

Kansas Specialty Crop Growers' News

Winter 2021-2022

In the Winter Newsletter

As I wrap up the finishing touches on this Winter Newsletter, the rain that began early this morning, December 28, with lightning and thunder is letting up—the first measurable precipitation in two weeks, and only the second precipitation in 46 days. Going through posts on our Facebook Group page, I see reports of damage from the wind



December dust storm & damage—Garden City—page 4

events earlier this month. As growers on the frontline, we're seeing firsthand the challenges we face ahead—and specialty

crops are driving innovations to meet those challenges through these times and beyond.



In this newsletter, we look at **how specialty crop growers are working in a changing Garden City landscape** (page 2); KSCGA's **vision in collaboration with growers statewide in building networking and supporting innovation** (page 5). Also: **more on the recent windstorms** (Page 4); the upcoming [Great Plains Growers Conference and KSCGA Annual Meeting](#) (page 2); [how you can help in building a picture of specialty crops impacts in local economies](#) (page 7); [membership benefits, and gifts for joining or renewing now](#) (page 7); and **Kansas grower gallery—2021** (page 8).

COMPLETE OUR KANSAS GROWERS SURVEY

We look forward to your involvement as we look ahead to 2022—and hope to see you in our **January 7 Annual Meeting!**



Peter Pierson,
KSCGA Project Manager

Upcoming Events

- **KSCGA Annual Meeting:** Friday January 7, 5-6:00pm; through Great Plains Growers Conference— [ZOOM link on conference schedule](#). We invite all Kansas Specialty Crop Growers and interested parties to attend—and consider serving on our Board as we move forward in 2022. For more information, please contact us at info@kscga.org.

GREAT PLAINS *Growers Conference*

- **Great Plains Growers Conference:** January 7-8; A full slate of workshops and presentations at this year’s hybrid in-person and virtual event: greatplainsgrowersconference.org

KSCGA Welcomes Business Supporters—Reaching Out for More in 2022

Through the early fall, we solicited coffee suppliers across the country for donations toward our Fall Membership Campaign (see page 4). While global coffee supply systems, as with many of our product supply systems, have been impacted by pandemic and transportation concerns, the response surpassed our expectations.



Among the coffee roasters who responded, [Equal Exchange Co-op](#) stood out in providing 16 bags of premium direct-trade coffees and becoming our first business supporter in our

goal to expand our funding base. With a mission to promote genuine direct-trade relationships and sustaining local economies, Equal Exchange recognized how their vision parallels KSCGA’s efforts in promoting Kansas growers’ role in local economies and building sustaining market relationships for Kansas fruits, vegetables, and other specialty crops.

We thank [Equal Exchange](#) for their support—and encourage you to consider picking up some of their coffee and chocolates for your home. For those with markets and food service, there may be opportunities for collective wholesale buying as a group—please let us know if you might be interested.

If you operate a business, or know of a business in your area, that might benefit from being highlighted as a business supporter to our reach of over 300 Kansas growers and friends of the specialty crop industry, please contact us for more information at info@kscga.org.



Garden City Area Growers Work to Expand Reach and Awareness in Changing Times

Looking north from KSCGA member grower Prairie Wind Farms Garden City operations, thousands of heads of cattle mill about the sprawling feedlot and holding enclosures of one of the beef production facilities surrounding the community. The bright red banner hanging from the feed

(Garden City—cont’ed page 3)

(Garden City—cont'd from page 2)

