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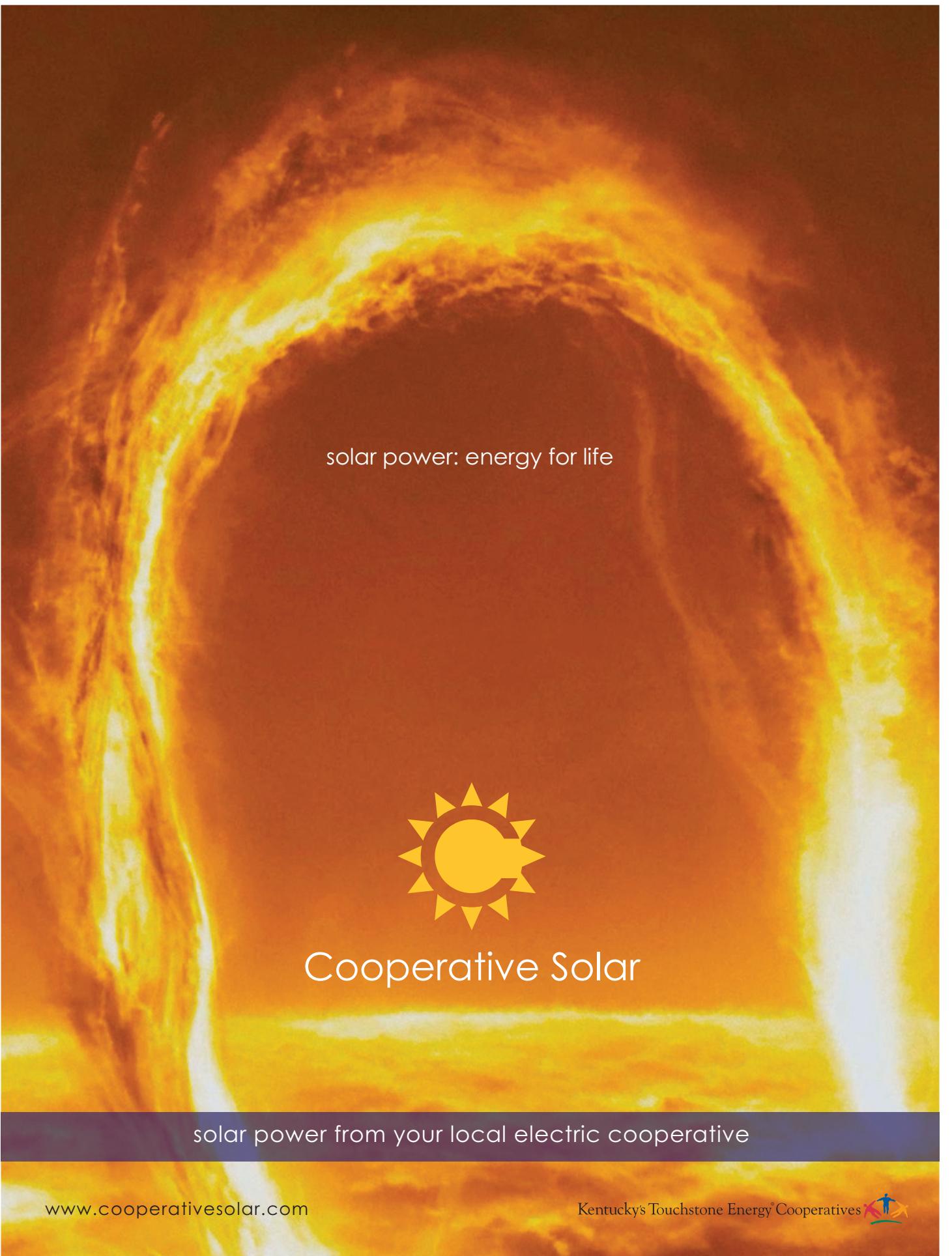


KFB ANNUAL MEETING'S CENTENNIAL CELEBRATION KICKOFF



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KENTUCKY FARM BUREAU NEWS

Volume 17 | No. 10
December 2018 - January 2019**CONTENTS**

PRESIDENT'S COLUMN	3
COMMENT COLUMN	5
2019 PRIORITIES	6
TOP COUNTY	8
BOARD ELECTIONS	10
OUTSTANDING FARM BUREAU YOUTH	12
DISTINGUISHED SERVICES AWARDS	13
DISCUSSION MEET AND EXCELLENCE IN AG	14
FARMER OF THE YEAR	16
OUTSTANDING YOUNG FARM FAMILY	18
PUBLIC RELATIONS AND COMMUNICATIONS AWARDS	20
CANDID CONVERSATION	22
ANNUAL MEETING PHOTOS	25
NAILE SUMMARY/2018	
KFB AG TOUR	28
KFB STARS IN HISTORY CHANNEL SHOW	29
DOWN THE BACKROADS	30

Cover photo by Tim Thornberry
This refurbished 1919 Model T Runabout is being used to help KFB celebrate its Centennial Year. Thanks to Beckley Creek Park for allowing us to photograph the truck on their property.

