

Oklahoma Country

Spring 2023
The magazine of
Oklahoma Farm Bureau

Fighting *the* good fight

One family's commitment to battling
hunger and advocating for agriculture

Uncharted territories

*From Canute to Chisinau, one Oklahoman's
story of farming and growing in Moldova*

Taking to the airwaves

*Sharing agriculture in northwest Oklahoma
through an opportunity in radio*

Racing to the top

*Two OKFB members promote beef
to a nationwide NASCAR audience*



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ON THE COVER

Photo by Dustin Mielke

Advocates for agriculture and hunger, Jeff and Sara Marlow, stand with one of Sara's show pigs, which she donates to the OKFB Foundation for Agriculture's Pork for Packs Program.

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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.

Featured stories



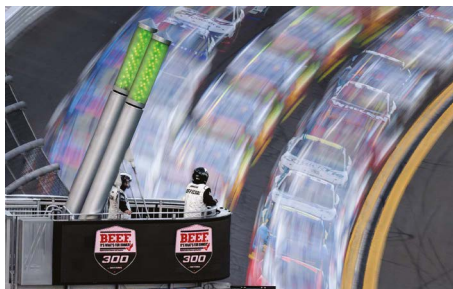
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Rodd Moesel

President

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"While OKFB has been involved in advocacy efforts since our inception, a new and exciting area that we are focusing on is the opportunity to spur on local innovation and opportunities with our new rural development efforts."

Forging forward together as Farm Bureau

If you have seen an Oklahoma Farm Bureau advertisement, brochure or video over the last few years, you may have noticed our tagline, We are rural Oklahoma.®

More than a mere sentiment or a nice saying, OKFB members, leaders and staff strive every day to support our state's family farmers and ranchers and improve our local communities – the core of rural Oklahoma.

A key way our organization supports rural Oklahoma is by helping develop and guide laws and policies that support our rural members. Throughout the first half of the 2023 Oklahoma legislative session, our Farm Bureau members have taken a hands-on approach to supporting their grassroots policy positions by traveling to the state Capitol to visit with their legislators, hosting local legislative meetings across the state and staying up-to-date with Farm Bureau legislative updates.

I am proud of our public policy team as they have spearheaded OKFB's advocacy efforts throughout the 2023 Oklahoma legislative session. They have taken our grassroots policies and our local Farm Bureau members' voices to legislators as they work on the offensive side of the ball by promoting bills that would help agriculture and rural Oklahoma grow while at the same time playing defense to prevent laws and policies that would harm our rural way of life from being passed and enacted.

Our communications team has played a crucial role as well, sharing our legislative work with Farm Bureau members and the general public. I hope you have taken the time to read the weekly legislative updates on the OKFB website or watched the Lincoln to Local video series on Facebook or YouTube recapping all the legislative action.

While OKFB has been involved in advocacy efforts since our inception, a new and exciting area that we are focusing on is the opportunity to spur on local innovation and opportunities with our new rural development efforts.

The results of the 2020 census clearly showed that while the state of Oklahoma experienced a population gain, much of rural Oklahoma's population declined. As farmers and ranchers who rely on hometown

businesses to not only purchase supplies and agricultural inputs, but also to provide job opportunities for our family and community members, we know it is important to have vibrant businesses along main street and beyond.

We are embarking on a two-pronged rural development program that provides local entrepreneurs and innovators with industry expertise, business knowledge and funding opportunities to get new ideas off the ground and bolster growing businesses.

Our accelerator programs will provide an intensive training opportunity for businesses that are developing ideas that could either be implemented on a farm or ranch or help grow an existing rural business' impact in their local community. To accomplish this, we are proud to team up with our national agriculture partner, AgLaunch, on the agriculture innovation pipeline and with Oklahoma's own CareerTech and Oklahoma's Small Business Development Centers for our rural development pipeline.

Once a business successfully completes an accelerator pipeline, they will qualify to receive funding through an equity investment opportunity we are developing with partners including BancFirst and Oklahoma's Farm Credit branches.

We are excited to add Amarie Bartel to our staff to coordinate our rural development initiatives. If you know of an innovative business that could benefit from the accelerator program and possibly funding, do not hesitate to reach out to Amarie to learn more as the program progresses. Of course, we will be sharing news, updates and how local businesses can participate as we launch these opportunities in the coming weeks and months.

This potent one-two punch of business development through our accelerator pipelines coupled with funding opportunities for businesses that graduate from the pipelines will have a tremendous impact on Oklahoma innovation, rural opportunities and our local communities.

We are proud to stay true to our grassroots members, our agriculture industry and our rural communities. Together, we truly are rural Oklahoma.



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Thad Doye

*Executive Director
Oklahoma Farm Bureau*

Discover your piece of the Farm Bureau pie

As I travel the state to work with county Farm Bureau members, represent our organization at programs and events, and visit with farmers and ranchers, I find each Oklahoma Farm Bureau member has their own story about why they joined OKFB and how they are involved and engaged in our organization.

No matter the story or reason someone is part of Farm Bureau, one thing is certain: there is plenty of Farm Bureau to go around. It is astounding how many different ways there are to plug in and be a part of our amazing grassroots organization.

To help explain the wide array of activities, programs, benefits and opportunities our organization has to offer, I often invite Farm Bureau members to picture a simple dessert: a pie.

Just as a pie has to be cut into many pieces to serve many people, there are many different areas of Farm Bureau that each serve a different part of agriculture or a different facet of our rural way of life. Some pieces may be bigger, and some pieces may be smaller, but it takes every piece to make a complete dessert – or organization.

If you ask many of our county Farm Bureau leaders, a big piece of their Farm Bureau pie is our public policy work, which spans across many different initiatives, programs and areas. From our state-level policymaking to our work on national issues to our efforts in the regulatory and legal arenas, this is often a sizable piece of the Farm Bureau pie. And do not forget our political action committee, which Farm Bureau members themselves head up.

We also have a wide array of leadership opportunities for Farm Bureau members including our Women's Leadership Committee, our Young Farmers & Ranchers Committee, the Generation Bridge program, and our numerous ag youth events.

Farm Bureau has many programs that reach out and provide support to our fellow Oklahomans. Our safety services efforts encompass numerous programs to teach students and families safety lessons and skills. Our Foundation for Agriculture is yet another piece that helps connect consumers with agriculture while supporting our state's farming and ranching community. Forming the base of all this is the work our county Farm Bureau leaders do as they support agriculture on the local level.

As executive director, I often think of our staff who work behind the scenes to make Farm Bureau a powerful organization for our members. From our membership department to field services to communications and beyond, our staff dedicates their time and talents to ensure our members are active, engaged and informed.

For many people around the state, our Farm Bureau brand is associated with insurance. Yet, another piece of the Farm Bureau pie, Oklahoma Farm Bureau Insurance provides important products and services for our members. Our hometown insurance agents and adjusters are often the faces of Farm Bureau for many of our members.

I could go on and on sharing the work OKFB does in so many areas to accomplish our organization's mission; the Farm Bureau pie is impressive.

The amazing part of Farm Bureau is that with so many options on the table, our members can choose to be involved in the areas or programs that suit their interests or help them grow. No two OKFB members are the same, and there are many different ways to participate in and experience Farm Bureau that are tailored to each individual.

I invite you to pull up to the Farm Bureau family dinner table, find a spot beside fellow grassroots members and find your own piece of the Farm Bureau pie to serve as an advocate and a leader for our state's agriculture community.



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JEFF AND SARA MARLOW



FIGHTING THE GOOD FIGHT

STORY BY REBEKAH NASH | PHOTOS BY DUSTIN MIELKE

BEING INVOLVED IN AGRICULTURE

does not require growing up on a farm or ranch. Agriculture is wide and varied with room for Oklahomans from all walks of life and backgrounds.

Broken Arrow high school senior Sara Marlow did not grow up on a traditional farm, but she has a deep passion for the industry she has grown to love.

"I got started showing pigs because it was something my dad did when he was my age, and ever since then, I have had a very determined drive," Sara said of her involvement in the livestock industry. "To be in 4-H and FFA, you have to be a driven individual.

"By showing pigs, it makes me feel like I have my own thing at my school because going to a big school there are so many things you can be involved in. I like knowing that I am one of the students at Broken Arrow High School who is showing livestock," she said.

She has been able to exhibit her livestock projects at local, district, state and national shows during her time in 4-H and FFA, even though she was diagnosed with cerebral palsy at a young age. However, that has not stopped her from achieving the goals she made for herself.

Sara has made the most of the opportunities given to her — despite her challenges — and strives to find a way to help others who find themselves in similar situations.



“FARMERS AND RANCHERS ARE GOING TO ULTIMATELY HELP US TO END THE FIGHT AGAINST HUNGER, TO END THE FIGHT AGAINST CHILDHOOD FOOD INSECURITY AND TO END SENIORS GOING TO BED HUNGRY.”

JEFF MARLOW

FOOD BANK OF EASTERN OKLAHOMA
CHIEF CULINARY OFFICER

“I am able to advocate for those who have special needs within agriculture, and I was able to help start the Unified Champions 4-H club,” Sara said. “These students are now able to advocate for agriculture and learn about the industry and where their food comes from. Getting a head start on advocating for agriculture, even within the public school, has been a great opportunity for me.”