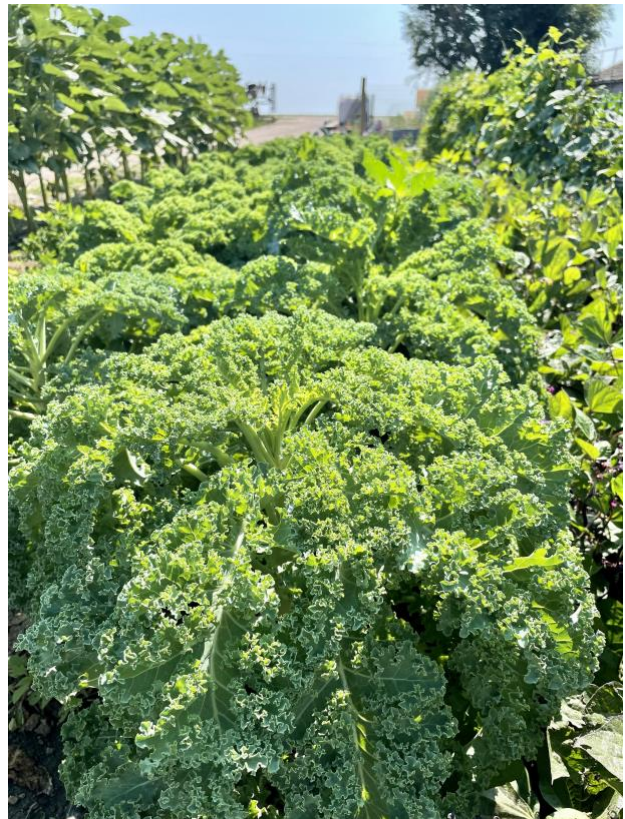
storage silos reads “Eat Beef—Stay Slim.” On entering the Saturday morning farmers market in town, one is met with a line at the first stand under a tent displaying “Fresh Colorado Fruit.” The combined signage of these two institutions seems to sum up the challenges Garden City area fruit and vegetable growers face in expanding their sales and market reach.



With Garden City and surrounding Finney County seeing some of the highest population growth rates in the state, there are opportunities for specialty crop growers in this rapidly changing community. Moving through the Garden City Farmers Market, though, one local grower reported that it was common to have potential customers stop and ask about, even admire, some of the more distinct varieties of kale, cauliflower, and cabbage displayed, but turning their noses at the suggestion that they take some home and try it—and then moving on to the adjacent stand selling what is perhaps the more familiar “Texas Melon and Corn.”

Steve and Kandice Michel’s Prairie Wind Farms are at the forefront of regional growers’ efforts to expand production to meet the growing needs in the community. With a diverse business portfolio that includes display and sales of sustainable, in terms of the region’s mounting water

resource concerns, lawn and garden plants and trees, horticulture equipment and supplies, and an array of high tunnels, greenhouses, and small fields supplying their on-site market with a variety of fresh produce, they’ve become a hub for other area growers to put their ideas into practice and build connections. It is not infrequent, though, for growers to tell them that they had no idea how many others were involved in specialty crops in the region that is defined by its principal industries of beef, corn and sorghum (harvested primarily for feed), and now dairy—as the expanding DFA production facility is poised to become one of the largest in



Garden City kale

the nation, taking up production, in part, from a California dairy industry threatened by a diminishing Colorado River water supply.

Along with the escalating industries in the region comes a rising population—and a demographic diversity that has Finney County now at 51% Hispanic (2020 Census). With that diversity there are opportunities for growers

(Garden City—cont'd page 4)

(Garden City—cont'ed from page 3)

in the region to collectively shape an evolving regional food system—and bring in backyard gardens tended by growers from such places as Guatemala, Eritrea, and Afghanistan.



Garden City TP & L Wind Turbine Depot—One of the largest of its kind in the nation

The possibilities are genuinely exciting as well as overwhelming—as evident in talking with growers and community planners in the area. Addressing the primary networking, community outreach, and awareness concerns in the region is the focus of recent grant work KSCGA is doing, partnering with growers in Garden City, Ulysses, and Liberal—along with proposed projects in smart irrigation, corner planting in row crop circle irrigation plots, and other sustainable cultivation practices.

Watch for reports on this work in the months ahead.



December Storms

December 2021 brought record warm weather, drought, or near-drought, conditions, grassfires and dust storms fueled by hurricane force winds, all bringing damage to growers across the state.

With sharp temperature contrasts between record heat across the Midwest and winter cold in other parts of the country, the disparities result in extreme pressure gradients [creating inland cyclonic conditions](#), or what we sometimes hear on weather reports, bomb cyclones. While these terms may not have been commonly used in the past, they are now heard more frequently on our weather broadcasts as these kinds of extreme weather patterns become more common.



