Being homeschooled, he had the opportunity to finish his schoolwork and then travel with his dad to check out players. Jake often honed his own skills by playing and practicing with the college players his dad was scouting, providing even more chances to play the game he loved.

“I grew up on a baseball field,” Jake said. “I was sold out. I was the guy that wouldn’t have quit unless something stopped me. I only saw one thing, and it was baseball.”

After finishing high school, Jake had his mind set on a future of playing college ball with other opportunities on the horizon.

That all changed with a seemingly small incident shortly after he graduated high school that derailed his future hopes on the field.



*In addition to raising stocker cattle, Jake and Kelly Decker also feed out cattle that they process and sell as part of their retail beef business, Flying D Beef, where they connect with consumers.*



*Jake and Kelly are raising their three children on their Orlando-area ranch.*



*Kelly, Beau and Bexley Decker stand in a pasture on the family's Orlando-area ranch. Kelly and her husband, Jake, are first-generation ranchers.*

The EF5 tornado that ravaged the Piedmont area in 2011 passed a mere three miles from the Decker family's house. The family came out of their cellar, and with everything in order at their home, they decided to check on some friends to see if they needed help.

As they were traveling to a nearby friend's house, they came across a motorist who had driven across some debris in the roadway, entangling her car's axle in coils of very fine wire, which Jake was later told possibly came from an air conditioner. Jake got out to help, as Oklahomans are known to do in the wake of tragedies.

"It was wrapped all around her axle and tire," Jake said of the wire. "I grabbed cutters, and I started cutting it out. I came to the very last wire, of course, but it had tension on it, and I didn't realize it. When I cut that wire, it recoiled back and went in and out of my eye."

Not realizing what had happened, Jake removed the tangle of wire and the motorist drove away to her destination. Jake said he felt like he had something in his eye, but he did not realize the extent of his injury until he made his way back to his car and checked his eye, and realized blood was running out of it.

Once at the hospital for treatment, Jake was told the wire went in and out of his eye, and the estimated recovery time was brief.

About a month after the injury, Jake was drafted by the New York Mets, contingent on his recovery.

Unfortunately, the recovery time lagged as





area ranch. Left to right: Beau, Shiloh and Bexley.



Jake loads feed for cattle that will be processed and sold to customers throughout the area as retail meat products ranging from steaks and ground beef to ready-to-eat beef sticks.

his retina detached, which was followed by an infection and complications.

“They initially said it was going to be a six-week recovery, and then I’d be back on the field,” Jake said. “It turned into 18 months and 13 or so surgeries. I never regained the use of my left eye.”

As the recovery time lingered on and Jake was unable to keep honing his athletic skills, he said he saw his future in baseball slipping away, leading him to focus instead on a future in another field the he loved.

Through his high school years, Jake spent time with a close friend whose family farmed in the Oklahoma panhandle. The two would play baseball together during the week in Oklahoma City, then Jake would travel to the panhandle to work cattle and help out on the farm.

It was there that Jake was bitten by what he refers to as “the bug” – a love for agriculture.

“I went up there on a place that I think is run well and is on a large scale, and I got to see what could be,” Jake said.

“I liked being able to have my own space and I liked working hard. It was fulfilling work. You hit the bed every night and you’re tired, but that’s a good feeling to have.”

With the allure of farming and ranching in the back of his mind since high school, when Jake met and married Kelly, who grew up in Marlow and who also did not have an agriculture background, the two set their sights on finding a place where they could build their own agricultural endeavor as first-generation

agriculturalists.

After a decision that Jake likened to throwing “a dart at the map,” the couple purchased land near Orlando, located west of Stillwater.

“We met while I was in college at the University of Central Oklahoma, and we got married right after I graduated,” Kelly said. “This is where we could find land that we could afford, so this is where we moved to and started with our first piece of land. A family friend had asked Jake if he would finish out some cattle, and that’s kind of what got us started into this business.”

“We never thought we’d be here,” Jake said. “This is not at all what we had pictured, but I think it has a lot to do with the neighbors that we have who have helped us to get to this point. This was never on our radar to be here.”

As the couple embarked on building their ranch in 2014, they started out with a plan, a mindset of slow but steady growth, and help from neighbors.

“I think he was the person that made the list of ways that it could work, and I was like, ‘What are we doing?’” Kelly said. “But we just set our minds to it.”

“I think you have got to have a really good plan, got to have a really good partner,” Jake said. “But then you just have to do it. You just have to put your head down and do it.”

Jake began building fence for fellow farmers and ranchers to have a steady source

**“I think you have got to have a really good plan, got to have a really good partner. But then you just have to do it. You just have to put your head down and do it.”**

**– Jake Decker**





*Kelly holds one of the many cuts of retail beef the Decker family sells to customers through their website, an area farmers market and other direct sales.*

of income to stabilize the family against the seasonal income swings inherent in production agriculture.

“One of our values not just for starting out, but for everything, is delayed gratification,” Jake said. “The slow way – the stable way – is the way to go. We’re not necessarily looking for maximum short-term profit, and I think once you get into agriculture, that’s what makes the difference.”

Starting their livestock enterprise by raising stocker cattle, the Deckers added goats to their ranch to start a multi-species grazing management program to benefit their herds and pastures. When the goats did not fit into the family’s grazing program as well as they had hoped, Jake and Kelly went back to the drawing board and bought sheep to enhance their conservation efforts.

As the ranch grew, so did Jake and Kelly’s family. With every new turn, the Deckers adapted to capitalize on new opportunities, and the couple has been proud to teach their children – Bexley, 8, Beau, 6, and Shiloh, 3 – lessons they have learned together.

“If one thing doesn’t work, then we can try something else,” Jake said. “That’s one of my favorite things. Failure is not a bad thing, and if you do something wrong, that’s one less way you have to try before you get it right.”

The family integrated hair sheep in the place of goats, which complement the cattle by grazing different forages in the family’s pastures and allowing the Deckers to more easily manage livestock health. The sheep also provide an additional income source for the first-generation ranchers.

“We go back to what is the most sustainable, and then how can we make the most per acre?”





*The family raises hair sheep alongside their cattle, which complement each other in the family's grazing program while helping the Deckers diversify their operation. Jake and Kelly focus on conservation and land stewardship, which all points back toward their love for their ranch's natural resources and area wildlife.*

Jake said, "We're selling grass – that's really the only thing we grow is grass – and we're trying to find the best way to market that."

Another way the Deckers expanded their ranch to make sure they were capitalizing on the opportunities in front of them was through beef sales. Initially selling wholesale beef from animals that they fed in their own pens to ensure quality beef, the family transitioned over the past few years to also selling individual cuts of beef on the retail level with their brand Flying D Beef.

"It's grown very organically," Kelly said of the family's beef sales. "We started with our first couple animals that we fed out, and then those customers told some people. That word of mouth has been our best advertising. I mean, we're on Facebook, and we're on Instagram, but most of our sales have been people who we already knew that started buying from us."

The family now sells beef at local farmers markets, and they have even expanded their sales to supply two nearby restaurants – one in Perry and one in Stillwater – with local beef that is featured on menus.

Jake and Kelly are always looking for new opportunities to learn and grow in agriculture. Currently, they have their eyes set on selling beef to more restaurants and bringing on more stocker cattle in order to grow their ranch.

"I think being open minded, when it comes to different practices, has really helped us," Kelly said. "We don't do it exactly like our neighbors, and they don't do it like each other, but we gather a little bit from everybody and figure out what works for us."

The couple is sticking to their plan of slow and steady growth. In fact, there is not a

tractor to be found on the ranch as feeding is done with a pickup truck and bale bed. While the Deckers plan to add more equipment as their needs and operation grow, they are dedicated to expanding in a planned, methodical way, adapting and seizing opportunities as they become available.

"We've totally changed how we manage stuff," Jake said. "We've probably gotten more passionate about certain things, but we're still heading in the same direction. We're still going for the same goal, but the way that we're going about that is completely different now than it was then."

While neither Jake nor Kelly grew up in the Orlando community, the Decker family has invested time and effort in their local area to become part of the fabric of their community.

No matter if it is caring for leased parcels of land and working to leave pastures better than they found them or visiting with community members at the local farmers market, the Deckers are proud to be part of agriculture.

The agriculture way of life also affords Jake and Kelly the opportunity to spend time together with their kids, much like the way Jake was raised traveling with his dad to scope out prospective baseball players. The Deckers work side-by-side as they feed cattle, care for sheep, and raise their family on the ranch.

And while baseball may not have panned out for Jake quite like he may have imagined it would back in high school, he now takes time to coach his kids' baseball and softball teams with a unique level of expertise.

The batting cage that sits in the family's front yard next to their cattle pens stands as a symbol of both what was, what is, and what is yet to come for the Deckers. **FB**

*The Deckers represented Oklahoma Farm Bureau at the 2024 American Farm Bureau convention in January as the state's Young Farmers & Ranchers Achievement Award contestants.*

**Learn more about the Decker's retail beef sales at [flyingdbeefok.com](http://flyingdbeefok.com), or by searching for Flying D Beef on Facebook or Instagram.**





JIMMY AND TRACY TAYLOR

**W**henever I call a farmer or rancher to discuss a story idea or visit about a topic, I'm used to hearing all kinds of sounds in the background of the phone call. From the low hum of a tractor to the calls of cattle during feed time, agriculture producers find can find themselves almost anywhere on the farm or ranch engaged in any number of jobs at any given time.

But when Roger Mills County Farm Bureau member Jimmy Taylor returned my phone call one fall day in 2023, I was greeted by Jimmy's congenial voice with an unusual opening line:

"Good morning from Tokyo!"