Kentucky Farm Bureau News is published ten times per year. Combined issues for December-January and June-July are sent to all members. The remaining eight issues go to regular members. Bulk postage rate paid at Lebanon Junction, Ky. Changes in address should be mailed to KFB Communications Division, PO Box 20700, Louisville, Ky. 40250.

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President's

COLUMN



It is at this time of year I believe we all have a tendency to think about the past while pondering the future; the traditions we've experienced and the opportunities that lie ahead.

As our organization closes out another successful annual meeting, I am reminded of all these events I have attended in the past remembering our many members who have made this annual meeting time a tradition of their own. I see the many accomplishments we have made in advocating for our agriculture industry and I'm excited about our future, and the work that is yet to be done.

The year was 1919 when all this began for Kentucky Farm Bureau, and we have kicked off our Centennial Year during this recent annual meeting. Being a grassroots organization, we have relied on our members to guide us through our first century of existence. And it will be those members who will lead us into the next 100 years.

In much the same way as we have done since the inception of this organization, the annual meeting serves as a time to approve policy and priority issues for the coming year. It is a time to learn from industry experts through a variety of commodity sessions. It is a time to fellowship with other members, and this year it was a time to elect a new Second Vice President.

We welcome Sharon Furches to the Executive Committee and look forward to benefiting from her years of experience on the farm, and as an agricultural leader. Sharon has served in a variety of roles in addition to her involvement with the family farm. She serves on the Kentucky Board of Agriculture, the Kentucky Venues and State Fair Board, as well as serving on our board since last year.

Sharon has also been active in her local community, exemplifying the kind of leadership so many of our members exhibit every day, where they live and work, all across this great Commonwealth.

As we begin 2019, it is no secret the ag economy is seeing tough times with low commodity prices, volatile markets and a year of weather challenges in 2018, from planting to harvest.

However, as farm families, we have crossed these bridges before. It is in our nature to make the best of the day, no matter what the day brings. But, we continue this tradition of living and working on the farm.

I know of no other industry that could give me the same satisfaction as seeing a harvest we have worked so hard to get. I can't imagine spending my life anywhere but on the family farm and in our rural community. There is no other feeling like the one we receive seeing our urban neighbors being fed because of the great agriculture industry that exists here and throughout the country.

In remembering the past and looking forward to the future, I have great confidence in our farm families as we continue our farming tradition into the next century and remain the "Voice of Kentucky Agriculture."

I wish each and every one of you a very Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year.

Mark Haney

President
Kentucky Farm Bureau

Comment

COLUMN



Kentucky Farm Bureau is a voluntary organization of farm families and their allies dedicated to serving as the voice of agriculture by identifying problems, developing solutions and taking actions which will improve net farm income, achieve better economic opportunities and enhance the quality of life for all.

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Editor Tim Thornberry
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Advertising Casey McNeal
..... Times-Citizen Communications
..... 800 798-2691 (ext. 334)

Circulation Kelley Parks
..... (502) 495-5112

I've been blessed in my life to have done many things related to agriculture. Whether it has been on our family farm or with various agricultural boards or organizations, it has been an honor to serve in the many capacities in which I have had the opportunity.

But, I must admit being selected by a group of my Kentucky Farm Bureau peers as your new Second Vice President is one of the highest honors I have ever received.

I have had the privilege of being a part of this wonderful Farm Bureau family for many years in a variety of roles at both the local and state levels. In all that time, I have seen the difference this organization makes when it comes to agriculture advocacy. I have experienced the success it brings to local communities through its involvement in rural areas across this state. I have benefited from legislative initiatives KFB has supported over the years that helped make our farms more sustainable.

Many of our members know us as their insurance company while others know us as the "Voice of Kentucky Agriculture." But I know there is so much more to this organization than that. We are the supporters of community little league teams, the volunteers who work at local animal shelters, the organizers of educational events, and the parents who read to elementary school students. We are the hometown government leaders who farm all day and work well into the night at a local fiscal court meeting. We support our schools' PTAs and volunteer to help the booster club at the Friday night football game.

Farm Bureau is about community; it's about advocacy from the courthouse in town, to the capitol in Frankfort and the halls of Congress in Washington; it's about helping a neighbor in times of need; it's about family, and we are all one big family.

As I take on this new role, I look forward to the many opportunities that are in front of me, to serve our members, to serve our communities, to serve our industry, and to make the best of each day for those who have entrusted me to serve in this position.

I know there are big shoes to fill. My friend Fritz Giesecke has been such a positive influence for me and countless other agriculturalists through the years. He has been a tremendous asset to Farm Bureau and I will continue to depend on his wisdom and strive to set the same example for those who will follow me as he has done for so many.

I am joining an Executive Committee so dedicated to the mission of Kentucky Farm Bureau, and I am honored and humbled to serve with them, learn from them, and stand beside them in all we do for our members, for our communities, for this state, and for an industry that has given me so much. I will always strive to return that favor as we open this new chapter together.