High Tunnel Damage—Johnson County

The week of December 12-18 brought temperatures in the 70's and high wind warnings. Ahead of another of these inland cyclone low pressure systems, much of the state was reporting winds of over 55 mph, with gusts reaching 85 in the west. Kansas and E Colorado made national news with hurricane level 1 force winds crating dust storms that prompted news reports comparing them to those of the 1930's. Several communities in W Kansas and the Oklahoma panhandle were given evacuation

(December Storms—cont'ed page 5)

(December Storms—cont'ed from page 4)

alerts with wind-fueled grass and brush fires threatening. Intense smoke from these fires led to notices in the Kansas City area advising people to not call 9-1-1, as the fires were over 200 miles away.



Damage and dust storm—Clay Center

The sustained and gusting winds along with the brief line of storms that accompanied the passing cold front brought reports of damage to farm infrastructure across the state. Particularly hard hit were high tunnel and greenhouse structures, with some impacting critical year-round cultivation operations and destroying poultry housed in the structures.

As reports and images of damage popped up on [KSCGA's Facebook Group page](#), people responded to help out their fellow growers in managing the damage—some driving 60 miles or more to lend a hand. As heartening it is to see the support among our grower community, the financial cost of this scale of

damage can be devastating to growers. Infrastructure such as high tunnels are often impractical, if not impossible, to insure, resulting in growers incurring the costs of repair, replacement, and lost production.

KSCGA Board members have been in contact with KDA officials regarding the potential for emergency funding support for Kansas growers suffering losses in the recent wind events. If you've experienced damage and loss in the December storms, please post comments and pictures on our [Facebook Group page](#) and/or email to info@kscga.org. While no commitments have been made regarding emergency compensation, recent reports of a Kansas budget surplus may open the door for some compensation. We'll continue to work with KDA on this, and on insurance reforms needed, and give updates as things unfold.



KSCGA Year in Review—Looking Ahead to 2022

Through the membership forms collected the last few years, outreach and communication with growers, and information we're gathering through our ongoing grower survey (please see page 7), it is clear that the Kansas specialty crop industry is expanding in scale and diversity. Getting the word out and sharing information on opportunities in crop selection, cultivation practices, and general advice for growers continues to be a concern—with networking

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(2022—cont'ed from p 5)

being noted as the primary reason growers are joining KSCGA, and the lack of being noted as an obstacle for many growers in the less populated reaches of the state. As KSCGA looks ahead, expanding platforms for networking among growers is front and center in our priorities.

December 2021 marks the end of the original grant period in the 2020 Specialty Crop Block Grant (SCBG) funding organizational development, including the part-time professional roles behind much of the advances we've seen this past year. With an extension given in this grant supplemented by membership contributions, funding from Kansas Center for Sustainable Agriculture and Alternative Crops (KSAAC), and other income, we're able to build on our work in supporting Kansas growers.



Among our 2021 accomplishments are:

Membership Development: 2021 saw an increase of 370% in membership dues contributions from 73 individual Kansas growers—many from new members. With over 200 active in our Facebook Group page in 2021, and a mailing reach of over 300, there's plenty of room to grow!

Outreach: We've expanded our quarterly newsletter, in content and impact, and visited over 30 growers across the state

gathering information and insights on the vision and needs of Kansas growers. Another contracted role is actively working with potential business supporters to bring collective purchasing, discounts, and other benefits to our grower members.

Networking: Our social media activity among growers continues to increase, with growers across the state connecting and sharing information on everything from mushroom cultivation to advice on design and construction of improvised refrigeration systems.

Organizational Data Management: With funding from KSAAC and your membership contributions, we've been working with [WaterGrass](#), a database platform provider geared toward nonprofits, in developing and implementing a data management platform. With the platform now operational, we've evolved from a sprawling unwieldy spreadsheet system to the efficient organizational structure needed to better serve our grower members.

Looking ahead to 2022, KSCGA has been collaborating with growers and local officials across the state in developing project ideas in sustaining cultivation innovations and crop diversity, building awareness and market reach, and networking. A Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education (SARE) grant proposal connects the work among Garden City area growers (see pages 2-4) with alternative crop selections and innovations in composting in southeast Kansas and urban cultivation efforts in KC, Kansas into a broad-reaching networking arena. An SCBG proposal brings together north central growers and economic development offices with southwestern Kansas growers and community planners into, again, a networking platform KSCGA is developing from the base of our now operational data management platform.