Taylor was on a trade mission halfway around the world in Japan as chairman of the Cattlemen's Beef Promotion and Research Board, taking generations of western Oklahoma ranching knowledge to promote beef in top export markets.

Taylor was appointed to the board in 2018 as one of 101 volunteer farmers, ranchers and importers that direct the work of the beef checkoff program. Taylor served two full three-year terms, and in early 2023, he was selected to serve as CBB chairman for a one-year term, which wrapped up in early 2024.

Taylor and his wife, Tracy, focus on raising quality Angus cattle using modern production practices coupled with time-honored animal husbandry practices to raise premium beef for consumers around the world.

I visited with Taylor about his time as CBB chairman, and he graciously shared his perspective on the U.S. beef industry, our export partners and what lies ahead for cattle producers.

**Q** **WHAT IS THE CATTLEMEN'S BEEF BOARD, AND WHAT SORT OF WORK DO THEY TAKE ON?**

**I**f I met somebody off the street who didn't know anything about the board, the part of the program that resonates with people most would likely be the "Beef. It's What's for Dinner." campaign. Many consumers, especially if they're a little older, will remember the TV commercials with Sam Elliott, James Garner and Robert Mitchum that featured that good-looking steak and just did a really good job promoting beef.

To get into the nuts and bolts of it a little bit, the beef checkoff at the national level is called the Cattlemen's



# CHAIRMAN

OF THE

# BOARD

ROGER MILLS COUNTY FARM BUREAU MEMBER JIMMY TAYLOR SHARES HIS PERSPECTIVE ON THE BEEF INDUSTRY THROUGH A YEAR OF SERVICE AS CHAIRMAN OF THE CATTLEMEN'S BEEF BOARD.

BY DUSTIN MIELKE

Beef Board. Every time a head of cattle is sold, a dollar is collected. That's done at the state level with the Oklahoma Beef Council. They keep \$0.50 of that dollar and then send \$0.50 on to the national organization, which I was chairman of this last year, and we will take those dollars and we'll invest them where we can get the biggest bang for the buck in creating beef demand.

We do that through promotion, research and education. We look at projects our contractors do to help beef demand grow. We have nine contractors, and one of the contractors is the American Farm Bureau Foundation for Agriculture. They'll come up with ideas and do different programs to promote beef and create beef demand.



**WHAT ARE SOME OF EXAMPLES OF THOSE PROMOTION, RESEARCH AND EDUCATIONAL INITIATIVES?**



On the education side, I'll start with the program that American Farm Bureau does for us, which is a STEM – or science, technology, engineering and math – program that started in 2018.

And since that time, since its inception, we have reached 1.6 million students through that program – just an amazing number. These schools that they are going into to teach about beef are mostly urban schools where students would have no other way of finding out about beef production if it

wasn't for the work that the American Farm Bureau Foundation was doing.

For promotion, I would point to "Beef. It's What's for Dinner." We have done several things with that campaign. The most recent one was a sponsorship of a NASCAR race, the Beef. It's What's for Dinner. 300., which was a three-year partnership.

Those NASCAR fans are our kind of people – most of them are beef eaters already. You know, there might be a school of thought out there that says, "You know, why are you doing that? They're already eating beef." Well, it's a lot easier to get them to eat beef one or two more meals a week than it is to try to convert a vegetarian.

Of course we've got the website [BeefItsWhatsForDinner.com](http://BeefItsWhatsForDinner.com), and if a consumer or anyone wants to





**JIMMY TAYLOR INTERVIEWS AUSTIN HILL, THE 2023 BEEF. IT'S WHAT'S FOR DINNER. 300 NASCAR RACE WINNER, IN THE WINNER'S CIRCLE.**



**TAYLOR HANDS OUT SAMPLES OF BEEF PRODUCTS TO KOREAN GROCERY SHOPPERS WHILE ON AN INTERNATIONAL TRADE MISSION WITH CBB.**

know more about beef or where the different cuts come from, that's the place to go. If you're interested in nutrition and health, it has pages that address those questions, and it talks about beef's carbon footprint, which is not nearly as big as some might say it is. It helps fight that misinformation that's out there.

We also have research projects, which is the third leg of that stool.

I remember one research project the checkoff supported came out with a new process for beef packers to use when processing carcasses that helps battle salmonella. That project happened in the early 90s, and they're still using that process today.

Some of our research is consumer-oriented to find out what consumers are thinking. We work hand-in-hand with the research to target our promotion. If you know what consumers are thinking, then you know what information to give them to answer questions that they have.

**Q WHAT DID YOUR TIME AS CBB CHAIRMAN ENTAIL?**

If I had to sum it up in a phrase, I was the spokesperson for the organization. There are others who do interviews and represent the Cattleman's Beef Board, but the chairman does a lot of that. We had an outreach program where we were attending annual meetings of our contractors, and one of my last functions as chair was to attend the 2024 AFBF convention, which was the first time I'd ever been.



**I KNOW ONE PARTICULAR OPPORTUNITY YOU HAD WAS TO REPRESENT THE BEEF INDUSTRY IN FOREIGN MARKETS. WHAT WAS THAT EXPERIENCE LIKE?**

I had the opportunity last year to represent the Cattleman's Beef Board in Korea and Japan, which was a really neat opportunity to see what is going on in those countries.

Those countries are very important to us in the beef industry because in 2022, they were our No. 1 and No. 3 markets for beef exports. Korea was the No. 1 market where we did \$2.7 billion worth of business. Japan was No. 3 with \$2.3 billion worth of exports. So those two markets are very, very important to us. That year we set the all-time record at \$11.6 billion in beef exports, making it our banner year.

We traveled to those countries to see the programs the United States Meat Export Federation, which is another one of our contractors, has in place to educate those consumers and drive demand for beef over there. USMEF's job is to develop markets and get market access in those different countries. They have 19 offices around the world and work in about 80 different countries.

One of the neatest parts of that trip was the opportunity to address a group of about 400 Japanese importers and businessmen and talk about U.S. beef and the safety of our product. I discussed the programs we go through to ensure safety with the

USDA's involvement, and our Beef Quality Assurance program, which hosts seminars for beef producers to brush up on best practices for beef production. That's very important to the people who are buying our beef not only in those countries, but also here in the United States, too.

In both those countries, they really like our product, even though it might be prepared a little differently than we're used to over here. One of the delicacies in Japan is tongue. Here, you don't see tongue too much in the grocery store. It might have a rendering value here of \$0.30 a pound. But over there it's one of their delicacies and costs \$11 a pound. It really does increase the value of a fed animal by selling things like that overseas.

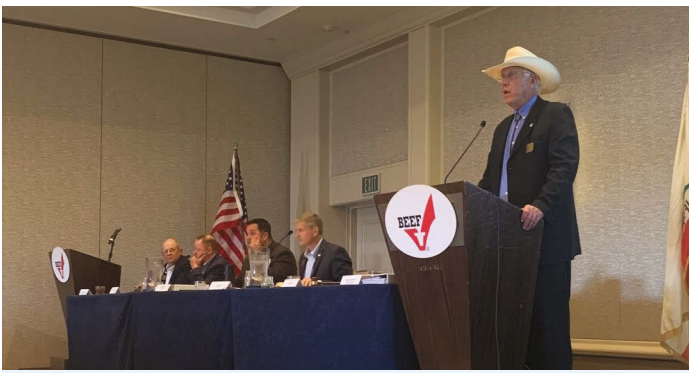
Those beef variety meats, such as tongue, amounted to over \$1 billion in sales to those different countries.

The bottom line for a beef producer is that last year those export sales added \$397 per fed head, which affects their bottom line.

**Q WHAT DO YOU SEE IN THE FUTURE OF THE BEEF INDUSTRY FOR PRODUCERS?**

Considering beef exports, something is happening in the United States right now that is going to make those exports even more important than they are today.

If you look at the hog industry and look at California, that state has set their own rules and regulations with Prop 12. That state is trying to dictate to the rest of the nation how those



**TAYLOR LEADS A CBB BOARD MEETING DURING THE 2023 CATTLE INDUSTRY SUMMER BUSINESS MEETING IN SAN DIEGO.**



**TAYLOR REPRESENTS THE BEEF CHECKOFF IN THE TRADE SHOW OF AFBF'S 2024 ANNUAL CONVENTION.**

animals need to be raised to be sold in California, and other states are following suit. If that continues, we won't have one unified domestic market anymore. It's going to be fragmented into different states having their own rules and regulations, and it might not be very possible for a producer to meet all those hurdles.

Our export markets are going to be very valuable if that takes place since 96% of the world's population lives outside the United States. If you look at just the middle class, it's 93%, so there are people out there who can afford our product.

There are also animal rights groups that don't like the beef industry, and they're going to continue to ramp up their attacks on us. In fact, they would like to see us out of business. Our issues management team, which is a checkoff project, monitors media 24 hours a day, seven days a week, watching for stories covering beef. Some of those animal rights groups put out half-truths and misinformation that are not always the full story. When our issues management team sees incorrect media coverage, they get out the correct story immediately. I think that team is going to become more important as we move forward in time, and those checkoff dollars do a really good job keeping on top of things like that.

Another emerging trend is sustainability. Over half the consumers today say sustainability is important, and I think that number will continue to grow.

When I first started in this

organization, sustainability was a little hard for me to wrap my mind around. What exactly is that? And I finally figured out the reason for that: if you ask 10 different people what sustainability means, you might get 10 different answers. Many of those people who are defining it are not necessarily our friends.

I think it's very important that we have a seat at the table in those talks to define what sustainability means. To me, it means doing more with less, leaving my place better than I found it and taking care of our place so it will be better for future generations. And, of course, making a profit – that's part of sustainability.