Sharon Furches

Second Vice President
Kentucky Farm Bureau

2019 KENTUCKY PORK PRODUCERS ASSOCIATION ANNUAL MEETING

January 18-19, 2019

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This event provides an excellent opportunity to renew acquaintances with old friends, attend educational seminars, and stay abreast of the activities of the KY Pork Producers Association.

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PIC receives funding from the Kentucky Agricultural Development Fund (KADF) which provides grants to diversify and modernize Kentucky's farm economy

FRIDAY (January 18, 2019)

6:30 PM — KPCW Banquet & Auction
Scholarship Auction—Auctioneer Scott VanSickle
Door Prizes \$6-\$50
Announcements

SATURDAY (January 19, 2019)

7:00 - 8:30 a.m. — BREAKFAST (Hartland Café)
All meetings will be in Meeting Room 1 Sloan Convention Center

8:30 a.m. — Interviews for 2020 KPPA Officers and 2020 National Delegates - Crosswinds Board Room

9:00 a.m. — Chris Borders, Knuckles Insurance Company

9:30 a.m. — Cody McKinley, Director National and State Relations Director, State and national Pork Producers Council

10:00-12:00 — Show Pig Clinic and Pizza

10:00 a.m. — Foreign Animal Diseases Roundtable - Dr. Robert Stout, State Veterinarian; Dr. Debbie C. Reed, DVM, MPH Director of the Breathitt Veterinary Center;

Patrick Webb, Director - Swine Health Programs, Science & Technology, University of Kentucky Veterinary Diagnostic Laboratory

10:00 a.m. — Ladies Program - Rosie Cochran, Pharmacist

11:00 a.m. — Stephen Herring, National Pork Board

11:30 a.m. - 1:00 p.m. — LUNCH (Hartland Café)



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KENTUCKY FARM BUREAU'S 99TH ANNUAL MEETING

Priorities set for 2019 as Centennial Year celebration kicks off

Nearly 1,900 Kentucky Farm Bureau members and guests made their way to Louisville's Galt House for the organization's 99th Annual Meeting. This year marked the official kickoff of the Centennial Celebration as KFB gets ready to turn 100 years old in 2019.

In addition to commodity sessions and awards programs, voting delegates elected a new Second Vice President and heard from KFB President Mark Haney during his annual address.

He recognized members, agents and staff for their hard work and advocacy efforts for the organization and the agriculture industry and told a packed house how important it is to pay attention to the future while celebrating the past.

"It's always good to reflect on our past but we must also stay focused on our future; on our next 100 years. We must keep our eye on the ball and we must move forward on sound science, proper research, and determination for the good of our country," he said.

Haney recognized some of the many accomplishments KFB experienced over the past year from an agricultural and legislative perspective, but he told the crowd not to rest on their laurels.

"As we move toward this next legislative session, there are several important issues we much watch, be aware of, and advocate for," he said.

Some of those issues included adequate broadband service throughout the state; supporting trade initiatives that will open markets for family farms; and standing strong in support of maintaining sales and use tax exemptions for agricultural inputs not only for farms but for rural businesses, to name a few.

"Those businesses are so very important to our operations and the rural economies in which they are located," he said. "One of the most important businesses in every rural farm community is the farm supply. They understand our industry, supply of our inputs, and disseminating important information."

In speaking about rural businesses, Haney emphasized the importance of rural economic development.



"My commitment to you from day-one has been to approach every decision with a clear head, an open mind, and a steady hand."

— Mark Haney
KFB President

"As an organization, we need to make a big push on rural economic development issues in the coming year," he said. "I fully understand we can't build large manufacturing facilities in every county, but I do think we can look for opportunities to establish a healthier business environment to strengthen our rural economies."

Haney also shared the progress being made on KFB's Bluegrass Senior Living initiative that will bring memory care facilities to areas across the state in need of these specific kinds of services.

During his closing remarks, he thanked the members for their continued support and for the opportunity to serve as their president.

"My commitment from day-one was to approach every decision with a clear head, an open mind, and a steady hand," he said.

The KFB Board of Directors approved state and national priorities during the annual meeting. Some of those state issues included: the support modernization of the grain insurance fund to adequately protect current and future Kentucky grain producers; support the provisions of House Bill 44 (KRS 132.010) which notes revenue from property taxes should continue to be

limited to four percent plus new growth, and proposals to exceed four percent should automatically go to the voters; support the rural secondary and county road aid programs and continuation of the 22.2 percent allocation of the state gasoline tax revenue for rural roads; support efforts that will retain and attract new business and industry to rural areas of Kentucky; and support broadband and high speed internet service being available for the benefit of all Kentuckians.

Nationally, some of the priority issues approved included: support fair and open multilateral trade agreements that will open new markets and expand existing markets for U.S. agricultural products; support maintenance and improvement of transportation infrastructure, including rural highways, lock and dam systems, riverports, and railroads; support immigration reform that includes restructuring the H-2A program to streamline the process making it more reliable, economical, and simple for farmers to participate; support changes to current health care law that will stabilize the market, encourage competition that will reduce health care costs, and increase consumer choice; and support a producer's right to protect livestock and property against nuisance wildlife predation.