We look forward to sharing the progress in these areas as we move forward in the coming year—and having you with us in the good work ahead.

Gifts for New and Renewing KSCGA Members

Thanks to the generous support of direct-trade coffee suppliers around the country, we still have premium coffees to raffle off in our now extended membership drive. We've given away 13 bags so far, with more to be raffled off in the coming weeks.



[Join or renew your KSCGA membership](#) between now and January 12 and your names will be entered into the raffle for the fine coffees we have on hand.

Thanks to all of you who've taken the initiative to join and renew this fall—and thanks to our coffee roaster partners who've contributed to our campaign: [Equal Exchange Co-op](#), [Just Coffee Co-op](#), and [Café Campesino](#).

Supplied through equitable relationships with growers in Central and South America, what we sip in our morning pre-chore moments impacts the individuals, families, and

communities behind growing our coffee. Remember—everything is grown and produced local somewhere!



Photo: FairTradeproof.org

Join Us in Building Awareness of Specialty Crops' Impact on Kansas Communities

We're asking Kansas growers to help in building a picture of how specialty crops contribute to the economy of the state, and the quality of life in our communities. To add to our base of information on Kansas growers and crops, your input is needed—and very appreciated. Please take a few minutes to [complete our short \(9 questions\) survey](#).

COMPLETE OUR KANSAS GROWERS SURVEY

By expanding the base of information on specialty crops in Kansas, we'll be able to effectively focus funding and policy to the benefit of our growers across the state. Information on sales and marketing platforms being used by Kansas growers will be used to develop education and support for those looking to broaden their sales and production.



Get your [Kansas Grower Survey](#) in before January 12, and your name will be entered into our ongoing Fall Campaign raffles for gifts of premium direct-trade coffees.

With your participation, we will continue to grow as the state's essential resource for specialty crops—and specialty crop growers.

Grower Gallery



Glazed broiled Brussels sprouts—Leavenworth

Through 2021 KSCGA has been building connections and relationships with growers and producers across the state involved in everything from commercial apples and pumpkins; grapes and winemaking; specialty lettuce, greens, and herbs supplying finer restaurants in the Kansas City area to ornamental flowers sold at Denver markets to Brussels sprouts and zucchini sold at rural southwest Kansas stands. The networking platform we will be developing in 2022 will greatly increase the capacity for our grower members to share information and ideas in the evolving Kansas specialty crop arena.



Mushroom production—Independence, KS



Gretel eggplant—Garden City



Galeux d'Eysines—Johnson County—a member of the pumpkin family of squash. Most pumpkins are delicious roasted or processed into soups and sauces. Rather than send Halloween ornamentals to the compost or garbage, pumpkins can be used to stretch fresh/frozen local foods through the winter. Some have suggested a Kansas Specialty Crops recipe collection might be in order—stay tuned in 2022!

*Thanks to everyone who's been involved in our work in 2021
...and here's to good things ahead in 2022!*

KSCGA Membership

Kansas Specialty Crop Growers Association is a grower-driven 501(c)(5) agriculture organization of fruit, vegetable, ornamental and aromatics, and fiber growers; vineyard and winery operators; apiarists; and others dedicated to promoting specialty crops—and specialty crop growers—in Kansas.

To join or renew your membership with KSCGA, please complete and submit membership form online at www.kscga.org/membership; or print and complete the form below and return it with a \$10 membership contribution to:

Farm Name _____

First and Last Name _____

Additional People with your Farm:

Address _____

City _____ **State** _____ **Zip/Postal Code** _____

County _____

Email _____ **Phone** _____

Website _____

Crops—What specialty crops do you grow? (ex: heirloom tomatoes, herbs, fruits, nuts, etc.)

Acres in Specialty Crop Production _____

How do you market? (*Farmer's Markets, CSA, Online, Restaurants, Grocery Stores, Food Hub, etc.*)

Would you prefer paperless newsletters and correspondence? (Circle One) Yes No

Tell us a bit about why you're a KSCGA member? What are your hopes and vision for your growing operations? How might KSCGA serve you in reaching your goals?

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