We need to be involved in those conversations and do a better job of telling people what we're already doing. Most beef producers are already doing this. They're multigenerational farms and ranches, and they would not be multigenerational if they weren't taking care of the place.

Another thing that is already on the radar, but is going to be even more so in the future, is our carbon footprint. There's a lot of misinformation out there. People try to say our carbon footprint is bigger than it actually is. For instance, here in the United States, the beef industry is responsible for 2.6% of greenhouse gas emissions. If you add in transportation, it's 3.9%. But those organizations that don't like us, they'll try to tell consumers that we're responsible for 14% of that, and that's an international number. Here in the United States the beef industry has done really well, making our cattle more efficient.


In fact, if you look back to the late 1970s, we're raising the same amount of beef that we were back in the in the late 70s, but with a third fewer cattle. That lessens our carbon footprint. Our cattle are very efficient, and that's why our greenhouse gas emissions number is a lot less than that international number.

We've got to keep telling that story because those other groups are trying to define us in a way that is not very favorable in a consumer's mind.



### **WHY DO YOU TAKE TIME TO VOLUNTEER ON BEHALF OF THE BEEF INDUSTRY?**

The beef industry has been very good to my family, and this is a way of giving back. Volunteering in this organization and others, such as Farm Bureau, is so important to the future of agriculture. You can do a good job on your place and try to run it as a good, profitable business, but it can only go so far without these organizations such as Cattlemen's Beef Board or Farm Bureau.

We've got to have volunteers to be the voice of agriculture, and in this case, the voice of the beef industry. 

*Jimmy Taylor currently serves as an ex-officio member of the CBB's executive committee after serving two full three-year terms. The five current CBB members representing Oklahoma include Secretary-Treasurer Cheryl DeVuyst of Morrison, Gaye Pfeiffer of Mulhall, Rodney Cowan of Watonga, Jason Hitch of Stillwater and Angie Meyer of Okarche.*





OKLAHOMA FARM BUREAU JOINS OKLAHOMA'S AGRICULTURE COMMUNITY TO HELP FARMERS, RANCHERS AND RURAL COMMUNITIES RECOVER FROM OKLAHOMA'S SPRINGTIME WILDFIRES.

BY DUSTIN MIELKE

**E**llis County Farm Bureau President Bill Peetoom was walking out of a prescribed burn workshop on February 27 when his phone rang to alert him about a large and growing wildland fire that had been sparked near his Shattuck-area ranch.

What became known as the Catesby fire started just two miles away from Peetoom's ranch. Peetoom said 50- to 70-mile-per-hour west winds pushed the fire east until a cold front from the north pushed the fire rapidly southward, creating a wide line of fire that quickly consumed grass, fencing, structures and everything else in its path.

"When it started, it took off like a racecar," Peetoom said.

Even with a valiant firefighting effort tackled by numerous agencies and departments, the fire burned nearly 90,000 acres north of Shattuck just along the Oklahoma-Texas border. It was part of a massive wildfire outbreak across multiple fire complexes that burned almost 153,000 acres in Oklahoma. Across the border in Texas, even more acres of grassland were scorched, with the enormous Smokehouse Creek fire burning over a million acres of land.

While the local community banded together as the flames swept across acre after acre, the outpouring of support from the agriculture community across the state – and the

nation – was swift and strong. From donations of hay to collections of supplies to help replace fencing to support for the volunteer fire departments who worked long hours to battle the flames, the agricultural community sought ways to help support producers in fire-ravaged areas of Oklahoma and Texas.

A week after the Catesby fire had started, Oklahoma Farm Bureau board members traveled to Ellis County to survey the fire damage, and more importantly, deliver a donation of \$5,000 worth of fuel cards to help offset trucking costs to deliver donated hay to the affected area.

Randy Holley, a longtime Shattuck educator, became the unofficial hay relief coordinator in the aftermath of the fire as he worked to find hay and other supplies for area agriculture producers. Holley spent his days after the fire fielding phone calls from around the state, and even the nation, as fellow agricultural producers, businesses and organizations sought ways to help farmers, ranchers and the local community recover.

Holley took to a local ag radio show, *Today in Ag with Jimmy Clark*, which is broadcast from Elk City, and put out a call for hay donations to help ranchers feed cattle after the fires devastated hay stacks and pastures.

"So the hay started coming," Holley said. "We had lots of



**ABOVE**

*OKFB board members present \$5,000 worth of fuel gift cards for truck drivers hauling hay donations into the fire-ravaged areas of Ellis County one week after the fire started. An additional \$5,000 worth of cards was delivered a week later. Pictured left to right are: Bill Peetoom, Ellis County Farm Bureau president; David VonTungeln, OKFB district three director; Howard Cunningham, Chickasha-area farmer and truck driver, who received one of the gift cards; Randy Holley, who is coordinating hay deliveries; Monte Tucker, OKFB district two director; and Leon Richards, OKFB district one director.*

**About the fire relief efforts**

The Oklahoma Farm Bureau Foundation for Agriculture, Oklahoma Farm Bureau and Oklahoma Farm Bureau insurance each offered \$10,000 in matching funds to donations to help fire-ravaged areas of western Oklahoma recover.

Fire relief donations were collected and matched dollar-for-dollar from late February through March 15. In total, more than \$80,000 in relief funds were collected, and the full \$30,000 in matching funds was contributed to the foundation's fire relief fund, resulting in a total of more than \$110,000 available for fire relief efforts to aid in recovery.

Money from the fund will support fire relief efforts, which included the fuel card donation. The foundation will monitor ongoing fire relief needs and help support rural agricultural communities affected by the fires as they work to make a full recovery.

calls that said, 'We've got hay.' But we have to have trucks. So I got on the next day and said, 'We've got hay, but we're going to need trucks.' So truck drivers started calling and said, 'We can move it, but we need money for our fuel,' so I started fundraising for fuel. Farm Bureau stepped in big time."

OKFB donated \$5,000 worth of fuel cards initially and came back with another \$5,000 the following week, helping offset costs for truck drivers who hauled in donated hay for farmers and ranchers.

Holley said he paid more than \$700 for a partial tank of fuel for one truck driver, making the cost – not to mention the time commitment – significant for truck drivers.

The importance of donated hay is hard to underestimate, according to Peetoom, who had two different portions of his ranch affected by two separate fires.

"A lot of my neighbors up here lost basically all the hay they had stockpiled," Peetoom said. "This is a Godsend. It may save several operators up here.

"The hay donations will supplement tremendously. If they would have to go out and buy that hay, the cattle would already be gone to market."

Holley said the hay donations were not just to carry cattle through the remainder of the winter and into spring

– the need for hay will likely not subside soon.

"Once it starts raining your pastures start growing, but there's nothing there," Holley said. "It's going to take maybe two months of growth before they can turn back in on it. So they're going to have to feed hay for several more months longer than usual."

Peetoom echoed the severity of the situation.

"It's a long-term loss," Peetoom said of the fire's impact. "You not only lose the dry grazing right now, but it will take most of this year recovering.

"Some of this probably won't be grazed this year, and we'll have to depend on other sources and use considerably more hay than we normally would."

While the initial recovery response is important for agricultural producers, full recovery will require time and hard work.

"It looks like a bomb went off in that country," Holley said. "There's no fences, no posts, no wire."

Even as Holley stood in the middle of stacks of donated hay, his cell phone continued to ring as people called in to offer various forms of help for the Shattuck area.

"Sometimes it takes a natural disaster to bring this world back together," Holley said. "They're helping people – Farm Bureau's helping people." **FB**






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# Unraveling a Challenge

**Cherokee County Farm Bureau members start a program to clean up used hay net wrap in their local communities through collaboration.**

*By Dustin Mielke*



*Cherokee County Farm Bureau members Kelly Blair (left) and Bobby Whitewater stand next to one of the net wrap recycling containers used during the Cherokee County net wrap takeback program.*

**C**herokee County District 1 Commissioner Bobby Whitewater knew the problem all too well.

Each year, his crews, tasked with keeping county roadside ditches mowed in the eastern Oklahoma county during summer and beyond, spent hours and hours untangling hay bale net wrap from around mower blades, hubs and gear boxes.

Net wrap is used when baling hay to help preserve the quality of the hay as livestock feed. The wrap is what keeps round bales bundled tightly for storage and transportation, and farmers and ranchers remove it when feeding hay, primarily during winter months.

Made of high density polyethylene, net wrap is extremely light, and even when farmers and ranchers are vigilant to

collect net wrap when feeding hay, Oklahoma winds can grab and carry the material with ease, depositing it in fences and roadside ditches.

Whitewater said that he has seen trailer axles entangled with net wrap that led to wheel bearings failing – a problem that can also plague farmers and ranchers.

“I was underneath one of my big gooseneck trailers this week putting a floor in it, and there was hay wrap around the axles,” Whitewater said. “It gets up in the bearings, eats the seals, and before you know it, you’ve lost bearings, and you have a high-dollar maintenance fix.”

In order to address the problem of errant net wrap ending up in roadside ditches and getting caught in machinery, Whitewater – a Cherokee County Farm Bureau





member – turned to fellow county employee and county Farm Bureau board member Kelly Blair to come up a solution to keep net wrap from finding its way to roadsides in the county.

As a cattle producer herself, Blair understood what dealing with net wrap was like on the ranch, but she said she was not aware of just how troublesome it was for the maintenance crews.

“I knew it was unsightly, and I knew it was litter, but I had no idea the damage it was costing,” Blair said.

Blair said she knew fellow agricultural producers around the county understood the importance of ensuring net wrap was properly collected and disposed of, and she came up with an idea to connect school-aged children around the

county with farmers and ranchers to collect the wrap in a fun and competitive way.