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BUTLER COUNTY NAMED “TOP COUNTY” DURING KFB ANNUAL MEETING

Recognized for outstanding programming and for having a positive impact on both the community and its membership, Butler County Farm Bureau was honored as Kentucky Farm Bureau's (KFB) "Top County" in 2018.

Volunteer leaders from Butler County received the award at a recognition breakfast held this morning during the 99th KFB annual meeting.

The "Top County" announcement headlined nearly 70 membership program and insurance honors presented during an awards breakfast this morning. Butler County, which has 2,058 members and a variety of successful service programs, was also honored as the most outstanding in the membership category for counties with 2,600 or fewer members. Breckinridge County (2,964 members) received recognition among the counties with



Members of Butler County Farm Bureau, which was named Kentucky Farm Bureau Top County, at the Galt House in Louisville, KY.

2,601 to 4,200 members, and Hopkins County (5,754 members) won top honors among counties with more than 4,200 members.

IN OTHER AWARD PRESENTATIONS:

- Top County Farm Bureaus were designated in all eleven of Kentucky Farm Bureau districts. The recipients were: Bath, Butler, Campbell, Cumberland, Fleming, Garrard, Harlan, Hopkins, Logan, Shelby, and Trigg.
- Henderson, Mason, and McCreary Counties received Top Growth Awards for having the largest percentage of membership gain from 2018.
- Pacesetter Awards were given to counties in the three membership size classifications that were the first to achieve a membership gain during the year. The large county award went to Breckinridge County, followed in size by Mason and Henderson Counties.
- 11 counties won honors for having the highest member retention totals in their districts. Those winners were: Adair, Breckinridge, Floyd, Franklin, Garrard, Green, Hickman, Knott, Lewis, Nelson and Todd Counties.
- Wayne County was honored for having 55 consecutive years of membership growth.
- Hickman County was recognized as the Most Improved County Farm Bureau.
- Three awards were given for most effective county Farm Bureau information programs. Mercer County won first place, Daviess County was second and Logan County was third.
- 67 Counties won the awards for policy growth and profitability produced by their local Farm Bureau agencies. Allen, Clinton, Fleming, Harlan, Jefferson, and Lyon counties came closest to the growth goal set for that county.

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MARK HANEY RE-ELECTED AS KENTUCKY FARM BUREAU PRESIDENT

Calloway County's Sharon Furches elected new second vice president

Pulaski County farmer Mark Haney was re-elected Kentucky Farm Bureau President on the concluding day of the organization's 99th annual meeting. Also re-elected was Webster County's Eddie Melton as First Vice-President. Sharon Furches of Calloway County was elected as Second Vice-President, taking the place of Hart County's Fritz Giesecke who retired from the Kentucky Farm Bureau Federation Board.

Haney has served on the Executive Committee for 20 years and has been a state director since 1993. For many years he chaired the State Resolutions Committee. He is a past president and current board member of the Kentucky Center for Agriculture & Rural Development, past president of the Kentucky Center for Cooperative Development, past chairman of the Kentucky Horticulture Council and a current member of the Board of Directors for Southern Farm Bureau Life Insurance Company.

Haney has also served as former president of the Pulaski County Farm Bureau and is a current member of the American Farm Bureau Federation's Executive Committee and Board of Directors.

He and his brother, Don, produce apples and peaches near Nancy, KY, where they also raise beef cattle. They sell fresh produce from their orchards – as well as cider, jellies, baked goods and other products – at a KFB Certified Roadside Market located on the farm. He and his wife, Marlene, have two sons and a daughter.

Melton, a former president of Webster County Farm Bureau, is chairman of KFB's State Resolutions Committee and chairs KFB's Farm Bill Working Group. Mr. Melton additionally serves on the Board of Directors for Southern Farm Bureau Life Insurance Company. He and his wife, Regina, have a daughter.

Sharon Furches was elected Second Vice-President. Furches has



KFB President Mark Haney addressed members and attendees during a session of this year's Annual Meeting.

been a member of KFB's Board of Directors since 2017. She is Chair of the Kentucky Farm Service Agency State Committee, serves on the State Board of Agriculture and the Kentucky State Fair Board. She and her husband Tripp reside in Murray, KY where they farm 5,000 acres of corn, soybean, wheat, and canola. They have a son and a daughter.

Three new members were elected to the KFB Board of Directors this year: Ray Allan Mackey of Hardin County will serve as a District 3 representative to the Board, Mark Kinsey of Grant County will serve as a District 6 representative to the Board, and Tyler Ferguson of Johnson County will serve on the Board as the Chair of the KFB Young Farmers Committee.