Already an advocate for agriculture and for Oklahomans with special needs, Sara is setting herself up for success. High-attendance schools, like Broken Arrow High School, have a unique set of not only challenges, but also opportunities, Sara added.

“Going to a large school, not many students are knowledgeable about the agriculture industry, so I have the opportunity to advocate for agriculture within the Broken Arrow school district and share what we do with my teachers and other students,” she said.

Most students who play sports at her school are required to complete a number of community service hours to be eligible to play. Sara has a unique chance to connect students looking for service opportunities with the Food Bank of Eastern Oklahoma. Sara’s dad, Jeff, is the organization’s Chief Culinary Officer, so she has special insight into the nutritional needs of fellow Oklahomans.

“I went through our FFA program starting in eighth grade,” Jeff said. “I showed hogs from eighth grade until my senior year. I had a passion for it, and I loved how FFA and the agriculture industry brought people together. It taught me a good work ethic that carried into my job today. I knew when I had kids of my own – I wanted to introduce it to them as well.”

Jeff, like Sara, did not grow up on a farm, but he has a deep passion and care for the agriculture industry.

“I grew up in a small town and worked for one of the local farmers who had peanuts, soybeans, alfalfa and cattle,” Jeff said. “I naturally loved being on the farm and being around to help feed the animals.”

Jeff’s 10-year career at the food bank translates directly to farming and ranching – providing food for Oklahomans.

“No matter the size of an operation, every farm and ranch in Oklahoma is important,” Jeff said. “We know protein is a great source of fuel in peoples’ diets. Farmers growing crops and raising livestock are providing fuel for people all over the world.

“Their work is so important, but it is also important for everyone to support our local farmers and ranchers. Farmers and ranchers are going to ultimately help us to end the fight against hunger, to end the fight against



childhood food insecurity and to end seniors going to bed hungry,” Jeff said.

One of the programs common to Tulsa’s Food Bank of Eastern Oklahoma and the Oklahoma City-based Regional Food Bank of Oklahoma – the Backpack for Kids program – is something near and dear to Jeff because he and his wife have three school-aged children.

In 2012 and 2013, the Oklahoma Farm Bureau Foundation for Agriculture created the Beef for Backpacks and Pork for Packs program. The program accepts donated cattle and hogs to produce protein sticks for the food banks’ Backpack for Kids program. 4-H and FFA students are a key part of the effort, since students can elect to donate their show animals at the end of the show season at either the Oklahoma Youth Expo or the Tulsa State Fair.

In what has become a tradition across the state, the foundation later partnered with the Oklahoma FFA Association to create the Hunger Challenge, where students and chapters can either donate animals or cash to the foundation’s protein stick program in support of the food banks’ goal of feeding hungry Oklahoma students.

The giving culture runs deep in the Marlow family, so naturally, Sara has donated each pig she has shown at OYE throughout her showing career.

“It means a lot to me being able to donate a pig every year,” Sara said. “Going to Broken Arrow schools, you are exposed to a lot of hungry students. It means a lot to me that students possibly in my school are being fed through the backpack program. It means a lot knowing those students have something to fill their hungry stomachs.”

One pig donation can potentially create 1,600 pork sticks to be a nutritious protein option for the students receiving a backpack. The Regional Food Bank of Oklahoma will typically distribute more than 600,000 protein sticks a year through their backpack program, providing a healthy protein option for those students.

“What the backpack program does is it gives kids that food and nutrition over the weekend when they are not in school, so they are not going without food,” Jeff said. “What Oklahoma Farm Bureau has done with the pork sticks program is providing a good protein option to those backpacks that would cost the food bank a lot of money. We send out thousands of backpacks every weekend for kids in need. Programs like OKFB’s Pork for Packs program are very important to us.”

One in four Oklahoma students is struggling with hunger, and the United States Department of Agriculture estimates that northeastern Oklahoma will soon have the

“I AM ABLE TO ADVOCATE FOR THOSE WHO HAVE SPECIAL NEEDS WITHIN AGRICULTURE, AND I WAS ABLE TO HELP START THE UNIFIED CHAMPIONS 4-H CLUB. THESE STUDENTS ARE NOW ABLE TO ADVOCATE FOR AGRICULTURE AND LEARN ABOUT THE INDUSTRY AND WHERE THEIR FOOD COMES FROM. GETTING A HEAD START ON ADVOCATING FOR AGRICULTURE EVEN WITHIN THE PUBLIC SCHOOL HAS BEEN A GREAT OPPORTUNITY FOR ME.”

SARA MARLOW

BROKEN ARROW FFA MEMBER

nation’s highest food insecurity rate for children, which is something Jeff said is nothing to be proud of. Adequate nutrition improves children’s physical, behavioral, and mental health, increasing their performance in school.

A central goal of the backpack program is to ensure children are not only eating a nutritious meal, but also enjoying the food they receive.

“We talk to kids themselves when formulating what goes into each backpack,” Jeff said of the process to fill a backpack for a weekend. “We want to make it nutritional: we want to make sure they have fruits and vegetables, whether it is dried or in a can. We want to make sure there is protein and dairy, so we can meet the United States Department of Agriculture’s MyPlate Plan.”


The quality and nutritional content of the food is always taken into account, but there are even more considerations the food banks need to take before sending the food home with hungry children.

“We think about when they get home – do they have a refrigerator to put food in, and do they have a way to cook

the food?” Jeff said. “Everything in the backpacks is fully cooked. The students just have to open the package to eat it. We think about everyone when deciding what to send home with the students. When you are feeding thousands, you cannot meet the needs of every single person, but we try to meet the needs of everyone.”

Like being a farmer or rancher, working at the food bank requires a servant heart to break the cycle of hunger. Jeff and his fellow staff at the Food Bank of Eastern Oklahoma understand the importance of their work.

Farmers and ranchers are helping the food bank every day by providing food for hungry Oklahomans, but there is more work to be done to strengthen our rural and urban Oklahoma communities.

“Why should we ever say there are people going to bed hungry in our state?” Jeff said. “I think we can conquer this problem from all different levels. Whether it is volunteering at the food bank, bringing a skill or trade you have, or donating to our cause, there is something for everyone to help eradicate hunger in our state.” 

FOR MORE INFORMATION ABOUT PORK FOR PACKS AND BEEF FOR BACKPACKS

Contact OKFB Director of Membership and Foundation for Agriculture Holly Carroll at (405) 523-2300.

**Monetary donations can be made to the program by sending a check with “Backpack program” in the memo to:
OKFB Foundation for Agriculture • 2501 N. Stiles • Oklahoma City, OK 73105**





Kelsey and her husband, Yuri, stand in a sunflower field with their daughters during harvest on the family's Moldova farm. Walters uses her rural Oklahoma roots and passion for agriculture to share the realities of farming in Eastern Europe.

Uncharted territories

As I sit and reflect over the past year since the eruption of the Russian-Ukrainian conflict, many tears have been shed – from spending six months in Oklahoma while we waited for the situation to settle down to dealing with uncertainty with drought and export bans on my own farm in Moldova. However, these trials and tribulations have brought clarity and gratitude.

My Oklahoma roots run deep as I was raised on my family's farm in Washita County, and I was active in

4-H and FFA. I received an agricultural economics degree from Oklahoma State University, and while I started taking masters classes through the OSU international agriculture program, I began finalizing the application and vetting process with the U.S. Peace Corps, which ultimately offered me a tour in Moldova. I served as an agribusiness and rural development volunteer from 2007-2009, which is where I met my husband, Yuri.

I was leaving the Peace Corps when Yuri and I started our own journey of

farming. I used my \$3,000 Peace Corps readjustment allowance to buy a tank of diesel so we could plant our first winter wheat crop.

As we built our farm and developed modern operational and maintenance processes, we slowly added new equipment to our inherited patchwork of rebuilt Soviet tractors. Our journey bears similarities to many farm families in the United States, but there are a couple of key differences.

Despite having some of the deepest and most fertile black soils in the world



Area where Kelsey and her husband, Yuri, farm along the border with neighboring Ukraine.

Moldova fast facts

Population

2.6
million

2021
Source: World Bank

Area

13,068
square miles

*Slightly larger than
the state of Maryland*

Official language

Romanian

Capital city

Chișinău

ories

One Oklahoman's story of building a life in agriculture in Moldova, even in the midst of an ongoing war.

By Kelsey Walters • Special to Oklahoma Country

and milder winters than the U.S. corn belt, there are drawbacks to farming in Moldova. I attribute these obstacles to a disconnect between urban and rural populations and a misunderstanding of the differences between traditional and modern agriculture.

Agriculture has been in my blood from being raised on a multi-generational homestead to earning a degree in agriculture and now having my own farm with my family. I have always been surrounded by people from Oklahoma with ties to the land

from small towns and even big cities.

In Moldova, however, public opinion of agriculture is fundamentally different. The Soviet Union used rural citizens as forced manual labor. Though each person technically had some collective ownership under communist ideals, farm laborers had no power or voice in the Soviet political system and were harshly punished for any digression from the farm production orders received from the Soviet planners in Moscow.