“I got this idea that we would do a competition across the whole county, school versus school, and invite every school in the county to participate – if they wanted to – for a \$1,000 grand prize,” Blair said.

Without being able to use taxpayer dollars for the reward program, Blair approached the Cherokee County Farm Bureau board, and requested \$500 to fund the program prize. With \$500 from the county Farm Bureau, Blair applied for and received matching funds from the OKFB Foundation for Agriculture’s county Farm Bureau matching grant program.

“It shows that Farm Bureau cares about both sides of it:



they care about the producer and what the producer is doing,” Whitewater said of the organization’s involvement.

With a big idea and a small budget, Whitewater and Blair launched the Hay Wrap Takeback program across the county, challenging participating schools to collect net wrap and deposit it into bins placed at each school. Students spent the next few months collecting used net wrap from neighbors, friends, farmers and ranchers in hopes of winning the \$1,000 reward for the largest ball of wrap collected.

The contest ran from early October to early February, which Blair said is the traditional winter timeframe during which farmers and ranchers feed hay and collect net wrap.

Students were advised to avoid collecting wrap from alongside roadways, and instead were encouraged to visit area farms and ranchers to ask for used net wrap, forging connections in the community between students and agricultural producers.

Whitewater found bins for schools to deposit their collected net wrap thanks to Ergon Asphalt and Emulsions, and the county sign shop made placards for each bin to identify the collection sites. The bins were placed at participating schools and at the county’s newly built livestock arena.

As students scoured the county for net wrap to collect, the collection bins quickly filled up. County crews collected the net wrap frequently from the collection bins, labeled it by which school collected the wrap, and transported it back to the district shop, weighed it for the competition and prepared it for disposal.

“I walked around there one day and thought, ‘Wow, this is getting huge,’” Whitewater said of seeing the pile of net wrap at the county shop. “And the last two weeks, it really got big.”

Word of the program spread, thanks, in part, to the signs posted on each collection site container, which caught the attention of an employee of an international net wrap manufacturer who happened to have property in nearby Muskogee County. He connected with Blair to learn about the program, and the company even contributed \$2,000 for prizes along with a pledge to provide additional help in the program’s second year.

All in all, approximately 13,500 pounds of net wrap were collected across Cherokee County by schools and a 4-H club during the contest’s run.

Two schools were recognized with \$1,000 cash prizes at the conclusion of the program, which were presented during the county’s youth livestock show premium sale. Norwood School won the contest for the largest actual ball

of hay wrap, and Cherokee Elementary School in Tahlequah won for the most hay wrap collected by weight, gathering 2,680 pounds.

After a successful inaugural run, Whitewater and Blair are already planning next year’s takeback event, which they hope to run from October to April.

The net wrap takeback program has opened additional doors, including a connection through OKFB’s Oklahoma Grassroots Rural and Ag Business Accelerators program with an engineer from the University of Oklahoma who is looking for alternate uses for the used net wrap.

“Sadly, after tons of research and talking to the Department of Environmental Quality, there is no recommendation for the wrap except the landfill right now,” Blair said.

With obstacles to recycling hay wrap, Blair said she is continuing to look for alternative uses to help keep the wrap from ending up in landfills. As they work with the engineer from OU, Blair said they are exploring plastic containers, agriculture-related products and other consumer goods as a use for used net wrap.


A grant from the Oklahoma Department of Environmental Quality that Blair secured will allow Whitewater to purchase a gooseneck trailer to load and transport roll off dumpster containers, making future net wrap collections even easier.

Both Whitewater and Blair have also visited with fellow Oklahomans about their net wrap takeback program, and they continue to develop even more ways to effectively collect net wrap for proper disposal through numerous collaborative ideas that can be implemented in other counties as well.

“I am so humbled by it,” Blair said of the takeback program. “It opened up a lot of opportunities I didn’t see coming.”

As springtime comes to Cherokee County, cattle move back to green pastures and Whitewater’s mowing crews begin their roadside maintenance for 2024. Whitewater is optimistic that as the mowers knock back the grass along roadways this year, the net wrap takeback program will not only make life easier for his crews, but also that the collections have instilled a sense of community pride in students and agricultural producers as they worked together across the county.

“This is just the first year in, and it’s going to make a difference,” Whitewater said. “We can tell already.

“We wanted to show that we’re not sitting on our hands. We’re out in the community trying to make our community better. It’s all about our people and the community.” 

**Cherokee County District 1 Commissioner and Oklahoma Farm Bureau member Bobby Whitewater holds some of the net wrap that was turned in as part of the net wrap takeback program in the county. Whitewater said he wanted to start the program to reduce the amount of net wrap in roadside ditches around the area.**



**Cherokee County Farm Bureau Board member Kelly Blair stands next to the biggest ball of net wrap, which was collected and assembled by Norwood school. Prizes were given out to the school that collected the most net wrap by weight and to the school that created the biggest ball of net wrap during the countywide takeback program.**



# NEWS

## TRUST

### Understanding foreign ownership of agricultural land in the United States

By **Danny Munch**

*American Farm Bureau Federation Economist*

**A** recent frenzy of hot-button media stories on foreign investment in United States agricultural land has propelled foreign ownership of land to a top concern, with much attention now on how foreign investors may be involved in rural communities and the potential strategic implications of land acquisitions by entities from adversarial nations.

Farmers and ranchers want to know how much agricultural land in the U.S. is owned by foreign investors and from what countries those investors hail. Interest in the subject was so great that the American Farm Bureau Federation received 11 policy proposals from nine different states concerning foreign ownership of agricultural land in 2022.

To tackle the questions and uncertainty around foreign land ownership, AFBF's board of directors assigned two of its Issue Advisory Committees to find answers.

The first discovery was that a law establishing a system for collecting information on foreign ownership of U.S. agricultural land already existed. The Agricultural Foreign Investment Disclosure Act of 1978 defines foreign persons and mandates disclosure by foreign entities engaged in buying,

selling or gaining interest in agricultural land.

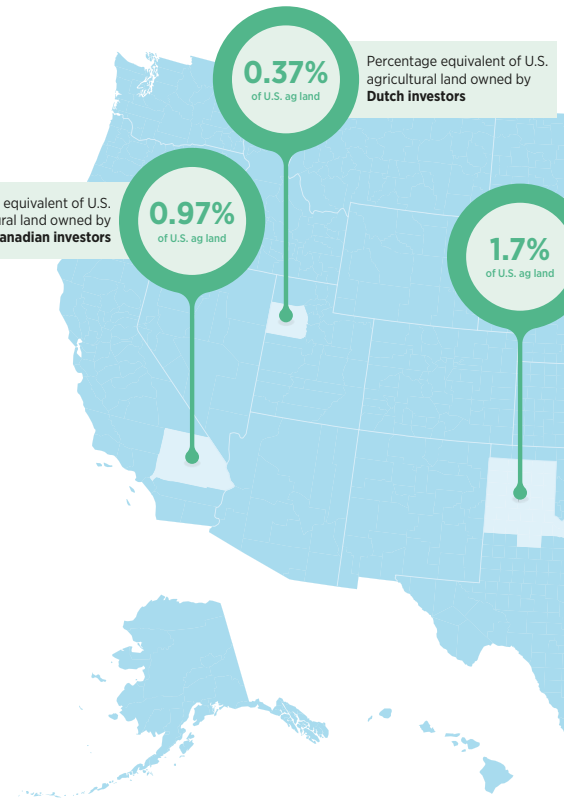
Data sets dating back to 1979 from the United States Department of Agriculture outlining disclosures under the act are publicly available. The data comes with significant limitations, but the findings do reveal statistics of note.

According to USDA's 2021 report, foreign investors and companies own over 40 million acres of U.S. agricultural land, comprising 3.1% of privately held agricultural land and 1.8% of total U.S. land.

Of this foreign-owned land, Canadian investors lead with 31%, followed by investors in the Netherlands, Italy, the United Kingdom and Germany. More than 52% of the acreage falls under limited liability companies, indicating varied ownership structures.