Returning Board Members are: Randy Chrisman of Anderson County; Marshall Coyle of Bath County; Greg Drake of Butler County; Jay Coleman of Barren County; Patrick M. Henderson of Breckinridge County; David McGlone of Carter County; Shane Wiseman of Clark County; Kim McCoy of Cumberland County; Dr. Nancy Cox of Fayette County; Glenn Howell of Fulton County; Brandon Davis of Green

County; Larry Clark of Green County; Larry Thomas of Hardin County; Roger Fannin of Harlan County; Don Miniard of Harlan County; Alex Barnett of Harrison County; Cloyce Hinkle of Knox County; David L. Campbell of Lincoln County; Joe Paul Mattingly of Marion County; Kelly Thurman of McLean County; Vickie Bryant of Monroe County; Mary Kate Kordes of Muhlenberg County; David Chappell of Owen County; Scott Travis of Spencer County; Terry Lawson of Rockcastle County; Victor Rexroat of Russell County; and Carroll Amyx of Wolfe County.

Leadership for two of KFB's key advisory committees was also announced during the organization's annual meeting. Tyler Ferguson of Johnson County is the new Chair of the Young Farmer Advisory Committee.

Vickie Bryant of Monroe County was re-elected as Chair of the Women's Advisory Committee.

The new Vice-Chair of the Young Farmer Committee is John Henning of Breckinridge County, the new secretary is Matthew Seiter of Campbell County, and the social media chair is Tammy White of Union County.

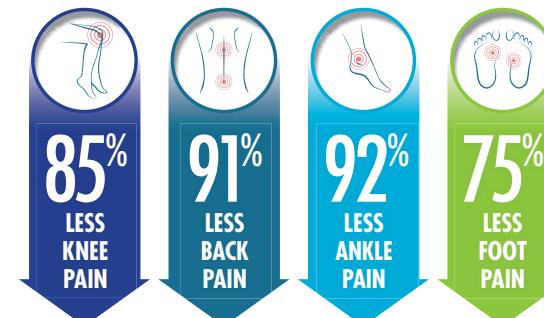
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MARCUS WISEMAN OF CLARK COUNTY AND LAUREN ROWLETTE OF MADISON COUNTY NAMED 2018 OUTSTANDING FARM BUREAU YOUTH

Marcus Wiseman of Clark County and Lauren Rowlette of Madison County were awarded top honors in the 2018 Outstanding Farm Bureau Youth contest.

Wiseman and Rowlette were selected from 22 district finalists, 11 male and 11 female, out of approximately 400 young people who competed in county and district contests over the past several months. At each level, the competition consists of two portions: a personal interview and a two-minute prepared speech related to agriculture or Farm Bureau. Contestants are judged by three people with backgrounds in youth work and/or agriculture.

During KFB's annual meeting, judges heard speeches and met with finalists for personal interviews, awarding points for each contestant's leadership record, conversational ability and scholastic achievement. KFB gave both winners a \$2,000 college scholarship, an expense-paid trip to Washington, D.C. on the KFB Congressional Tour in February 2019, a luggage set and watch.

Runners-up in the contest were Logan Cheek of Fayette County and



Mark Haney, President, Kentucky Farm Bureau; Marcus Wiseman of Clark County and Lauren Rowlette of Madison County, Outstanding Farm Bureau Youth Winner; Vickie Bryant, Chair, Kentucky Farm Bureau Women's Committee; Drew Graham, Executive Vice President, Kentucky Farm Bureau Federation.

Haley Nelson of Shelby County. They each received a \$200 cash award and leather portfolio. Congeniality awards, which were voted on by their fellow contestants, were won by Jake Harrod of Franklin County and Gabrielle McLeod of McCracken County. KFB awarded them both with \$100 cash prizes for the honor.

The 22 district finalists who competed at KFB's annual meeting included: Gabrielle McLeod (McCracken County), Samuel Freeman (Trigg County), Mallory White (Union County), Samuel Benton (Muhlenberg County), Emma Rose Vincent (Edmonson County), Luke Jacobs (Butler County), Bethany Schalk (Barren County),

James Dye (Warren County), Haley Nelson (Shelby County), Logan Cheek (Fayette County), Mary Perkins (Campbell County), Jake Harrod (Franklin County), Molly Sullivan (Taylor County), Hunter Miller (Taylor County), Lauren Rowlette (Madison County), Dylan Driskell (Garrard County), Fielden Bechanan (Nicholas County), Marcus Wiseman (Clark County), Madison Blair (Greenup County), Hayden Osborne (Pike County), Emalee Watts (Breathitt County), and Michael Hensley, Jr. (Harlan County).

All 22 contestants received luggage pieces and \$100 for winning district competitions.

SARAH HOWARD RECEIVES EXCELLENCE IN AG LITERACY AWARD

Sarah Howard, a teacher at Newton Parrish Elementary School in Daviess County, is the recipient of Kentucky Farm Bureau's (KFB) 2018 Excellence in Ag Literacy Award.

KFB's "Excellence in Ag Literacy Award" is designed to recognize and reward teachers who excel in their efforts to incorporate agricultural concepts throughout their core academic studies. Nominations were made for a variety of pre-kindergarten through 12th grade teachers who use their classrooms to help integrate agricultural concepts into non-agricultural curriculum, helping students comprehend the value of agriculture as it impacts their

personal well-being economically, environmentally and socially.

For winning the award, Howard received \$500 cash and an expense-paid trip to the National Ag in the Classroom Conference June 18-21, 2019 in Little Rock, AR where she will represent Kentucky in the national competition.

Howard has been teaching for the past 12 years at Newton Parrish Elementary School in Owensboro, KY and grew up in rural Daviess County. Upon entering the teaching profession, she quickly noticed that her rural background was very different from the lives of most of her students.

Recognizing the importance of her experiences and what the agriculture community provides, Howard made it a priority to teach her students more about rural life.

With that goal in mind, Howard developed Ag Day for Newton Elementary. Students and teachers alike learn about things like where the ingredients for pizza come from, the lifecycle of a cow, how to pet a farm animal correctly, what machinery is used in food production, and more. The knowledge students obtain on Ag Day makes other curriculum, like math, reading, and science, more relatable throughout the entire school year.

DISTINGUISHED SERVICE AWARDS GO TO BETTY FARRIS AND LARRY JAGGERS



Fritz Giesecke, Second Vice President, Kentucky Farm Bureau; Drew Graham, Executive Vice President, Kentucky Farm Bureau Federation; Carol Jaggers, Larry Jaggers, Distinguished Service to Agriculture Winner; Mark Haney, President, Kentucky Farm Bureau; John Sparrow, Executive Vice President and CEO, Kentucky Farm Bureau Insurance Company.



Fritz Giesecke, Second Vice President, Kentucky Farm Bureau; Drew Graham, Executive Vice President, Kentucky Farm Bureau Federation; Betty Farris, Distinguished Service to Farm Bureau Winner; Mark Haney, President, Kentucky Farm Bureau; John Sparrow, Executive Vice President and CEO, Kentucky Farm Bureau Insurance Company.

Hardin County farmer Larry Jaggers has been named the winner of Kentucky Farm Bureau's annual award for Distinguished Service to Agriculture.

A life-long farmer, Larry and his wife Carol made a small family dairy farm into a larger dairy, grain, and tobacco farm. Known for his hard, efficient work and good farming practices, Larry is involved in many agribusiness organizations and has been rewarded for his achievements and donation of time with many awards. After maintaining a dairy farm for 47 years, he has now cut back to a smaller operation and his son runs the grain operation.

Larry has spent a lifetime pursuing the improvement of agriculture and educating others of its importance, working with farmers and agribusiness across our county, state, and nation. Specifically, he has focused on improving dairy farming as an industry, connecting the local non-farm community with its agriculture community, and making sure future and young farmers are set up with the tools they need to succeed.

For 45 years and counting, Larry has served on the Hardin County Fair Board, promoting agriculture to the entire county. He has served as chairman for the Hardin County Farm City Committee and is dedicated to bridging the divide between urban and rural communities. Larry serves on the board of the Kentucky Agricultural Financial Corporation, setting



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BRIAN WELCH, OF HOPKINS COUNTY WINS KFB DISCUSSION MEET

Brian Welch, of Hopkins County, won first place in the final round of Kentucky Farm Bureau's (KFB) Discussion Meet, a debate-styled competition for young farmers that relies on an individual's skill in reasoning and logical discussion of issues.

Welch participated with three other entrants in the final event, winning a Kawasaki MULE donated by Southern Farm Bureau Life and Jacobi Sales. He also won a trip to the national finals in New Orleans, Louisiana as part of the American Farm Bureau Federation's annual convention, January 11-16, 2019. When Welch competes for top national honors next month in New Orleans, he will be vying for prizes including a new Ford truck.

Runner-up in the state Discussion Meet was Mike Meyer, who received \$1,000 from KFB.



Jackson Tolle, Director Young Farmer Programs, Kentucky Farm Bureau Federation; Mark Haney, President, Kentucky Farm Bureau; Brian Welch, Discussion Meet Winner; Drew Graham, Executive Vice President, Kentucky Farm Bureau Federation.

The two other finalists in the state-level contest were Lilly Robertson of Logan County and Mackenzie Wright of Carroll County. They each received \$200 cash awards from KFB.

KFB's Discussion Meet tests entrants on their basic knowledge of critical farm issues and their ability to respond in a panel-type discussion.

BEN AND SAVANNAH ROBIN FROM BOURBON COUNTY WIN EXCELLENCE IN AGRICULTURE AWARD

Ben and Savannah Robin from Bourbon County have won top honors in Kentucky Farm Bureau's (KFB) Excellence in Agriculture Awards program for 2018.

The Excellence in Agriculture competition awards first, second and third place distinctions each year to individuals or couples under the age of 35 who contribute to and exhibit leadership growth from consistent involvement in Farm Bureau and

other agriculture and civic-oriented organizations. To qualify, contestants must not have the majority of their income subject to normal production risks associated with farming.

Ben and Savannah both grew up on family farms understanding the efforts needed to keep those farms sustainable. They currently maintain their own farm, a cow/calf operation along with a cut flower business in addition to off-farm jobs. Ben is an Information Systems Coordinator

for an agricultural lending institution, while Savannah is the Internship Coordinator for the Equine Program at the University of Kentucky College of Agriculture, Food and Environment.

Both are active in various agricultural-related programs in their community including their local Farm Bureau.

For the win, the Robins will go on to represent Kentucky in the national competition at the American Farm Bureau Federation (AFBF) annual convention, held in New Orleans, LA, January 11-16, 2019. The Robins were also presented with a John Deere Gator, courtesy of Farm Credit Mid-America, and an expenses-paid trip to the AFBF annual meeting.

Second place in the contest went to Evan Michael Tate of Hancock County who was awarded \$400 courtesy of KFB. Mike and Shelley Meyer Harrison County placed third and received \$300 from KFB.



Mark Haney, President, Kentucky Farm Bureau, Ben and Savannah Robin, Farm Credit Mid-America's Jonathan Carter, Drew Graham, Executive Vice President, Kentucky Farm Bureau Federation, and John Sparrow, Executive Vice President and CEO, Kentucky Farm Bureau Insurance Company.



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DANNY CUNNINGHAM KENTUCKY FARM BUREAU'S 2018 FARMER OF THE YEAR

There's something that can be said about tradition when it comes to farming. Danny Cunningham, Kentucky Farm Bureau's 2018 Farmer of the Year knows all about that kind of tradition. He lives about a half a mile from where he was born and raised, in the small Calloway County community of Penny. There he began his farming experience that continues today.

Cunningham is quick to credit his work ethic with having grown up on a dairy farm and smiles a big smile when he tells his age and the fact that he is still farming at 75 years of age.

During that time he has lived through the many ups and downs on the farm and in life itself, including nearly losing his farm in the 1980s during a crisis time in agriculture, and the loss of his wife a couple of years ago.

But Cunningham has stayed the course with the farm and said he learned to cook after his wife passed in order to still have Sunday dinner with his family, every Sunday. Those weekly meals are a tradition for him and his family as is the farm they have grown up on.

His farming operation rebounded to the point that he keeps five employees busy all year now and has supported an H-2A group that has been coming back for nearly two decades to work in his tobacco crop. Because of the strides he has made agriculturally and the support he shows his community, his industry and Farm Bureau, Cunningham was chosen as KFB Farmer of the Year being recognized at the organization's recent annual meeting.

His modesty comes through saying he was so surprised to hear about being

chosen for the honor. "I can't believe I would win such an award," he said with a tone of humility.

And while Cunningham may be humble in talking about himself, he is loud and proud when he talks about his family, the people that work on the farm, and an industry he has devoted his life's work to.

"I bought my great uncle's farm in 1965 and I'm proud of the ground I'm tending now because, most of it, I've had all those years. It has changed hands, but I still tend all the land I started with back then," he said.

That time in the 1980s when so many farm families faced tough decisions on the farm, Cunningham sold 300 acres of the original farm in order to stay in business. However, he signed a contract the day after the sale with the

new owners to rent that same land; a contract that is still in force today.

That decision along with others related to his crops have enabled Cunningham to be successful throughout his career and demonstrate his ability to run the farm as a successful business in the good times and the not-so-good.

"I love that I have been able to raise my family on the farm and want my children and wonderful grandchildren and great-grandchildren to continue this tradition."

Along with his 25 acres of dark tobacco, the main crop on the farm is white corn, as well as soybeans, raising 2,400 and 1,900 acres respectively. Cunningham also grows a smaller crop of wheat, as well. He sells all his corn to one customer located in Jackson, Tennessee and because he has the grain bin capacity (more than 300,000 bushels) to store all he grows, he trucks corn throughout the winter to the mill.

"I laugh and tell them we store their corn for them, but I have five full time employees here and it's a way to keep them working through the winter," he said. "I also get a premium for the white corn so that is the only kind we grow. And that's what's kept me in business."

Cunningham has contracted with ADM Milling since 1989 producing 255,000 bushels for them yearly. He also handles his own marketing.

"The basis is already set for white corn making it easier to market but technology has really allowed me to have the market at my fingertips via my cellphone and computer," he said. "I sell at minimum in 5,000-bushel increments for the corn, soybeans and wheat contracts."

In addition to the contracts he has, Cunningham also credits the local ethanol plant with being of value to him and other growers who may have overages, saying they generally take that corn at any time.

When speaking in terms of his dark tobacco crop, he noted how labor intensive it is but still somewhat profitable.

"I would say that 80 to 85 percent of the work in our tobacco is still hand labor and we use all H-2A labor. One of those workers has been with me for 22 years," he said. "The nine guest workers we have here on the farm are good people, all family men just trying to make a better

living, and send their children to school, just like you and I."

Cunningham, a lifelong Farm Bureau member has done much to support the industry that feeds his family and so many others, including serving on the Calloway County Farm Bureau Board in many capacities.

always mentions his family, especially his late wife Judy.

"When thinking about my greatest accomplishments I think about being Judy's husband for 54 years and having three beautiful daughters and being a farmer for 58 years," he said. "I love that I have been able to raise my family on the farm and want my children and wonderful grandchildren and great-grandchildren to continue this tradition."

Danny Cunningham really emphasizes how important it is to help young people get involved and says he's never been ashamed to be called a farmer and never will because the industry is so important to everyone.

"I'm really proud to be picked as the Farmer of the Year. I wasn't expecting it because I know there are much better farmers out there, but I really appreciate it and I know my wife would have been proud. She was always a big part of this farm."

Cunningham will now serve as the Kentucky representative in the 2019 Sunbelt Ag Expo's Farmer of the Year Competition to be held in Moultrie, Georgia next October.

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MACY FAWNS NAMED KENTUCKY FARM BUREAU FARM PUBLIC RELATIONS AWARD WINNER

Macy Fawns, a Horticulture Agent at the University of Kentucky Cooperative Extension in Maysville, is the recipient of Kentucky Farm Bureau's (KFB) Farm Public Relations Award.

Fawns grew up on a farm in Fleming County and still has a farm there today where her principle crop is hay. Prior to her position with the UK Cooperative Extension, she served as a Nutrient Management Planner at the

University of Kentucky and an Ag and 4-H Agent with Purdue Extension.

As a Horticulture Agent, Fawns works to develop and implement agriculture programs to assist in improving horticulture practices in her community. She holds classes, communicates with the community regularly, and partners with other agents and agencies to provide educational programs about agriculture. Additionally, Fawns promotes agriculture programs via a newsletter, on Facebook,



B. Todd Bright, Director of Communication, Kentucky Farm Bureau; Macy Fawns, Kentucky Farm Bureau Farm PR Award Winner; Mark Haney, President, Kentucky Farm Bureau; Drew Graham, Executive Vice President, Kentucky Farm Bureau Federation.

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on the radio, local television advertising, and occasional newspaper articles.

Fawns also works closely with local farmers to help educate people outside of the agriculture community about ag-related topics. This includes partnering with local agencies to provide summer programming for low-income children to teach them about fruits, vegetables and flowers.

A graduate of Morehead State University, Fawns serves in leadership roles in multiple professional organizations, including the Mason County Master Gardener Association and Buffalo Trace Beekeeper Association.

Ms. Fawns was nominated for the KFB Farm Public Relations Award by Mason County Farm Bureau.

OYFF continued from page 18

to keep working hard to make our dreams come true and are proud to join Kentucky Farm Bureau in their mission to make rural Kentucky a great place to live!"

Wesley and Alicia Logsdon of Pulaski County were named runner-up in the contest while Nicholas and Bethany Hardesty of Meade County, placed third.

The top three contestants will be receiving various prize packages from the following sponsors; KFBF, KFBMIC, Case IH, Kubota, New Holland, premier crop insurance, Nutrien Ag, Pioneer, Southern States, Community trust bank and Republic Bank.

KFB COMMUNICATIONS AWARD GOES TO CHRIS COOPER



B. Todd Bright, Director of Communication, Kentucky Farm Bureau; Chris Cooper, Kentucky Farm Bureau Communications Award Winner; Mark Haney, President, Kentucky Farm Bureau; Drew Graham, Executive Vice President, Kentucky Farm Bureau Federation.

Chris Cooper, Managing Editor and Reporter for the News-Democrat & Leader was named the winner of Kentucky Farm Bureau's (KFB) 2018 Communications Award.

The annual Communications Award has been presented by KFB since 1960. Media outlets, county Farm Bureaus and other agriculture-related agencies nominate candidates whose outstanding journalism work has created a better understanding of Kentucky's agriculture industry over the last year.

Logan County Farm Bureau nominated Ms. Cooper for the commendable work she produces on behalf of Kentucky agriculture. Ms. Cooper has been with the News-Democrat & Leader for 20 years and writes feature stories regarding what is happening in Logan County, oftentimes writing about agriculture-related topics.

Additionally, Ms. Cooper has been a leader in the community, including her service as the Logan County Humane Society President and Board Member, and on the Auburn Youth Softball Board. She has won several awards from the Kentucky Press Association including the Best Features Story and Best Spot News Coverage awards.



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CANDID CONVERSATION

KFB Candid Conversation presents a discussion about the topical issues facing the agricultural industry and rural communities in a question and answer format. In this column, musicians and songwriters Josh Mitcham and Paul Priest of Jericho Woods (JW) discuss how their farm and rural roots play a major role in the music they produce. On a side note, JW wrote and produced a song especially for Kentucky Farm Bureau's Centennial Year kickoff.

Josh, tell us about creating the song that is being used for the Kentucky Farm Bureau Centennial Celebration.

Having appeared on a segment of *Bluegrass and Backroads*, