

Education and Networking Opportunities at Kansas Rural Center

The Kansas Rural Center's annual conference, to be held November 17 – 18, will feature 12 to 15 workshops each day providing practical information for diversifying your farm or ranch's enterprises, building and supporting local and regional food systems, and communicating effectively in order to improve on-farm, community, and public policy decisions. The conference will be held at the Four Points Sheraton in Manhattan, Kansas. A full agenda and registration information is available online at www.kansasruralcenter.org.

“Providing a support network and self-education is what our conference is all about,” says Kansas Rural Center's Executive Director, Mary Fund. Ninety-minute workshop sessions will feature presentations and panel discussions on how biological, human and economic diversity build resilience, and how we can make this happen on our farms and in our communities. Fund adds, “Many farmers and ranchers have realized that multi-species diversity is critical to soil health and ecological health. Now we must learn the benefits of multi-cultural ethnic and racial diversity in our human communities.”

Conference sessions will also include practical production and marketing information, conservation practices and management, and informative sessions on state policy, community organizing efforts in Kansas, and more.

One track of sessions titled “The Farmer to Farmer Forum”, will highlight NCR-SARE (North Central Region Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education) funded farmer research projects, with presentations from across Kansas, Missouri and Nebraska. These include a return of last year's workshops on capturing local honey bee strains and sustainable beekeeping by Leo Sharashkin of Missouri and the economics of grazing and haying cover crops by Josh Roe, plus new presentations on diversifying crop rotations in a semi-arid environment, portable grazing system for goats on invasive weeds and brush, and exploration of a mobile meat marketing unit.

Other workshop sessions include conservation practices and cover crops in specialty crop production, a dialogue on opportunities and future vision for small meat farmers in Kansas, farming with limited resources, conservation & biological control/attracting beneficial insects to your farm, local food councils in Kansas, climate and health resilience, how agroecological practices can improve crop production and grazing systems, the future of organic farming, increasing biodiversity, carbon and forest products in your woodlands, and the 2018 Kansas policy preview by the WEALTH network of organizations (Water, Energy, Air, Land, Transportation and Health).

The conference aims to include education and dialogue that appeals to a diverse audience at different levels of farming, community organizing and activism. According to past conference participant Jessica Gnad of Pratt, KS, “Attending the KRC annual conference has really opened my eyes to learning about sustainable ag issues while keeping my hometown community of Pratt, Kansas in mind. The most profound lesson I've learned in past conferences has been how to tell my story to others on why I'm passionate about helping make my community a better place.” Gnad adds, “I've also enjoyed the diversified viewpoints expressed at the conference. It's really a place where all are welcome!”

Those looking to network with new and old acquaintances will have several opportunities throughout each day of the conference through session dialogues, scheduled breaks and a Friday evening social complete with locally-sourced snacks and Kansas beer.

Keynote speakers include Denise O'Brien on Friday Nov. 17, and Ferd Hoefner on Saturday Nov. 18. O'Brien will talk about “What Can One Person Do? The Perspective of a Long-time Activist.” O'Brien, a long-time advocate for family farms, women farmers, and environmental protection, will also participate in a workshop session on the challenges of addressing spray drift with comments on the emerging Dicamba threat. O'Brien is current chair of the Pesticide Action Network.

Hoefner will provide a presentation called, “The Past, Present, and Future of Sustainable Agriculture.” He will provide an overview of farm policy, on-the-ground successes, and work yet to be done to ensure a sustainable food and farming future. He'll share his 30 years of experience working in D.C. to shape sustainable agriculture policy and what's on the horizon with the 2018 Farm Bill as well as the future for sustainable agriculture.

Cost to attend the conference is \$70 per day or \$135 for both days which includes access to all presenters, lunch and snacks both days, and a Friday evening social hour. Both days will include a lunch from locally-sourced ingredients and will offer conference attendees time for networking and visiting exhibitor booths in order to connect with and learn more about the great people and exciting things happening in farming, food production, and the environment, in Kansas and beyond.

Register online at www.kansasruralcenter.org. A limited number of scholarships are available to students and beginning farmers. Call 866-579-5469 or email info@kansasruralcenter.org to learn how to apply. Hotel rooms at Four points by Sheraton available at a discounted rate until Oct. 24 for conference participants. To reserve a room call (888) 627-8649. Request the group rate for “Kansas Rural Center Farm and Food Conference.”