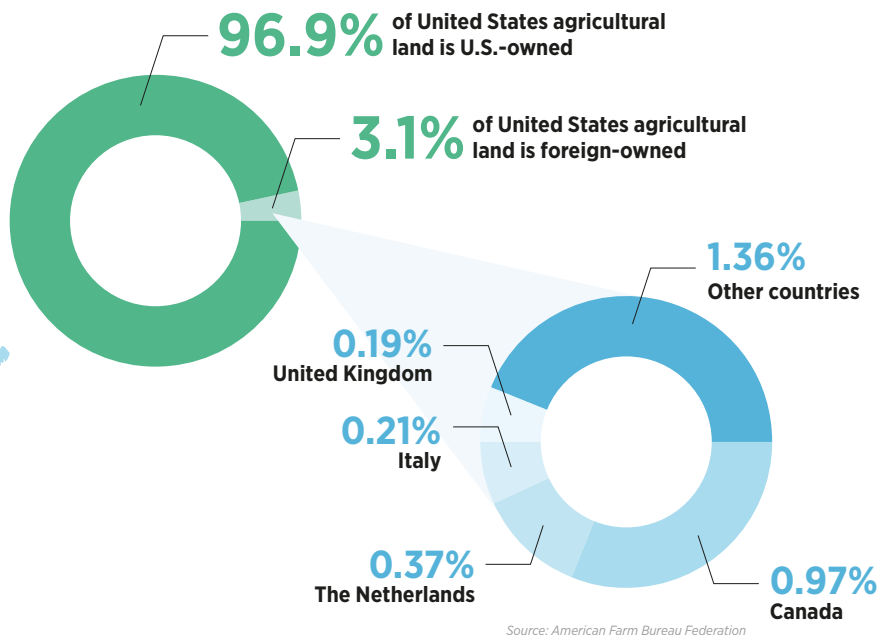
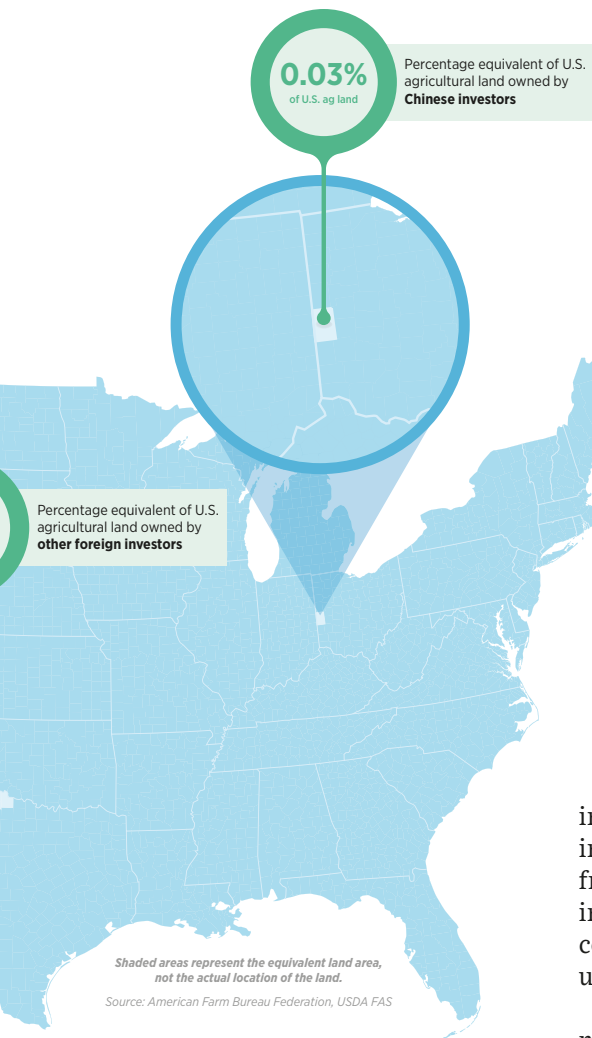
In Oklahoma, reported investments in U.S. agricultural land are slightly higher than the national average, with 4.1% of the state's privately held agricultural land held by foreign entities. Canadian investors own 47% of foreign-held Oklahoma land, followed by Italy with about 30% and Germany with about 4%.

Forestland dominates foreign-held U.S. agricultural land, constituting



48%, followed by cropland (29%), pastureland (18%) and other agricultural land (5%). The distribution varies across states, with forestland predominant in timber-rich states. In Oklahoma, more than 60% of the state's 1.79 million foreign-held acres is cropland, followed by about 27% in pastureland.

Over four decades, foreign-investor-held U.S. agricultural land has increased by 27 million acres (214%), rising from 1% to 3.1% of total privately held agricultural land. Between 2010 and 2021, cropland saw the greatest percentage increase at 182%, while forestland had the highest numerical increase at 8.6 million acres. The increase appears to parallel the growth of interest and investment in renewable energy production with words like "solar" and "wind" appearing in the names of many newly reported entities.



The top 10 entities, holding 18% of foreign-owned agricultural land, are mainly timber or renewable energy industry participants. China, a focal point of concern among many farmers and ranchers, ranks 18th in ownership, holding less than 1% of foreign-owned land – a parcel roughly equivalent to a third of the size of Rhode Island. The largest area owned by a Chinese investor is in Texas, primarily intended for a wind farm, but the project was halted due to regulatory obstacles.

In Oklahoma, the top 10 entities hold close to 70% of foreign-held land in the state. All are either linked to Canada or Italy and have the term “wind” in their name. AFIDA data captures leases of over 10 years, under which most of these renewable energy entities fall.

Existing AFIDA data implies a limited involvement of foreign entities

in U.S. agriculture, primarily by investors from nations considered friendly. However, there are problems in AFIDA’s enforcement and data collection practices, adding a level of uncertainty in our understanding.

Enforcement gaps emerged as a major obstacle to accurate information, as highlighted by the Congressional Research Service. Their data indicates that USDA penalties, assessed 494 times between 1998 and 2021, were predominantly for late filing – rather than avoiding filing altogether – with penalties consistently below 1% of the market value (USDA has authority to impose penalties up to 25% of the land’s market value).

Limited resources at USDA and staffing shortages between 2015-2018 and 2020 further hindered enforcement. Aggressive enforcement of AFIDA is needed to counter the reliance on voluntary compliance and self-reporting by foreign entities.

Ownership transparency is also limited because USDA lacks the authority to require disclosure beyond a third tier of ownership, which means they cannot always confirm the “identity of the ultimate beneficial owner” or their corresponding geographical location.

A substantial amount of acreage is currently linked to addresses in locations such as the Cayman Islands, known for making it easy to hide the true identity of entities via the use of shell corporations. This barrier means the public can often not capture the true location of where majority investor-owners claim citizenship.

There are additionally over 3.2 million acres, or 8%, of foreign-investor-held agricultural land that is uncategorized, either because the submission had “no foreign investor listed” or “no predominant country code listed.” USDA assigns a country based on the investor with the largest share, even if that share is minimal and not a controlling interest. This shields many minority owners and their associated countries of origin from public knowledge.

Improvements to collection and enforcement appear to be a meaningful way for consumers, farmers and policymakers alike to better understand the issue of foreign ownership of U.S. agricultural land.

Furthermore, understanding the sensitivities of each investor situation, their history, and the implications for agriculture regionally are all likely to be considerations for legislative or policy actions. **AFB**



## Farm Bureau **Events**



**Above** | OKFB President Rodd Moesel presents the Oklahoma flag during the opening AFBF Convention session.



**Above** | AFBF President Zippy Duvall (right) presents the New Horizon Award to OKFB President Rodd Moesel (left) during the 2024 AFBF convention. OKFB's Capitol Camp was recognized as the outstanding new program in the organization's membership group.

## OKFB members attend 105th annual AFBF Convention

*OKFB members travel to Salt Lake City to gather with fellow Farm Bureau members from around the nation for fellowships, conferences, competitions, awards and more.*

**N**early 70 Oklahoma Farm Bureau members traveled to Salt Lake City Jan. 19-24 for the 105th annual American Farm Bureau Convention.

The meeting is the largest annual gathering of Farm Bureau members in the nation, and included three general sessions, numerous breakout sessions, the 2024 AFBF business meeting, YF&R competitive events, Women's Leadership meetings and more.

### **OKFB wins AFBF New Horizon Award, State Awards of Excellence**

Oklahoma Farm Bureau was awarded the AFBF New Horizon Award Sunday, January 21, at the 2024 AFBF Convention for OKFB's Capitol Camp youth legislative event.

The OKFB Capitol Camp is a two-day immersive mock legislative experience started in 2022 for 4-H and FFA members who are high school juniors and seniors that aims to help them understand Oklahoma's legislative branch and the lawmaking process.

The event, held at the Oklahoma State Capitol, is planned again for June 12-13.

The New Horizon Award recognizes one state Farm Bureau in each AFBF

membership category for implementing a new program or event. OKFB received the award in AFBF's membership category four, which includes states with a similar number of members.

OKFB was also recognized with four AFBF State Awards of Excellence during the 2024 AFBF Convention. State Farm Bureaus are recognized for outstanding achievement in four possible award areas based on the state's yearly programs, events and activities. OKFB was honored with an award in each of the possible program areas, which includes advocacy, coalitions & partnerships, engagement & outreach and leadership & business development.

### **YF&R Competitive Events**

Oklahoma Farm Bureau Young Farmers & Ranchers members competed in the AFBF YF&R competitive events during the 2024 AFBF Convention.

Jake and Kelly Decker of Noble County competed in the YF&R Achievement Award, Meggie Gibbs of Ottawa County competed in the Excellence in Agriculture event, and Leslie Lewis of Okmulgee County

competed in the Discussion Meet.

Each of the contestants prepared their applications and honed their presentations in the months leading up to the AFBF Convention.

### **OKFB WLC members represent Oklahoma at AFBF meeting**

Oklahoma Farm Bureau Women's Leadership Committee members met with fellow Farm Bureau women from around the country during the AFBF Convention.

OKFB WLC members attended the AFBF Women's Leadership Committee regional caucus, networking events and represented Oklahoma during the AFBF WLC Business meeting. The OKFB WLC also sponsored a table at the AFBF Flapjack Fundraiser.

WLC members wrapped up their time in Utah with a tour of Utah agribusinesses where they learned about the state's agriculture industry.

### **OKFB delegates help set national grassroots policies for 2024**

Five Oklahoma Farm Bureau members joined fellow farmer and rancher delegates during the business session of the 105th AFBF Convention Tuesday, Jan. 23.



AFBF presidential address



Convention trade show



YF&R discussion meet



AFBF business session



Election of leaders

Rodd Moesel, OKFB president; Leon Richards, OKFB district one director; Mike Leverett, OKFB district eight director; Brady Bond, Garfield County member; and Jared Anderson, Ottawa County member served as OKFB's delegates during the session, where they reviewed proposed policy changes, gave their input on selected issues and voted on bills proposed to the delegate body.

The farmer and rancher delegates adopted policies submitted by Farm Bureau members from around the country and curated by state-level policy development processes. The approved policies will guide AFBF's agricultural policy work in 2024.