Since the fall of the Soviet Union 30

years ago, we feel dismissed by most people in Moldova when we claim agriculture as our profession. Most Moldovans in the capital know little about agriculture, major commodity exports or the food industry. It seems most people associate agriculture with what they have seen on TV and during drives in the countryside. Even though there is a negative connotation against farming in eastern Europe because of the Soviet Union, farmers, especially in Moldova, are gaining more respect, but policymakers are trailing behind.



Ukraine

The family's farm in Moldova with the Ukraine border outlined on the horizon. Restored barns hold previous years' corn, wheat and sunflower crops that have not been able to be sold or exported due to a multitude of circumstances.

Not only is it disheartening to be disregarded because of the fact we work in agriculture, but also some employees of the Moldovan government prey on timid farmers, extracting bribes to supplement their unlivable government salaries.

Living in the country, it is hard to find a connection in the city with leadership or government agencies. The agencies still look very similar to the Soviet Union-era, even though the private economy functions in a new way. These bureaucrats are experts in creating paperwork to charge farmers for farm permits and documents required to operate a business.

Moldovan farmers are required to fill out an incredible number of statistical forms – more than any other industry – and often need to hire staff dedicated to filling out government forms to keep the farm compliant.

A farmer could typically avoid these long lines and multiple days of trips back and forth to the city to complete paperwork if they found the right agency worker and asked them to be more flexible. As an Oklahoman, I am

used to giving someone a homemade pie as a symbol of gratitude, but many bureaucrats in Moldova do not share the same sentiment – they expect a handful of cash as a thank you for expedited work during permitting processes. Without the cash payment, the bureaucrat will often interfere with the applications – making it difficult to get the documents needed to continue farming.

Like everywhere in the world, farming is a long-term venture, and we continue to care for the land and grow the crops essential to our country while learning to develop thicker skin in Moldova's business environment.

We have expanded our operation from 1,400 to roughly 6,000 acres and have grown our team from 4 to 35 employees across 2 counties. After several years of winter wheat yields of 30 bushels per acre, we have harvested fields of 90 bushels per acre. Our average continues to increase past 60 bushels per acre.

In 2021, we were fortunate to harvest a record 215 bushels per acre of dryland corn. We were particularly

challenged to dry the high-moisture corn and find enough trucks to transport the unprecedented volumes. While we were in the midst of dealing with the good problem of a big harvest, Russia started to decrease gas delivery, which pushed up corn drying prices and diesel transport costs.

We were in the process of our biggest investment – restoring a large barn that we would use for flat storage for our increased crop yields – right as input prices skyrocketed. Just as many Americans were facing an economic pinch, we continued to feel the pressures of high fertilizer, construction and diesel prices, yet we continued to build the needed storage.

In the months leading up to Russia's invasion of Ukraine, we knew that we could not be prepared for every scenario and that costs would continue to rise. While we were doing our best to calculate our price position and plan B for different farm scenarios, we also needed to rest in faith that we would know the right time to act.

With farm input prices increasing between 30% to 150%, speculation

pushed cereal grain prices up as flour and bread processors across the world began to stockpile commodities.

Then the inevitable happened – Russia invaded Ukraine in February 2022 – pushing grain and oilseed prices through the roof.

The spring of 2022 was exceptionally dry for Moldova, which meant lower yields for our wheat crop. Even though Moldova exports nearly 80% of harvests each year and only needs 20% for consumption, Moldovan politicians watched international headlines warning that the war in Ukraine could cause food shortages in net import countries and became hyper-fixated about food security in Moldova.

Without real-time statistics or agricultural extension services to verify the abundance of grain stored on farms, the Moldovan government banned wheat exports. Like most of our farming neighbors in Moldova, we had not sold any of the wheat we harvested in 2021 because we had been focusing on drying, trucking, and selling corn. Because of the high moisture, the corn was riskier to store, and most grain barns were still full of wheat in March 2022. We and all of our neighbors knew there was a lot of stored wheat, but the Moldovan government had no idea how much wheat was in storage.

Despite the incredible cost and time that farmers spend making reports in

Moldova, the statistical agency did not have accurate or reliable information to provide to the emergency council when it was needed. Without data to account for the amount of grain stored in the country or how much grain is produced versus consumed, the emergency council was pressured into banning grain exports. Overnight, the price of grain fell from \$10 USD per bushel to \$5 USD per bushel.

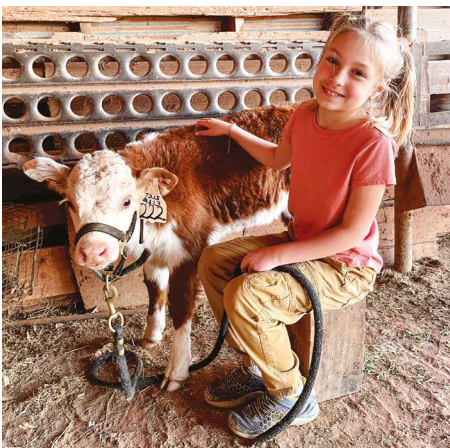
Adding to the complexities of farming, the port entries to Moldova became completely blocked by cargo going to and coming from Ukraine. Wheat harvest in Moldova is much like wheat harvest in Oklahoma, happening near the end June. In the weeks leading up to harvest, the emergency commission lifted the ban.

Most Moldovan farms do not have the resources to store grain on their farm, which demoted their 2021 wheat crop from food grade to animal feed grade. While farmers were hurting from not being able to sell grain to cover their spring planting expenses, many were forced to take out additional operating loans, and economic pressure from the war increased the Moldovan interest rate from 4% to 21.5% over the course of one year. The squeeze got worse as inflation hit a high of 34.62% in October 2022, making it even more difficult to stretch a low-yield and low-price situation to cover the family

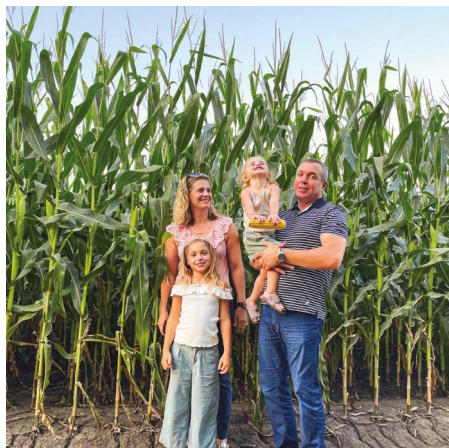
grocery list.

The safety and stability for our daughters also was on the forefront of our minds while we were trying to navigate how we would continue operating our farm while providing an income for our employees. Once the U.S. government asked Americans to leave Ukraine in February 2022, we started to get worried. Watching American friends leave their homes in Ukraine, we realized that we needed to have an emergency bag packed in case the U.S. government asked Americans to leave Moldova.

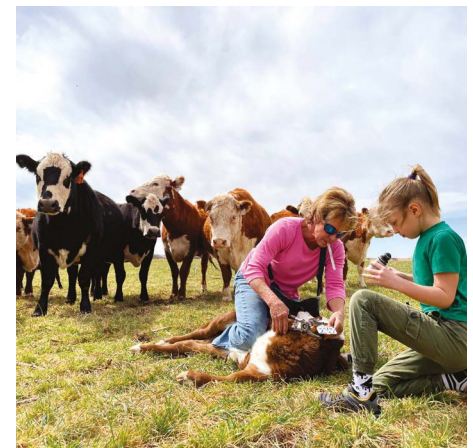
The biggest physical threat to Moldova would be – the now unlikely scenario – if Russian troops advanced into Odessa, Ukraine, which is only one hour from our farm. We had never really considered what types of security or protections Moldova might have. The reality was that Moldova's military and defense situation was stacking up frightfully short, and if Russia decided to invade Moldova, Ukrainian armed forces were the only thing stopping them. We had played the game of peace and economic prosperity, but the strategy of war and defense treaties had never been on our radar. Knowing that neighboring Romania was a member of NATO and that over 30% of Moldovans had Romanian citizenship was comforting, but it did not keep my Oklahoma family from worrying and



Kelsey's oldest daughter was able to help bottle feed a calf during the 2022 spring in Oklahoma.



The family stands in front of a crop of dryland corn. In 2021, the crop yielded a record 215 bushels per acre.



The spring calving season allowed Kelsey's daughters to learn about animal agriculture.

“Being an Oklahoman with international eyes has given me clarity to understand that **the blackest soil can grow high yields but needs so much more before it produces true riches.**”



rallying for us to return as fighting in Ukraine intensified.

At the time of invasion, I was working as a business development consultant for the U.S. Embassy. Some of my colleagues had expressed concern that without having diplomatic status, we could get caught in a rush for the exit and face significant delays in customs if Russia advanced on Odessa, Ukraine, and then into Moldova. They could not say much, but suggested I should be proactive. The girls and I left for Oklahoma March 10, 2022. With the airspace over Moldova closed because of the war in Ukraine, we needed to drive to Romania and fly out of Bucharest. After a tearful separation at the airport in Romania, Yuri drove our family car back to Moldova to plant corn and sunflowers. After six wonderful but anxious months in Oklahoma, we returned to Moldova in August as Ukraine was mounting their successful counterattack, and it had become clear that Moldova would not be physically attacked.

I felt guilty after arriving in Oklahoma for not staying to help support the thousands of Ukrainian refugees that were crossing into Moldova to safety. With my oldest daughter enrolled in Canute Public School and my youngest at daycare with her cousins, I accepted invitations to speak to numerous civic groups in western Oklahoma to spread the word about refugee relief efforts. In April



Kelsey shares her story with southern region Farm Bureau leaders in Oklahoma City in April 2022.



Yuri and Kelsey stand in front of Soviet equipment the family used on their farm back in 2008.



The family plants winter wheat using modern farm equipment near the Ukraine border.

2022, I received a phone call from a gentleman who introduced himself as Rodd Moesel, president of Oklahoma Farm Bureau. He invited me to speak at the American Farm Bureau Southern Region Presidents and Administrators conference hosted by OKFB in Oklahoma City to share my first-hand account of the challenges that farm families were facing in Moldova.

Being in Oklahoma and being touched by the rally of civic activity across all walks of our society, the ability to feel my own democracy in action in Oklahoma reawakened my duty of service – to do what I can – upheld from my Peace Corps days.

My unexpected time in Oklahoma compelled me to not only to spread the story about why Ukraine is worth fighting for, but also to understand what was diminishing the voice of Moldovan farmers, who are working to advocate for better government services and less government interference.

Moldovan farmers are members of a number of farm organizations on paper, however none of them have a solid financial foundation nor a true mission statement and procedures. Farmers and ranchers in Oklahoma can rely on the OKFB and AFBF policy teams to advocate on their behalf, but because of the disorganized Moldovan farm organizations, farmers have to travel to the city during their busy planting and harvesting seasons to be their own

advocates – we cannot rely on the Moldovan farm organizations.

When the government has held council to decide to ban exports of agriculture products, farmers have not had adequate representation in the process, resulting in significant economic losses to the agriculture and rural sectors.

Local farm organizations lack the knowledge and resources to build strong advocacy networks to raise awareness among government decision-makers about how public policies impact farmers, the agriculture industry and rural businesses.

With so many economic development programs in Moldova granted by foreign governments, staff in the Moldovan Ministry of Agriculture often have more diplomatic events on their calendars than meetings dedicated to farmers or policy work, making it hard to build a sustainable agriculture industry in Moldova.

After several years of losing investment because of Moldova's weak agriculture voice, I am profoundly proud of the representation and strength farmers and ranchers have in Oklahoma. Farm Bureau is impressively tech savvy and boasts of an impressive advocacy team that does the deep work to dissect dense bureaucratic policies to deliver key points to farmers. Advocacy keeps the voice of American agriculture strong so that the doors to decision-makers are

open when needed. The variety of media platforms and professional content Farm Bureau produces should be a regular affirmation of agricultural pride for all members.

My experience farming in Moldova has shown me what it is like to have a weak voice and the true value of strong advocacy. The agriculture industry has a duty to understand policy and maintain a strong position to uphold the rights and the interests of farming families. I will also argue farm families around the world have a collective interest to support each other in preserving their rights to private stewardship of their lands.

After a tough year of drought, war, displacement, unemployment and uncertainty, I am deeply grateful for the six months we spent in Oklahoma. Though I have lived in eastern Europe for more than 10 years, my daughters and I consider Oklahoma home. Returning to Oklahoma because of the war in Ukraine allowed us to be on the farm from calving to weaning and allowed my girls the blessing of daily farm chores for the first time. Being an Oklahoman with international eyes has given me clarity to understand that the blackest soil can grow high yields but needs so much more before it produces true riches. As farmers we must never underestimate the power of an engaged community and a collaborative but assertive voice that keeps our farms strong and our country safe. **FW**

About the author

Kelsey Walters grew up near the small, western Oklahoma town of Canute before volunteering for the Peace Corps in Moldova. Meeting her husband, Yuri, during her service, the couple now farms near the Ukraine border. Kelsey relies on her Oklahoma roots and knowledge to help build their farm and create a stronger collective voice for the country's farmers.

You can follow Kelsey on Facebook [**@KelseyWaltersS**](#) or visit her blog [**kelseywalterss.substack.com**](https://kelseywalterss.substack.com) to see more of her journey documenting life between Oklahoma and Moldova.



Taking to the

the airwaves

By Krista Carroll · Photos by Dustin Mielke

Seventh-generation farmer and Woods County Farm Bureau Member Sagelyn Budy shares her passion for agriculture as the Farm Girl on her own radio show.

Sagelyn Budy has spent her entire life growing up in and around agriculture in northwestern Oklahoma. From life lessons learned as a seventh-generation farmer to studying agriculture as a sophomore at Northwestern Oklahoma State University, she has developed a passion for the way of life her family has enjoyed for generations.

If you tune into Alva's KALV radio station, you can hear Budy's voice coming in loud and clear three times a day as she shares agriculture news and stories with listeners across the region.

Hosting her radio show as the Farm Girl on KALV radio, Budy combines her agriculture experience with her love for advocating for agriculture to highlight the importance of Oklahoma's farming and ranching community.

In the summer of 2022, the owner of local KALV radio approached Budy's parents to share an opportunity for Sagelyn to be the voice of an agriculture segment. Her farming and ranching background coupled with her choice to major in agriculture and minor in mass communications made her an ideal choice to fill the role at the radio station.





Above: *Budy interviews Dacoma Farmers Co-Op General Manager Jake Kelln for an agricultural update s
Budy often interviews local agriculture leaders and experts to share their own agriculture stories.*

However, between working two jobs and taking 17 college credits, she was hesitant to add another task to her plate. After lots of prayer and conversations with her family, she decided she could not pass up the opportunity to be an on-air agriculture advocate.

Farming and ranching are a way of life for many KALV listeners, but Budy said she believes there is always value in sharing agriculture news, even though many local residents are already invested in and involved with the industry. When she started the radio show, her instructions were simple: share anything agriculture-related with listeners.

“My boss thought if we had a daily agriculture report we could bring in more listeners. This area is highly populated with farmers and ranchers, so he thought they would enjoy listening,” Budy said.

Budy began her time as the Farm Girl with a 90-day trial period to ensure the segment was successful, but more importantly, to see if she enjoyed the rigors of producing a radio show.

“It has been longer than 90 days, and here I am, still doing the show,” she said.

The focus of Budy’s Farm Girl segment – the on-air moniker she proudly uses – covers anything and everything related to agriculture. She encourages her on-air guests to share their own personal stories to

create a connection with listeners and lend a personal touch to the state’s food and fiber industry.

With her smartphone in-hand to record her guests’ stories, she has interviewed many unique people from around northwest Oklahoma and beyond. One of her most memorable interviews was with her own grandpa. He shared the Budy family’s journey to become part of the agriculture industry and their deep roots as farmers and ranchers.

Her typical guests are agriculture professionals who share their experience in their own facet of the industry. Guests range from local co-op managers who share market updates to local FFA chapter members who explain their activities and experiences within the organization.

While Budy’s favorite part of producing the show is the personal interviews, she also shares agriculture news articles published by various agriculture organizations, including Oklahoma Farm Bureau, with her listeners.

“I absolutely love what I do – I love talking about agriculture in general,” she said. “I can make a difference through radio by educating people with agriculture facts.”

The Farm Girl segment is broadcast three separate times throughout the day to reach the most listeners.



segment for her radio show.

Above: *With roots running back generations in Woods County, Budy is dedicated to sharing the importance of agriculture with listeners.*

Her show runs at 7 a.m., noon and 5 p.m. In the short time Budy has been sharing agriculture stories as the Farm Girl, she has seen firsthand how her show has made an impact in the area. Listeners often call in to the station to express their thanks for including a daily agriculture report. Her grandpa has even been approached in the local Walmart and received compliments on her segment.

“My career plan is to work in media within agriculture,” she said. “I believe educated people within agriculture should help educate others.”

The opportunity to be the Farm Girl was a way for Budy to get her foot in the door within the industry she hopes to have a career in after graduation. The people she has met along the way have expanded her agriculture knowledge and helped her become a better advocate for the industry.

“I feel like there is a need for education about the agriculture field,” she said. “I feel like there are a lot of people who take food for granted and don’t realize the hardships and what it takes to provide the food we are consuming.”

Budy has been able to use her radio experience as an opportunity to grow as a young agricultural professional. The radio segment has inspired her to tell the agriculture story and manage her time better.

Since the show is daily, she is constantly thinking about what content to share and scheduling interviews, which can be time consuming but extremely rewarding.

As someone who has been involved in the agriculture sector her entire life and is currently pursuing a degree in the field, Budy said the preparation and work required to produce the show constantly expands her agricultural horizons.

“Not only have I learned a lot about agriculture through working with the radio station, but I have also done so much networking and met so many different people,” Budy said. “I have been to different cooperatives, sale barns, feed stores and feed lots. Through all of that, I have been able to network with so many different people.”

Through her daily work of producing a radio show focusing on agriculture, Budy said she now recognizes the incredible opportunity she has been given to network with industry leaders and share the importance of agriculture with listeners.

Opportunities do not always come knocking on your door, but when they do, sometimes you just must take a leap of faith.

“Although I was hesitant at first, the main thing I learned through this opportunity is to just say ‘yes.’” 



RACING TO THE TOP ***WITH BEEF LEADERSHIP AND PROMOTION /////***

TWO OKFB LEADERS PROMOTE BEEF AT THE BEEF. IT'S WHAT'S FOR DINNER. 300

As NASCAR stock cars thundered around Daytona International Speedway under the track lights on a February evening in Florida, two Oklahoma Farm Bureau members were there to help share the benefits of beef with a national audience.

Jimmy Taylor and Monte Tucker, each Roger Mills County ranchers and Roger Mills County Farm Bureau board members, helped represent Oklahoma's top agricultural product at the Beef. It's What's for Dinner. 300. The two western Oklahoma agriculture producers traded in dirt roads, pastures and feed trucks for a few days of palm trees, packed stands and NASCAR in Daytona, Florida, to promote beef to race fans around the country.

The Beef. It's What's For Dinner. 300 served as the first race of the 2023 NASCAR Xfinity Series season, and it was a chance for the nation's beef producers to share the spotlight with NASCAR superstars on Saturday, Feb. 17.

Both Taylor and Tucker serve in key leadership roles in Oklahoma's beef industry and beyond.

Taylor, a beef producer from Cheyenne, serves as the chairman of the Cattlemen's Beef Board, a position for which he was nominated by OKFB. The CBB consists of 101 beef-checkoff-paying volunteers who serve a non-paid three-year term to administer the collection of the \$1-per-head Beef Checkoff and approve the annual budget for its national checkoff-funded programs.

"The beef industry has been very good to my family, so it's been a wonderful opportunity to give back to it as a CBB board member and humbling to serve as its chairman," Taylor said.

Tucker, who represents OKFB's district two as a state director, ranches with his family near Sweetwater where they focus on producing high-quality cattle along with direct-to-consumer sales of beef. He serves as an OKFB nominee to the Oklahoma Beef Council, a board whose responsibility is to serve Oklahoma's beef farmers and ranchers by collecting the \$1-per-head beef checkoff and investing the state's share of that amount – 50 cents – in programs that build beef demand at the state, national and international levels.

"It has been an eye-opening experience as a member of the board of the Oklahoma Beef Council," Tucker said. "The sheer breadth and depth of Beef Checkoff activities is incredible. It does a lot for that \$1 per head investment that is important to Oklahoma's beef farmers and ranchers."

2023 was the third year in a row for the beef checkoff to fund the Beef. It's What's For Dinner. 300, serving as the kickoff to the year's NASCAR Xfinity Series racing season.

Held during the iconic race week at the Daytona International Speedway, the race was an opportunity to showcase beef through a variety of national advertising and promotional efforts before, during and after the race. In addition to racetrack signage, funding from several state beef councils – including the Oklahoma Beef Council – showcased beef to a national audience on the FS1 sports network during the race.

Throughout the weekend, Taylor and Tucker each had the opportunity to work with beef producers from other states to interact with more than 200,000 race fans in Beef's midway tent. Fans tried their hand at roping, tasted



ABOVE / OKFB MEMBER AND CATTLEMEN'S BEEF BOARD CHAIRMAN JIMMY TAYLOR INTERVIEWS THE BEEF. IT'S WHAT'S FOR DINNER. 300 WINNING DRIVER AUSTIN HILL IN THE WINNER'S CIRCLE AFTER THE RACE ALONGSIDE FELLOW BEEF PRODUCERS FROM AROUND THE NATION.

some delicious beef, picked up beef spice packets and spun a prize wheel. One of those prizes was a custom-branded beef stick made by Oklahoma's own Ralph's Packing.

Consumer engagement continued to the infield where Taylor and Tucker helped other beef producer volunteers distribute "Beef Grilling Here" signs to campers and tailgaters from across the United States throughout the venue and then followed up with prizes including beef gear for those fans grilling beef and sporting their signs throughout the event.

To top it all off, the two Oklahoma ranchers were part of the race's winner's circle festivities, where Taylor presented the trophy awards, a belt buckle, cowboy hat, and of course, a cooler of beef Tomahawk steaks. Taylor even interviewed the winning driver, Austin Hill, and spoke on behalf of America's beef producers.

"The lift for one more beef meal can be pretty light with NASCAR fans, so this was a wonderful opportunity to promote beef and our ranching heritage for a fan base that is incredibly loyal to those that support it," Taylor said. "Truly, it was an amazing event for beef promotion and the Beef Checkoff."

"It was my first NASCAR event," Tucker said. "I believe it was the perfect occasion for the beef brand. The fans loved the ranchers in attendance and wanted to engage with us. They were also incredibly proud of the beef they were grilling. I had the opportunity to take my kids on my own dime, and they had quite the time teaching the youngest fans how to rope and delivering beef sticks and gear to infield campers." **BR**



ABOVE / MONTE TUCKER AND HIS SONS, MASON AND REED, SHARE BEEF FACTS AND INFORMATION WITH NASCAR FANS DURING THE BEEF. IT'S WHAT'S FOR DINNER. 300 FESTIVITIES.



ABOVE / A SPECIAL BEEF. IT'S WHAT'S FOR DINNER. 300 BELT BUCKLE WAS PRESENTED AS PART OF THE FESTIVITIES OF THE BEEF-CHECKOFF-SPONSORED RACE.

Boots on the hill



Above | Logan County Farm Bureau members Jacob and Chastity Beck stand in front of the U.S. Capitol during the 2023 OKFB Washington, D.C., Summit.

Nearly 60 Farm Bureau members visited the nation's capital to share their personal stories with Oklahoma's congressional delegation and advocate for agriculture as part of OKFB's Washington, D.C., Summit.

Leaving the farm or ranch is a separate job in and of itself for agricultural producers, but Oklahoma Farm Bureau Young Farmers and Ranchers District Three Representatives Jacob and Chastity Beck of Guthrie took the leap to advocate for farmers, ranchers and rural Oklahomans in the heart of the nation's capital for the first time during the OKFB Washington, D.C., Summit.

Nearly 60 OKFB members in total heard from Oklahoma's congressional delegation during the five-day trip held March 27-31, including U.S. Senators James Lankford and Markwayne Mullin; Congressmen Frank Lucas, Kevin Hern, Josh Brecheen and Congresswoman Stephanie Bice; along with staff from Congressman Tom Cole's office.

Jacob took full advantage of his time in the nation's capital visiting and interacting with Oklahoma's federal delegation, asking the hard

questions to which he and others were seeking answers.

"It has been very eye-opening and reassuring that our delegation is thinking about us in agriculture," Jacob said.

Jacob and Chastity have a cattle operation along with their family-owned farm equipment business in Logan County.

"Hearing from our senators, representatives and their staffs' mouths that agriculture is ingrained in them has been wonderful," Jacob said. "It is reassuring to hear that they are going to put up a good fight for agriculturalists and defend our way of life."

Discussions during the briefings centered on national security and government funding, but the main focus of conversation was the reauthorization of the farm bill.

"The farm bill is so pivotal because agriculture and food assistance programs are



Chastity Beck (right) asks Sen. James Lankford a question during the 2023 Washington, D.C., Summit.



Rep. Frank Lucas discusses the upcoming farm bill process with OKFB members.



Rep. Stephanie Bice visits with OKFB members during the Washington, D.C., Summit.



American Farm Bureau's Andrew Walmsley shares AFBF's work to prepare for farm bill discussions.



so entwined,” Jacob said.


Eighty-two percent of funding for the five-year omnibus, multiyear law goes to food and nutrition programs, which provide access to healthy, affordable food, while the other 18% of funding goes to agricultural programs.

“Agriculture accounts for such a small part of the bill, and to ensure what programs farmers and ranchers need is such a key factor,” Jacob said. “Being here, we are able to say we are here, too, and we have people at home who do need help.

“Talking with our senators and representatives outside of this setting, I think, would be difficult. Whether it pertains to agriculture or other issues going on right now, this has really opened the doors to be able to say this is something we are facing at home. They gave great answers and everything they know, and they were genuine about it.”

OKFB members also met with representatives from the European Union, American Farm Bureau, the National Association of State Departments of Agriculture, the National Governors Association and CropLife America, as they discussed a variety of topics facing agriculture.

The Beck family sees the value of visiting the nation’s capital on behalf of all farmers and ranchers, especially those in Oklahoma.

“Farm Bureau is the number-one grassroots organization for farmers and ranchers in the nation,” Jacob said. “Farm Bureau offers a voice to me as a producer, for my family and for my friends. Farm Bureau has given us this platform to have a voice without pumping some organization full of our hard-earned money just to hear ourselves. Farm Bureau is the voice for the common farmer. This organization is one that I am very thankful for.” 

Watch the video

Learn more about OKFB's Washington, D.C., Summit at okfb.news/DCVideo23

Legislators honored with OKFB Champion awards for work during 2022 legislative session



Sen. Brent Howard



Sen. Darcy Jech



Sen. Chris Kidd



Sen. Lonnie Paxton



Rep. Jon Echols



Rep. Kyle Hilbert



Rep. Dell Kerbs



Rep. Anthony Moore



Rep. John Pfeiffer

Oklahoma Farm Bureau was proud to honor 12 state legislators with the organization's Champion award for their work on behalf of Farm Bureau members creating and passing agriculture- and rural-friendly policies during the 2022 Oklahoma legislative session.

OKFB presented plaques to 10 legislators with the 2022 OKFB Champion award – an honor given to state lawmakers who serve as exemplary advocates for Oklahoma agriculture, going above and beyond for the state's farmers and ranchers.

Champion award recipients were Sen. Lonnie Paxton, Tuttle; Sen. Darcy Jech, Kingfisher; Sen. Chuck Hall, Perry; Sen. Brent Howard, Altus; Sen. Chris Kidd, Waurika; Rep. John Pfeiffer, Orlando; Rep. Jon Echols, Oklahoma City; Rep. Kyle Hilbert, Bristow; Rep. Dell Kerbs, Shawnee; and Rep. Anthony Moore, Clinton.

"We are fortunate to have an outstanding group of lawmakers advocating for farmers, ranchers and rural Oklahoma at the state Capitol," said Rodd Moesel, OKFB president. "Farm Bureau members appreciate

these 12 individuals and their understanding of the importance of agriculture in our state, and we are honored to recognize them for their hard work."

In addition to the OKFB Champion award, OKFB presented Senate Pro Tempore Greg Treat and House Speaker Charles McCall with a special service award for their role in OKFB's first-ever Youth Legislative Experience in July 2022.

Award winners were nominated by county Farm Bureau members and the OKFB board of directors.

OKFB's Farm City Festival connects legislators with Oklahoma agriculture

The Oklahoma State Capitol Rotunda was filled with the voices of Farm Bureau leaders and the scent of home-cooked food as the Oklahoma Farm Bureau Women's Leadership Committee hosted their annual Farm City Festival, which served as an opportunity for WLC members to share the importance of Oklahoma agriculture with legislators, Capitol staff and guests.

WLC members provided meals to more than 400 legislators, staff and visitors at the Oklahoma State Capitol Tuesday, March 21, during

the committee's annual Farm City Festival.

"It's very important that the producers come to the Capitol and educate the legislators to let them know how legislation affects people on the farm," said Karen Dodson, OKFB WLC Secretary and family farmer from Caddo County. "We are less than one-and-a-half percent of the population. We are the experts, we are the environmentalists taking care of the land, and they need our input."

WLC members took the opportunity to visit with legislators and public

officials as they discussed issues that impact them on their own farms and ranches and thanked elected officials for their service and dedication to the state.

A full meal along with homemade desserts prepared by Farm Bureau members was provided, served by Farm Bureau women from across Oklahoma.

Homemade bread was prepared by David VonTungeln, district three OKFB state director, and served alongside a menu of ham, green beans and potatoes.



Above | County Farm Bureau women serve Rep. Bob Ed Culver lunch while sharing the importance of agriculture.



Above | OKFB member Kelly Blair (left) talk with Sen. Tom Woods (center) and Rep. David Hardin.



Above | OKFB Women's Leadership Committee Secretary Karen Dodson (left) discuss agriculture issues with Secretary of Agriculture Blayne Arthur.



Above | County Farm Bureau women prepare desserts for legislators and staffers to enjoy.



Above | Major County Farm Bureau members Nicole Martens and Monica Wahl visit with Sen. Roland Pederson.



OKFB launches Youth Leadership Alliance membership to help ag youth connect with Farm Bureau, agriculture

Oklahoma Farm Bureau members have proudly supported our state's agriculture youth for generations. From county Farm Bureaus across the state sponsoring and supporting local youth livestock shows and fairs to OKFB's scholarships and statewide youth programs, Farm Bureau members understand that our students are our state's future leaders.

OKFB is proud to offer a brand-new Youth Leadership Alliance membership for third- through 12th-grade students to provide them an opportunity to be part of our state's largest farm organization.

The OKFB Youth Leadership Alliance allows students to connect with Farm Bureau at an early age to broaden their horizons and learn how to be even more involved with agriculture and Farm Bureau.

Students can join the Youth Leadership Alliance online at OKFB's website by visiting **okfb.news/YouthAlliance** and creating a special Youth Leadership Alliance account.

There is no cost for students to join the Youth Leadership Alliance, and their parents do not have to be members of Oklahoma Farm Bureau for them to join. Simply complete the form on the OKFB website, and students in grades three through 12 will become part of the OKFB Youth Leadership Alliance.

While on the OKFB website, students can learn about the many scholarships, leadership development and youth programs OKFB offers to students. From our annual Oklahoma Youth Leading Agriculture Conference to our Young Farmers & Ranchers scholarships to our High School Discussion Meet, young agriculturalists have numerous opportunities to connect with Farm Bureau and expand their horizons in agriculture.

How to join the OKFB Youth Leadership Alliance

Students in grades three through 12 can join online in three simple steps:

1 Visit okfb.news/YouthAlliance

Go to OKFB's website using the special link above to access the Youth Leadership Alliance form.

2 Complete the form

Enter the student's information in the online form to create a special OKFB membership account designed especially for Youth Leadership Alliance members.

3 Finalize your membership

After the student's information is entered, select "Add to Cart" and then select "Proceed to Checkout" to finalize your no-cost Youth Leadership Alliance membership.

OKFB honored with four AFBF State Awards of Excellence

Oklahoma Farm Bureau was recognized with four American Farm Bureau State Awards of Excellence for outstanding programs and achievements during 2022.

OKFB was recognized for accomplishments in advocacy, coalitions and partnerships, engagement and outreach, and leadership and business development, earning awards in all four program areas.

OKFB highlights from 2022 included partnering with county Farm Bureaus to donate funds to local food banks and fire departments; hosting the inaugural Oklahoma Youth Legislative Experience for high school students at the Oklahoma State Capitol; starting the OKFB Generation Bridge program for mid-career agriculturalists; and supporting political candidates running for federal offices with the new OKFB Ag PAC political action committee.

The AFBF Awards of Excellence were awarded to state Farm Bureaus during the 2023 American Farm Bureau convention in San Juan, Puerto Rico.

Advocacy

Highlight:

OKFB Ag PAC Political Action Committee



Mike Schulz (left) discusses candidates at the state Ag PAC Committee meeting.



Kingfisher County member Randall Newton at the District 3 Ag PAC meeting.



Washington County members presented donation check to the fire department.



Garfield County Farm Bureau and WLC donates to local food bank.

Coalitions and Partnerships

Highlight:

Donations to local food banks and fire departments

Engagement and Outreach

Highlight:

Oklahoma Youth Legislative Experience



Students emulate state legislature committee meetings.



FFA member Titus Montgomery asked questions about student-authored bills.



Attendees were able to visit with one another between speakers.



Heather Buckmaster with Oklahoma Beef Council served as a speaker.

Leadership and Business Development

Highlight:

Generation Bridge Conference

Oklahoma Farm Bureau adds new staff members

Oklahoma Farm Bureau named Amarie Bartel as the organization's new economic development coordinator.

Bartel will work to expand OKFB's economic development efforts in rural Oklahoma, working with rural small business owners and entrepreneurs to help them grow their ideas and businesses through a variety of programs and resources.

"I'm really excited to act as part of a change agent for rural small business owners and agricultural innovators so that they can have prosperity in their future endeavors and feel like somebody in our state is in their corner cheering for them as they work to make their own dreams come true," Bartel said.

Bartel joins OKFB from the Oklahoma National Stockyards with an array of experiences in both agriculture and economic development.

"That is where I really realized I had a love for the people in the agriculture industry and that I loved essentially getting to be a professional problem-solver and boots on the ground for our state's producers," she said.

Bartel said she is looking forward to working with the state's largest general farm organization in her new role.

"I'm really attracted to the way Oklahoma Farm Bureau stands with and behind our state's agricultural producers and agricultural innovators," she said. "Sometimes it seems as though agriculture is many pieces of a puzzle, but at Farm Bureau, it seems like we bring all the pieces together."

Originally from Cushing, Bartel earned her bachelor's degree in agricultural communications and agricultural business from Oklahoma State University.



Amarie Bartel



Krista Carroll

Oklahoma Farm Bureau hired Krista Carroll as publications specialist in the organization's communications and public relations department.

Carroll will coordinate several of the organization's publications and communications platforms, including *Oklahoma Country* magazine, *Perspective* newsletter, email newsletters and other communications products.

"Oklahoma Farm Bureau places value in Oklahoma agriculturists and works to share the stories of farming and ranching families," Carroll said. "I have the same respect for those families, and I am excited to work alongside a great team to highlight the extent of Oklahoma agriculture."

Carroll joins OKFB as a recent graduate of Oklahoma State University, where she earned her bachelor's degree in agricultural communications.

Carroll was raised on a cattle ranch near the southern Oklahoma town of Tishomingo and was involved in agriculture through 4-H and FFA, including serving as the southeast area vice president for the Oklahoma FFA Association from 2019 to 2020.

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County Farm Bureaus give back within their communities



Above | Oklahoma County Farm Bureau members Bob and Alma Bierschenk present a \$5,000 donation to the Regional Food Bank of Oklahoma in January to assist with food insecurity in the service area.



Above | Jackson County members Kellie Muller (left) and Taylor Harting present accurate agriculture to Duke Elementary School Librarian Gloria Huerta and all other Jackson County elementary schools.



Above | Carter County Farm Bureau members Thurman Rail (left), Kelly Norman, Terry McGee and Joe David McReynolds provide breakfast to exhibitors at their livestock show.



Above | Canadian County Farm Bureau member Angela Heinrich reads accurate agriculture books to children and students during the Crossroads of Oklahoma Farm Show held in El Reno.



Above | Rogers County Farm Bureau hosts an ag olympics contest and serves dinner to kick off Farm Bureau Week and FFA Week.

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Oklahoma Farm Bureau members attend 2023 AFBF Convention in Puerto Rico

The 2023 American Farm Bureau convention in Puerto Rico Jan. 6-10 was a great time for Oklahoma Farm Bureau members to gather with fellow farmers and ranchers from around the country to celebrate Mi Familia – the Farm Bureau family.

Several Young Farmers & Ranchers competitive events participants advanced in their competitions at the 2023 AFBF Convention.

Travis and Rylee Schnaithman were among the 10 national finalists for the AFBF YF&R Achievement Award. The Garfield County farmers and ranchers progressed to the interview round of the contest and appeared on stage during the closing general session along with the other nine finalists.

Dillon Johnson advanced to the Sweet 16 round of the AFBF YF&R Discussion Meet. Johnson competed in two opening rounds, then participated in the Sweet 16 round discussing issues affecting agriculture alongside

fellow YF&R members from around the nation.

Rogers County Farm Bureau member Chris Hoskins represented Oklahoma in the AFBF YF&R Excellence in Agriculture competition, where he gave a presentation to a panel of judges about his on- and off-farm activities, Farm Bureau experience and future goals.

The OKFB Women's Leadership Committee members gathered with Farm Bureau women from across the nation to elect leaders and prepare for the coming year.

OKFB WLC Chair Mignon Bolay served as the credentials committee chair for the AFBF Women's Leadership Meeting, where she gave the credentials report.

OKFB members attended three general sessions, numerous breakout sessions on a variety of agricultural topics and visited vendors and fellow organizations at the trade show.

Keynote speakers at the general sessions included AFBF President Zippy Duvall, U.S. Secretary of Agriculture Tom Vilsack, country music artist "Big Kenny" Alphin, and Life is Good Co-Founder Bert Jacobs.

The convention was full of daily highlights for OKFB members as they enjoyed the convention and San Juan.

OKFB members gathered for a group breakfast on Monday, Jan. 9, to fellowship and visit about Oklahoma's achievements during the convention.

Farm Bureau members took time to enjoy Puerto Rico through a variety of tours in the San Juan area focusing on the culture, history and attractions of the island.

OKFB members were also featured heavily in the AFBF convention video, which highlighted Farm Bureau families from around the nation.

For additional convention news and highlights from AFBF, visit annualconvention.fb.org.



Above | Travis and Rylee Schnaithman are recognized as finalists for the AFBF YF&R Achievement Award.



Above | Nearly 70 OKFB members attended the 2023 AFBF Convention in Puerto Rico.



Above | Ottawa County Farm Bureau member Dillon Johnson (right) competes in the Sweet 16 round of the YF&R Discussion Meet.



Above | OKFB members help set policies in the AFBF resolutions meeting.



Above | OKFB President Rodd Moesel presents the Oklahoma flag in the first session.



Above | OSU Extension's Scott Clawson updates OKFB members with a current cattle market report.



Above | During breaks members network and discuss speakers with one another.



Above | Jackson County Farm Bureau members Matt and Kellie Muller explain the importance of transitioning a family farm.

Second-annual Generation Bridge Conference full of knowledgeable speakers and opportunities for members

Nearly 40 Oklahoma Farm Bureau members ages 35-55 gathered in Oklahoma City for the OKFB Generation Bridge conference Jan. 27-28 in Edmond. Generation Bridge is for mid-career agriculturists to gain experience and expand their agricultural knowledge.

The group kicked off the event at the Oklahoma Farm Bureau/Oklahoma 4-H ATV Safety Facility near Guthrie on Friday, Jan. 27, where they learned about the facility and its training programs and heard from Oklahoma Beef Council Executive Director Heather Buckmaster.

Members heard from a variety of speakers on Saturday morning, including a legislative update from OKFB's Steve Thompson, agritourism opportunities with Oklahoma Department of Agriculture Food and Forestry's Micaela Halverson, a cattle marketing update with OSU Extension's Scott Clawson, a mental health discussion with OKFB's Burton Harmon and a Q&A on transitioning a family farm between generations with Jackson County Farm Bureau members Matt and Kellie Muller.



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Left / Congressman Tom Cole provides an update on current legislation Washington, D.C.

OKFB members hear from robust lineup of speakers at 2023 Leadership Conference

More than 80 Oklahoma Farm Bureau members and guests convened in Oklahoma City for the organization's annual leadership conference Feb. 21.

Farm Bureau members kicked off the morning with Lt. Gov. Matt Pinnell, who shared the importance of rural Oklahoma, agritourism and Farm Bureau's advocacy efforts.

"There has never been a more important time for Oklahoma Farm Bureau," he said.

Members learned about State Question 820 – the vote to legalize recreational marijuana – from former Lt. Gov. Todd Lamb.

Lamb expressed that legalizing marijuana could lead to a number of societal problems, including homelessness, increased crime and the breakdown of the family.

OKFB members have strict policy against recreational marijuana and stood opposed to SQ 820.

Oklahoma Secretary of Agriculture Blayne Arthur closed out the morning speaker lineup with an overview of agriculture in the state.

Arthur touched on Oklahoma's drought conditions and relief efforts,

upcoming farm bill priorities and encouraged OKFB members to stay engaged at the state Capitol.

"My hope is that wherever you are from that your state senator or state representative knows your name and that you are in the agriculture industry," she said.

Over lunch, attendees heard from Senate and House Ag Committee chairmen Sen. Chris Kidd and Rep. Dell Kerbs as they discussed top agricultural issues currently moving through the legislative process.

Members also heard from Emma Alexander, a field representative for Congressman Frank Lucas, as she shared more about the congressman's involvement in discussions about the upcoming farm bill.

Mike Fina, chairman of the Oklahoma Broadband Governing Board, kicked off the afternoon with an in-depth discussion of the state of broadband accessibility in Oklahoma and the goals of the broadband board in the future.

"We learned that our broadband is insufficient at best," he said of his work with the current Oklahoma broadband board.

Fina said the standard broadband speed in Oklahoma is a download speed of 25 Mbps and an upload speed of 3 Mbps – a benchmark set back in 2015.

The Oklahoma Broadband Office seeks to provide symmetrical download and upload speeds of 100 Mbps by the time the agency sunsets in five years.

Andy Evans of the Oklahoma Public School Resource Center visited with members about the impact of ad valorem protests on school budgets.

Evans cited the Oklahoma Supreme Court case *Kingfisher Wind v. Wehmuller* as a notable example of the effect ad valorem protests have on local school districts, as Kingfisher Wind, through intangible property rights, received a tax credit for 48% of their wind turbine assets, causing Kingfisher Public Schools to lose the same amount in tax revenue.

Evans noted the importance of finding an equitable solution to tax protests for both taxpayers and school districts as he recognized the right to protest ad valorem valuations is crucial.



Left / Sen. Jessica Garvin (left) and OKFB district eight director Mike Leverett visit during the legislative reception.



Above / OKFB district five director Mike Clark (left) and Rep. Jim Grego discuss agriculture issues at the legislative reception.



Above / Andy Evans explains ad valorem taxes and rural school budgets.

Special guest Congressman Tom Cole spoke to attendees about his time in Washington, D.C., and the current hurdles the country faces, including the border crisis and American energy challenges.

Cole expressed his optimism as the new Congress gets underway and the Oklahoma delegation fulfills new jobs and leadership roles.

“This delegation is probably the most powerful delegation Oklahoma has ever seen since Carl Albert was Speaker of the House,” he said.

Jerome Loughridge, senior vice president of operations at Oklahoma State University, rounded out the afternoon with an update on OSU’s veterinary medicine program, rural healthcare and the university’s

nationally recognized research in unmanned aerial systems – an area he said is crucial to national defense efforts.

The evening concluded with a legislative reception and an awards dinner to honor 12 state legislators who received special awards for their service to agriculture and rural Oklahoma.



Above / Sen. Shane Jett (right) visits with OKFB member Mary Sloan.



Above / Rep. Trey Caldwell and Rodd Moesel talk during the legislative reception.



Lower Left / Rep. Dell Kerbs and Sen. Chris Kidd provide updates from the senate and house agriculture committees, which they chair, respectively.

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OKFB supports ag youth at 2023 Oklahoma Youth Expo

Oklahoma Farm Bureau proudly supported Oklahoma's agriculture youth at the 2023 Oklahoma Youth Expo with more than \$60,000 of premium purchases, sponsorships and partnerships.

OKFB purchased premiums during the annual OYE Sale of Champions in Oklahoma City Friday, March 17, where the organization gave out \$45,000 in premium purchases to 4-H and FFA members during the sale. OKFB was also recognized at the sale as the 2022 volume buyer as the purchaser of the greatest number of premiums at last year's sale.

OKFB also purchased the chalice for the grand champion steer, shown by Finley Yocham of Sapulpa 4-H.

OKFB also sponsored a wide variety of events and programs during OYE, bringing the organization's total financial support to more than \$60,000.



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OKFB co-hosts 2023 Ag & Oil Legislative Boot Camp

Freshman and sophomore legislators spent Jan. 24 visiting with industry representatives for the Ag & Oil Legislative Boot Camp in Oklahoma City.

Legislators in attendance had the opportunity to learn more about the agriculture and oil and gas industries and heard from Attorney General Gentner Drummond, Oklahoma State University agricultural economics professor Shannon Ferrell and a number of other speakers throughout the day.

Beckham County Farm Bureau members receive conservation award

Congratulations to Beckham County Farm Bureau members Jimmy, Cathy, Spencer and Calli Smith for being awarded the 2022 Oklahoma Leopold Conservation Award. The Smiths grow rye as a cover crop in their cotton fields to conserve moisture. Farmers and ranchers are the original conservationists, and the Smith family is no exception.

Bob Howard named 2023 Agriculture Hall of Fame Inductee

Bob Howard, a longtime southwest Oklahoma wheat, pasture, and cattle producer and Jackson County Farm Bureau leader, has been named the 2023 recipient of Governor Stitt's Outstanding Achievement in Agriculture Award. Howard is the 26th inductee into the Oklahoma Agriculture Hall of Fame, which is the state's most prestigious agricultural honor.



Howard, who passed away last April at the age of 75, was honored at the annual Ag Day at the Capitol event in Oklahoma City on Tuesday, April 11.

Howard's career was spent bettering Oklahoma's agriculture industry through research and innovation. His partnership with OSU Extension resulted in improvements to wheat and pasture production systems still implemented today.

"We are so proud to call Bob Howard our 2023 Agriculture Hall of Fame inductee," said Oklahoma Secretary of Agriculture Blayne Arthur. "Bob was not only a critical player and innovator in the state's crop commodity industry, but a trusted community member and friend to many. His impact on Oklahoma's agriculture certainly lives on."

Howard was a supporter of agriculture youth development programs. While he served as the FFA instructor at the Navajo School system for only four years, Howard spent a lifetime helping kids in both the FFA and 4-H programs by sharing his knowledge and providing support. Howard also served in several leadership roles for commodity groups including the Oklahoma Cattleman's Association, the Oklahoma Wheat Growers Association, and the Jackson County Farm Bureau Board.

Howard and his wife, Renee, raised three children together: attorney Chrystle Howard (Kruska), Judge Ryan Howard, and Senator Brent Howard. Howard's family continues to build on his legacy, positively impacting the greater southwest Oklahoma area for years to come.

Members celebrate Farm Bureau Week at the Crossroads of Oklahoma Farm Show

OKFB Members spent time meeting with potential new members and celebrating Farm Bureau Week in Oklahoma at the Crossroads of Oklahoma Farm Show in El Reno on Thursday, Feb. 23. Women's Leadership Committee members also read accurate agriculture books and gave away a toy tractor to one winner.



Collegiate Farm Bureau members advocate for agriculture at the Capitol

More than 25 Collegiate Farm Bureau members from four different Oklahoma universities traveled to the Oklahoma state Capitol for the Oklahoma Farm Bureau Collegiate Farm Bureau Day at the Capitol March 8.

Lt. Gov. Matt Pinnell greeted the students from across the state and provided insight into what it takes to manage the tourism industry in the state, including agri-tourism. Representatives Josh West, Judd Strom, Steve Bashore and Anthony Moore shared their experiences representing their constituents and the importance of being involved in the legislative process.

Collegiate members had the opportunity to visit with other legislators, watch proceedings on the Senate and House floors and make connections with fellow students.

Oklahoma Farm Bureau members attend 2023 AFBF FUSION Conference

Nearly 20 Oklahoma Farm Bureau Women's Leadership and Young Farmers and Ranchers members attended the American Farm Bureau FUSION Conference March 3-6 in Jacksonville, FL.

The conference brought together more than 900 Farm Bureau members from three AFBF program areas - WLC, YF&R and Program & Education.

Members at the event heard from various keynote speakers including motivational speaker and American Ninja Warrior Alex Weber, who shared tools for members to become the best leaders in the organization; AFBF President Zippy Duvall, who reminded members of the importance of being involved in every aspect of the organization - especially the grassroots policy process; and ESPN sports broadcaster Lauren Sisler, who offered her story of overcoming obstacles to become an award-winning reporter.

Northeastern Oklahoma A&M College student Taylor Fent competed in the AFBF Collegiate Discussion meet, where 33 students from across the country replicated a committee meeting where discussion and active participation are expected from each participant to come to an answer or solution.

Breakout session topics included leadership development, how to cultivate business relationships within a community, mental health, tax issues, the 2023 farm bill and much more. Members also toured local farms, ranches and businesses to gain perspective on agriculture in Florida.





Above | Straw bale gardening is a great option for those who may be dealing with poor soil quality but still want garden-fresh vegetables. (Photo by OSU Agriculture)

Straw bale garden offers alternative to traditional gardening methods

By Trisha Gedon

*Oklahoma Cooperative
Extension Service*

Most Oklahomans know a little something about using straw bales as food for livestock. And gardeners statewide are familiar with using straw as mulch around their plants. Some folks have even used them for fall decorations. But did you know that straw bales can have another purpose in the landscape?

While millions of people enjoy gardening, there are plenty of others who would like to enjoy this hobby but feel they won't be successful due to factors such as poor soil quality, limited outdoor space or perhaps they live in temporary housing.

Fortunately, these gardening enthusiasts can cultivate their green thumb through an alternative gardening method – straw bale gardening, said David Hillock, Oklahoma State University Extension consumer horticulturist.

"Straw bale gardening is great for those who, for whatever reason, are unable to garden in the traditional way," Hillock said. "This type of gardening also is great for people with limited mobility, because in essence, the straw bales create raised bed gardens. And, the great thing is you can grow not only vegetables, but flowers, too."

Hillock recommends straw bales over hay due to the number of grass and weed seeds typically found in hay bales. Select bales that are tight and held together with two or three strands of twine. Be sure to leave the twine in place.

Next, select a spot for the bale garden. Hillock said if you're planning to grow veggies, select a location that gets six to eight hours of sun per day. It's a good idea to put down cardboard or landscape fabric first, then place

the bale on top. This will help control weeds. Also, place the bale so the twine runs parallel with the ground.

What vegetables grow best in a straw bale environment? Bush beans, bush tomatoes and vine plants such as squash or cantaloupe grow well, as do strawberries. Avoid plants that grow tall, such as corn.

Once the bales are in place, they will need to be conditioned or aged. This simply means initiating decomposition within the bale. It's an important step before planting; otherwise, microbes will take away available nutrients from the plants.

"Water the bales every day for two weeks and sprinkle a nitrogen-rich fertilizer on top every other day," Hillock said. "Over the two weeks, the bale will heat up as the fresh straw begins to break down. The bales will cool down after a noticeable temperature spike, typically within 14 days. Now the bale is ready to plant."

Gardeners have a couple of options for planting in the bale.

"You can make pockets or holes about 3 inches to 4 inches deep by gently loosening and removing a small amount of the straw and adding a small amount of potting media to help retain moisture to get your plant established," he said. "The number of pockets per bale depends on what the grower is planting."

A second option, called the flat method, adds or spreads potting media on top of each bale. For both methods, the growing medium can be compost or manure mixed with blood meal and other nutrient-rich materials.

Straw bale gardening is good for both direct seeding and transplants. An added bonus is that weed and insect control is much easier.

Gardeners will need to stay on top of watering because the bales dry out quickly due to Oklahoma's heat and wind.

"It's recommended to replace straw bales at the end of the growing season," Hillock said. "They don't last long due to the necessary, frequent watering and high microbial/root activities that occur in the bales. However, the used bales make a great addition to the compost pile."



Above / Gardening enthusiasts have lots of possibilities with straw bale gardening. (Photo by Shutterstock)



Above / Straw bales must be conditioned before planting to ensure nutrients are readily available to plants. (Photo by Shutterstock)

Casey Hengtes, host of OSU Agriculture's "Oklahoma Gardening" television show, has several segments on the various steps involved in straw bale gardening. Check out these segments for preparing the bales,

planting the bales, making use of the bales after the planting season and how to use the old bales the following season. In addition, more straw bale gardening information is available on OSU Extension's website.

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