"I look forward to this every year because it reaffirms your faith in people and their judgment," Moesel said of the grassroots policy development process. "There are really good people with good ideas all across the country."

#### Artificial intelligence

Delegates voted to create new policy to address the growth of artificial intelligence in agriculture. AI has the potential to enhance farming practices and conserve resources, but privacy rights must be respected.

#### Labor

Recognizing the challenges of maintaining a strong agriculture workforce, delegates voted to stabilize wage rates for guest workers and revise federal H-2A and H-2B programs to help ease labor strains.

#### Farm bill

Delegates reaffirmed their support for increasing reference prices in the farm bill and maintaining a strong crop insurance program, including an expansion of eligibility to ensure more commodities are covered.

#### Foreign agricultural investment

On foreign investment, delegates added policy in support of additional funding to improve data collection on the foreign ownership of agricultural land. Delegates also voted to support the Committee on Foreign Investment in the U.S. reviewing foreign investments in U.S. agribusinesses, natural resources and real estate.

#### Contracted livestock contract terms

Delegates called for changes to the contract poultry pay system to ensure long-term economic sustainability for farmers, and to require more transparency from poultry companies.

#### Trade

On trade, delegates added policy to recommend Congress investigate fertilizer supply chain outages and tariffs placed on imports.

#### Leaders elected

In addition to policy changes voted on by Farm Bureau delegates, AFBF President Zippy Duvall and Vice President Scott VanderWal were unanimously re-elected for another two-year term to serve at the helm of the organization.

Moesel had the opportunity to deliver the nominating speech for VanderWal during the election process, delivering his address to fellow AFBF delegates.

"Delegates demonstrated their readiness to seize the opportunities and take on the challenges facing agriculture," said AFBF President Zippy Duvall. "It's crucial that Congress pass a new farm bill and address the labor shortage in 2024. The policy set forth by Farm Bureaus in all 50 states and Puerto Rico will guide AFBF in its efforts through the process. We look forward to making our members' unified voice heard as they work to ensure a strong food supply for America's families."





**Above** | Okmulgee County YF&R members visit with AFBF tradeshow attendees, sharing how fellow Farm Bureau members can host local ag tours.

**Left** | AFBF President Zippy Duvall presents Okmulgee County with their CAE award.

## Okmulgee County Farm Bureau recognized with AFBF County Awards of Excellence

*The county's YF&R program received national attention for their county ag tour, which connected Okmulgee County residents with their local farms, ranches and agribusinesses.*

**M**embers of the Okmulgee County Farm Bureau Young Farmers & Ranchers Committee hosted a booth showcasing their county ag tour for fellow Farm Bureau members from around the nation at the American Farm Bureau Convention January 19-24 in Salt Lake City, Utah.

Okmulgee County hosted their booth in the convention trade show alongside fellow county Farm Bureaus that were honored for outstanding programs and innovative ideas through the AFBF County Awards of Excellence program.

During the convention, Okmulgee County YF&R members visited with fellow Farm Bureau members from around the country as they shared their ag tour concept along with how they planned and executed the tour.

Okmulgee County YF&R members planned and hosted a countywide tour of agricultural businesses and facilities to help community members understand the important role agriculture plays in the county.

"Our county ag tour was selected as one of the best activities in the country this year at the national level," said Okmulgee County Farm Bureau YF&R Chairman Tim Taylor.

The county's booth featured a brochure promoting the ag tour, a slideshow of stops during the tour, and a handout designed to help fellow Farm Bureau leaders implement their own version of the event in their local communities.

Okmulgee County YF&R members also shared the local support they received from community businesses and encouraged fellow Farm Bureau members to connect with local businesses to both receive financial support for their program and build connections within their county.

"One reason that we felt like this activity was so important to put on and promote and organize was that a lot of our members, and community members and even ag and 4-H students, they drive back and forth on the highway," Taylor said. "They pass pecan orchards and cattle ranches and meat processing facilities, they see these things day in and day out, but they might not know what's going on at those operations."

Taylor said the idea of a county ag tour is a simple, yet powerful program for local community members to connect with agriculture.

"If we don't tell our story and we don't promote and educate our communities, who is going to do that in a way that is reflective of reality of our county Farm Bureau?" Taylor asked.

The AFBF County Awards of Excellence program recognized 24 county Farm Bureaus from across the country who demonstrated a commitment to offering quality programming to their counties.

"I'm proud of the strong leadership and engagement at the county level that leads to these outstanding volunteer-driven programs," said AFBF President Zippy Duvall. "Improving the lives of Farm Bureau members, supporting our rural communities and giving our urban neighbors a window into the world of agriculture are all worthy goals."

### See more online

Learn more about Okmulgee County's CAE booth and hear Tim Taylor discuss their county ag tour in our video at [okfb.news/cae24video](https://okfb.news/cae24video)



**Above |** AFBF President Zippy Duvall (right) and OKFB President Rodd Moesel (left) present Rep. Frank Lucas with the 2024 AFBF Distinguished Service Award.



**Above |** Lucas speaks to Farm Bureau members at the 2024 AFBF Convention.



**Above |** Lucas shares a legislative update during a 2021 meeting with OKFB members. Lucas, a longtime Farm Bureau member, works to keep OKFB members informed about national issues.

## Lucas receives AFBF Distinguished Service Award

*Lucas was recognized for his leadership on national agricultural issues, including his work on the transformative 2014 farm bill.*

**C**ongressman Frank Lucas of Oklahoma was named the recipient of the American Farm Bureau Federation’s 2024 Distinguished Service Award during the 2024 AFBF Convention in Salt Lake City.

The award is among the highest honors presented by AFBF.

Lucas is a fifth-generation Oklahoman and farmer who has been a defender of agriculture for more than 40 years. With a bachelor’s degree in agricultural economics from Oklahoma State University, he successfully brought the perspective of the American farmer with him to Capitol Hill. Elected to Congress in 1994, he is recognized as the longest-serving member on the House Agriculture Committee and served as chairman of the committee from 2011 to 2015, playing an instrumental role in the 2014 farm bill. Prior to serving in Congress, Lucas served in the

Oklahoma State House of Representatives where he focused on prominent agriculture issues.

Lucas commended AFBF for the important role the organization plays in informing farmers about congressional happenings and making sure they can voice their opinions and needs. A lifelong Farm Bureau member, Lucas shared what receiving this award means to him.

“It’s like having your family say you’ve done a really good job for them,” Lucas said. “There’s nothing more important than having your family acknowledge that your hard work has been for a purpose and accomplished things. I appreciate my Farm Bureau family acknowledging my 29 years of constantly working on their behalf. It’s very kind of them.”

Oklahoma Farm Bureau President Rodd Moesel shared the value Lucas’ background brings to Capitol Hill, noting not many in his role go home on

the weekends to complete a list of farm chores and move cattle.

“He’s so rare because he is a real farmer and rancher,” Moesel said. “There are very few of those left in Congress. He really understands our issues and is able to take those messages to Congress.”

Lucas was nominated by Oklahoma Farm Bureau for the DSA, and a national Farm Bureau committee selected Lucas as the recipient.

AFBF established the Distinguished Service Award in 1928 to honor individuals who have devoted their careers to serving the national interest of American agriculture.

### See more online

➤ Watch AFBF’s video honoring Lucas’ agricultural achievements on YouTube at [okfb.news/LucasAward24](https://okfb.news/LucasAward24)





**Above** | HJ Reed of Loyal and True Strategies walks OKFB members through a step-by-step guide to advocating for issues with legislators during the 2024 OKFB Leadership Conference.



**Above** | Oklahoma Secretary of Agriculture Blayne Arthur (right) greets OKFB members and shares an update on the state agriculture department's work for Oklahoma agriculture.

## OKFB members discuss foreign land ownership, 2024 election cycle during annual leadership conference

*Oklahoma Farm Bureau members gathered to learn about issues facing agriculture in Oklahoma and across the nation as OKFB kicked off its grassroots advocacy year.*

**N**early 100 Oklahoma Farm Bureau members gathered in Oklahoma City for the organization's 2024 Leadership Conference held Tuesday, Feb. 13.

The annual event serves to bring Farm Bureau members together for a day of learning and fellowship with a number of speakers and guests throughout the conference.

The event kicked off with Oklahoma Secretary of Agriculture Blayne Arthur giving an update on Oklahoma agriculture and the National Association of State Departments of Agriculture, of which Arthur is the president.

Arthur recounted some of NASDA's top priorities for the coming year, including the farm bill, agricultural research, animal disease response, conservation efforts and more.

She also expressed the need for programs like OKFB's Young Farmers and Ranchers, noting the average age of agricultural producers is 57.

Arthur shared with Farm Bureau

members the growth of Oklahoma's agritourism industry and encouraged members to think about tourism opportunities on their operations to diversify income, create space for family members to return to the farm, and educate fellow Oklahomans about the agriculture industry.

Farm Bureau members also heard from Tres Savage, the editor-in-chief at NonDoc Media, a journalism project that started in Savage's garage in 2015. Savage described NonDoc as a community journalism platform that aims to support under-covered issues around the state of Oklahoma.

Savage noted the decline in traditional journalism and the effect of shuttered main-street newspapers in communities across Oklahoma and the United States. NonDoc aims to bridge the gap between local and national news organizations, allowing local newspapers to run content in their print issues free of charge to provide another source of content for dwindling newspaper staff.

He also walked members through best practices as news consumers in an age of increased click-bait news and artificial intelligence technology, noting reliable news articles and sources generally list author names, include information from a variety of sources, display funding sources, and make their contact information readily available.

Savage also moderated a panel of political consultants to give Leadership Conference attendees a glimpse into the 2024 election season. Panelists included Evan Handy of the South Creek Group, Matt Parker of Campaign Advocacy Management Professionals, and Brigette Zorn, a political and marketing strategist who headed Joy Hofmeister's gubernatorial campaign in 2022.

Panelists discussed top issues for the 2024 elections, polling patterns across Oklahoma voters, upcoming state Senate races and more.

American Farm Bureau Federation Economist Danny Munch gave Farm



**Above |** NonDoc's Tres Savage moderates a panel featuring political consultants on the realities of political races in the upcoming 2024 election cycle.



**Above |** AFBF Economist Danny Munch (left) visits with Custer County Farm Bureau member Lawrence Sawatzky during the 2024 OKFB Leadership Conference. Munch presented the most recent data on foreign land ownership.

Bureau members an update on foreign ownership of agricultural land across the U.S. and Oklahoma. Munch noted the recent uptick of state-submitted policy proposals as AFBF received 11 proposals from nine states concerning foreign land ownership in 2022.

This year's speaker lineup concluded with an advocacy training session with HJ Reed of Loyal and True Strategies. Reed discussed best practices for visiting with legislators and advocating for the agricultural and rural issues that matter most to Farm Bureau members.

The evening concluded with an awards banquet to honor the recipients of the 2023 OKFB Champion award, which is given to state lawmakers who serve as exemplary advocates for Oklahoma agriculture, going above and beyond for the state's farmers and ranchers during the 2023 legislative session. The list of Champion Award recipients is included in our All Around Oklahoma section on page 38.



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**Above** | AFBF President Zippy Duvall (center) took time to visit with Oklahoma Collegiate Farm Bureau members during the 2024 AFBF YF&R Conference in Omaha. OKFB members met with fellow young leaders from around the nation to learn and grow.



**Above** | Oklahoma State Collegiate Farm Bureau Member Cassidy Cashen competed in the Collegiate Discussion Meet.

## YF&R, Collegiate Farm Bureau members attend AFBF national YF&R conference in Omaha

*Collegiate Farm Bureau member Cassidy Cashen of Oklahoma State University progresses to sweet 16 round of national collegiate discussion meet*

**N**early 20 young Oklahoma agriculturalists joined approximately 900 fellow Farm Bureau members from around the nation in Omaha for the 2024 American Farm Bureau National Young Farmers & Ranchers Conference March 8-11.

Members of Oklahoma Farm Bureau's Young Farmers & Ranchers program and Collegiate Farm Bureau members from five chapters enjoyed a full slate of speakers, breakout sessions and fellowship with fellow Farm Bureau members from around the country.

Cassidy Cashen of Oklahoma State University represented OKFB in the AFBF Collegiate Discussion Meet. Cashen progressed to the Sweet 16 round of competition discussing agricultural topics with fellow Collegiate Farm Bureau members.

Oklahoma's delegation also expanded their agricultural horizons as they toured area farms and agricultural businesses including pork and poultry farms in addition to a Claas combine assembly plant.



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# Farm Bureau Cares

## Community Food Donation Matching

### County Farm Bureaus, OKFB donate more than \$12,000 to feed Oklahomans in need through Farm Bureau Cares donation matching program

**O**klahoma Farm Bureau teamed up with county Farm Bureaus to donate a total of \$12,400 to food pantries and food assistance programs across the state through the 2024 Farm Bureau Cares: Community Food Donation Matching Program.

This year, more than 30 county Farm Bureaus and county Women’s Leadership Committees made donations to nutrition assistance

programs in their communities, including local community food banks, church meal programs, organizations helping victims of domestic violence and more.

Launched in 2021, the program encourages county Farm Bureaus to make donations of food or money to local organizations that help meet the nutritional needs of local residents. OKFB matched county Farm Bureau

donations up to \$100, doubling the impact of the grassroots organization.

As agriculturalists, Farm Bureau members know the importance of food security, and the Farm Bureau Cares program gives Oklahoma farmers and ranchers the opportunity to uplift their communities through sharing the products they grow to feed, clothe and fuel their fellow Oklahomans every day.



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## OKFB supports ag youth at 2024 OYE Sale of Champions

**O** The stadium lights were bright in Jim Norick Arena at the Oklahoma State Fairgrounds in Oklahoma City Friday, March 22, for the 2024 Oklahoma Youth Expo Sale of Champions.

Oklahoma agricultural youth showcased the hard work and effort they invested into their show animals during the culmination of Oklahoma's youth livestock show season in front of the state's agriculture community that had gathered to purchase

premiums to support Oklahoma 4-H and FFA members who made the sale.

Oklahoma Farm Bureau proudly supported Oklahoma agriculture youth at the sale by purchasing premiums for 66 exhibitors.

OKFB contributed a total of \$45,000 in premiums and add-on premiums during the Friday-night sale. OKFB also purchased the chalice for the grand champion steer, which was exhibited by Ruby Bell of Bristow FFA.

OKFB partnered with fellow

agriculture and rural organizations and businesses to purchase premiums of cattle, hogs, sheep and goats exhibited by Oklahoma 4-H and FFA members at final event of the annual youth livestock show.

The sale serves as an opportunity for winning OYE exhibitors to be rewarded for the hard work and dedication they invest into their animals as they develop animal care skills that agriculturalists across our state use every day.



**Left** | Ruby Bell of Bristow FFA stands with her crossbred steer, which was selected as the show's grand champion steer. OKFB purchased the grand champion steer chalice for the 2024 show.

**Opposite Left** | Payten Kienholz of Tonkawa FFA presents her reserve breed champion spot during the 2024 OYE Sale of Champions. OKFB partnered to purchase the premium on her hog.

**Opposite Right** | Connor Sneary of Alva FFA stands with his reserve breed champion shorthorn. OKFB partnered to purchase the premium on Sneary's animal.

**Opposite Left** | OKFB President Rodd Moesel received the 2023 OYE volume buyer award on behalf of OKFB before the start of the 2024 sale.

**Opposite Right** | Taylor Glover of Elgin FFA showed the bronze medallion market goat, purchased in part by OKFB.

OKFB was also honored during the sale as the 2023 volume buyer award after purchasing the largest number of exhibitor premiums during last year's Sale of Champions. In addition to the sale, OKFB was a platinum event sponsor of OYE, bringing OKFB's total support of the 2024 event to more than \$65,000.

The 2024 OYE Sale of Champions awarded a total of \$1.5 million to 4-H and FFA exhibitors, with a total of 211 students qualifying for the sale.



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**Above |** Rep. Neil Hays (right) grabs a quick meal in between legislative appointments during the 2024 OKFB WLC Farm City Festival on Wednesday, March 27.



**Above |** Oklahoma State Treasurer Todd Russ (left) stands with members of the OKFB Women's Leadership Committee at the State Capitol to visit with members of the OKFB Women's Leadership Committee.

## OKFB WLC hosts annual Farm City Festival at state Capitol

*Farm Bureau women from around the state gather in Oklahoma City to thank legislators, their assistants and Capitol staff*

**T**he Oklahoma Farm Bureau Women's Leadership Committee brought a buzz of activity to the Oklahoma State Capitol as the smell of fresh-cooked food and the allure of homemade desserts greeted state legislators, staff and guests during the group's annual Farm City Festival on Wednesday, March 27.

The yearly event offers an opportunity for Farm Bureau women from around the state to share the agriculture story with legislators.

WLC members hosted a lunch in the second-floor rotunda of the Capitol for legislators, their staff and Capitol employees to thank them for supporting policies that enable Oklahoma farmers and ranchers to continue providing food, fuel and fiber for a growing world.

"Our Farm City Festival is a tradition," said Mignon Bolay, OKFB WLC chair. "It is a tradition for the Farm Bureau women to come to the Capitol and thank our legislators and their assistants and feed the

employees. It's a great day to come and celebrate agriculture with them and say, 'Thank you.'"

The meal featured made-in-Oklahoma foods and included home-baked desserts provided by county Farm Bureau members. The main feature of the meal was a sausage from Stigler-based Mountain View Meats. OKFB District Three Board Member David VonTungeln baked fresh bread as part of the meal.

The meal was served to legislators, staff and guests by nine members of the state WLC committee along with 30 county WLC members from around the state. The Farm Bureau women took the opportunity to visit with legislators and share the important role agriculture plays in Oklahoma and how Farm Bureau supports family farmers and ranchers.

"It's an honor to be able to do this and represent agriculture, our women's committee and our Farm Bureau women around the state," Bolay said.



**Above |** Rep. Anthony Moore (right) visits with Logan Moore during the 2024 Farm City Festival event.



**Above |** OKFB WLC Chair Mignon Bolay (left) meets with Agriculture Committee, during Farm City Festival.





...topped by Farm City Festival at the Oklahoma Women's Leadership Committee.



...n County Farm Bureau member Gaye Pfeiffer



...with Rep. Dell Kerbs, chair of the House



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## Ten legislators honored with 2023 OKFB Champion Awards

Ten Oklahoma lawmakers were honored for supporting agriculture with Oklahoma Farm Bureau's 2023 Champion Award at the OKFB's 2024 leadership conference on Tuesday, Feb. 13, in Oklahoma City.

The OKFB Champion Award is presented to lawmakers who serve as exemplary advocates for Oklahoma agriculture. Award winners were nominated by county Farm Bureau members and the OKFB board of directors.

Recipients of OKFB's 2023 Champion Award were:

- **Oklahoma House Speaker Charles McCall, Atoka**
- **Rep. John Pfeiffer, Orlando**
- **Rep. Dell Kerbs, Shawnee**
- **Rep. David Hardin, Stilwell**
- **Rep. Anthony Moore, Clinton**
- **Sen. Brent Howard, Altus**
- **Sen. Lonnie Paxton, Tuttle**
- **Sen. Darcy Jech, Kingfisher**
- **Sen. Chris Kidd, Waurika**
- **Sen. Chuck Hall, Perry**

## OKFB adds two new staff members



*Cydnee Love*



*Chloe Black*

**Oklahoma Farm Bureau welcomed two new staff members to the organization in February:**

### Cydnee Love

Cydnee Love was named federation finance assistant for OKFB. In her position, Love will work alongside county Farm Bureau staff and grassroots leaders to maintain sound financial records and create reports and statements to ensure the smooth business operation of all 77 county Farm Bureaus across the state.

Having grown up in Chicago, Love now calls Edmond home. She comes to Farm Bureau after working in a supervisory role at a large retail business.

### Chloe Black

Chloe Black joined OKFB as coordinator of collegiate, special projects and YF&R. In her role, Black will work with the Young Farmers & Ranchers program and with Collegiate Farm Bureau chapters. She will also conduct OKFB safety programs, focusing on the southern half of the state.

A native of Newcastle, Black grew up as a fourth-generation farmer, and today, she has her own cow/calf herd of purebred Charolais cattle from which she sells bulls to fellow farmers and ranchers.

## AFBF: New ag census shows alarming loss of family farms

New agriculture census data released by USDA in mid-February is cause for concern as the number of farms operating in the United States and the number of farm acres have both fallen significantly.

The 2022 Census of Agriculture reports 141,733 fewer farms in 2022 than in 2017. The number of farm acres fell to 880,100,848, a loss of more than 20 million acres from just five years ago.

"The latest census numbers put in black and white the warnings our members have been expressing for years," said AFBF President Zippy Duvall. "Increased regulations, rising supply costs, lack of available labor and weather disasters have all squeezed farmers to the point that many of them find it impossible to remain economically sustainable."

While AFBF is encouraged that the number of beginning farmers increased, the latest census numbers show the number of farmers over the age of 65 is outpacing younger farmers. Almost 1.3 million farmers are now at or beyond retirement age, while just 300,000 farmers are under the age of 35.

AFBF has long-established policies supporting beginning farmers, including through farm bill programs focused on new and beginning farmers.

## Noble County Farm Bureau members named 2024 Oklahoma Leopold Conservation Award winners

Noble County Farm Bureau member Marty Williams of Red Rock has been named the recipient of the Oklahoma Leopold Conservation Award. He and his wife, Crystal, receive a \$10,000 award.

The award honors farmers, ranchers and forestland

owners who go above and beyond in their management of soil health, water quality and wildlife habitat. Given in honor of conservationist Aldo Leopold, the award recognizes agriculturalists and landowners who inspire others with their dedication to environmental improvement.



## Oklahoma broadband expansion grants approved for 142 projects

More than 55,000 Oklahoma homes and businesses are one step closer to receiving high-speed internet service, thanks to votes on Jan. 26 by the Oklahoma Broadband Governing Board to authorize broadband infrastructure expansion projects in 57 counties. Once all necessary agreements are executed, the 142 approved projects would provide broadband to nearly a quarter of locations without such service today.

In a first-of-its-kind investment in Oklahoma, the legislature designated ARPA State and Local Fiscal Recovery Funds to create and administer the broadband investment grant program. Grant funds of \$374 million will be coupled with more than \$90 million in matching funds from 31 internet service providers that submitted proposals for service expansion.

“Governor Stitt and the legislature’s vision to make broadband service available statewide is clearly taking root,” said Jim Meek, board chair and OKFB state director. “With hundreds of applications and over \$5.1 billion in funding requests, I commend the board for its dedication and the broadband office staff for its expertise in bringing to fruition this historic first grant program to bridge the digital divide.”

All projects must be completed before the end of 2026. The final list of funded projects is subject to modification. If an approved provider chooses to withdraw participation, funding will move to another project, with the approval of the board.

## Harmon named senior director of Young Farmers & Ranchers

Oklahoma Farm Bureau has named Burton Harmon as the organization’s senior director of Young Farmers and Ranchers.

In his new position, Harmon will work alongside OKFB’s grassroots-elected YF&R Committee to coordinate programs and events for Oklahoma agriculturalists ages 18-35 to help young Farm Bureau members develop their leadership, advocacy and business skills.

Harmon has worked alongside YF&R members for decades



**Burton Harmon**

going back to his time on the state YF&R committee as a Farm Bureau member. He also worked alongside county YF&R committees as a north central field representative.

## Stowers presented with OKFB Distinguished Service award

Oklahoma Farm Bureau had the opportunity to present Terry Stowers with OKFB’s Distinguished Service to OKFB Award.

Stowers was unable to attend the 2023 OKFB annual meeting in November when the award was announced.

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

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

OKFB partnered with several other agriculture



**OKFB President Rodd Moesel (left) presents Terry Stowers with OKFB’s 2023 Distinguished Service to OKFB Award.**

organizations to establish the Royalty Owner Coalition of Oklahoma in 2021 to continue Stowers’ work after he announced his retirement. ROCO provides a structured and strong voice for the interests of Oklahoma mineral owners.

## AFBF applauds SEC for sparing farms from Wall Street rules

The Securities and Exchange Commission responded to American Farm Bureau Federation’s concerns and affirmed that regulations intended for Wall Street should not extend to America’s family farms. The SEC voted March 6 on its final climate disclosure rule and removed the Scope 3 reporting requirement, which would have required public companies to report the greenhouse gas emissions of their supply chain.

Since the rule was first proposed two years ago, AFBF led the charge for its removal. Farm Bureau members sent almost 20,000 messages to the SEC and Capitol Hill, sharing their perspectives of how Scope 3 reporting would affect their farms.

Now that the SEC has thoughtfully evaluated the issue, AFBF is urging California to follow the SEC’s lead by withdrawing its Scope 3 reporting requirement for any company doing business in the state. Farm Bureau, along with the U.S. Chamber of Commerce and others, recently challenged that state law and its national ramifications.



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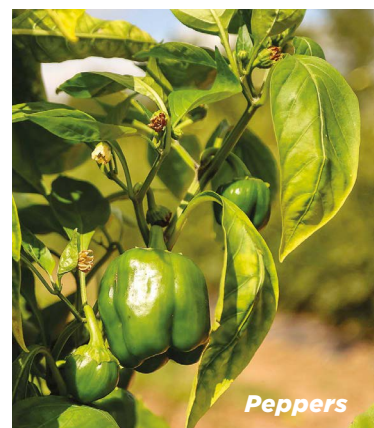


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**Watermelon****Broccoli****Pumpkins****Peppers**

**Above |** Oklahoma gardeners can give back to their communities this year by planting an extra row of fruits and vegetables in their backyard gardens, then donating the extra produce to a local food pantry or soup kitchen. Gardeners across the country have grown and donated more than 20 million pounds of fresh produce through the Plant a Row for the Hungry program. (Photos by Mitchell Alcalá, OSU Agriculture)

## Plant an extra row to help bridge the food insecurity gap

By **Trisha Gedon**

*Oklahoma Cooperative Extension Service*

In just over a year, the Student Farm at Oklahoma State University has produced thousands of pounds of fresh fruits and vegetables that have helped bridge the food insecurity gap in Oklahoma.

Located west of the OSU campus on Highway 51, the 3-acre farm has produced more than 54,000 pounds of broccoli, sweet corn, tomatoes, cucumbers, zucchini, watermelons, spaghetti squash, spinach, kohlrabi, pumpkins, peppers, cauliflower and more, all of which has been donated to the local food pantry, Our Daily Bread Food and Resource Center in Stillwater, Oklahoma.

“This farm is making a big difference in Stillwater,” said David Hillock, OSU Extension consumer horticulturist. “While the Student Farm is done on a fairly large scale compared to backyard gardeners, those gardeners can make a difference in their communities, too. As gardeners venture into the garden to sow their fruit and vegetable seeds, they’re encouraged to plant an extra row or two of their favorite produce. Later this spring and summer when harvest begins, they’re encouraged to

donate the extra produce to their local food pantry, soup kitchen or service organization to help feed the hungry.”

Planting an extra row to donate isn’t a new idea. Plant a Row for the Hungry is the public service program of an organization called GardenComm. It began in 1995 when GardenComm members encouraged other gardeners to plant an extra row of produce each year and donate the surplus to local food pantries and other service organizations.

Since its inception, more than 20 million pounds of produce have been grown and donated, resulting in more than 80 million meals to feed America’s hungry.

According to the U.S. Department of Agriculture, one in eight households in the United States is food insecure. Furthermore, about 33 million people, including 13 million children, have substandard diets. They resort to seeking food assistance because they don’t have the funds to buy the food they need.

“The need for food assistance has increased by 70% in recent years. In some cases, these families are turned away from food banks due to lack of

resources,” Hillock said. “This is just one way gardening enthusiasts across the state can make a difference.”

Gardeners who opt to participate in Plant a Row for the Hungry should choose fruits and vegetables that are easy to grow and have a high yield, such as tomatoes, okra, cucumbers, squash, beans, carrots and lettuce. Many food pantries have adequate sources for canned and boxed foods, but in many cases, they are desperate for fresh foods for their clientele.

Backyard gardeners aren’t the only ones making a difference. Master Gardeners from across the state grew nearly 23,000 pounds of produce in 2023 and donated it to their local communities.

“I don’t know of very many gardeners who haven’t had an excess of fruit and vegetables at some point in the growing season,” he said. “Get the whole family involved in planting, growing and caring for an extra row or two in the garden. It’s a great way to instill in children a sense of community and giving back. This act of kindness and generosity can plant a seed in children that can grow with them throughout their lives.”

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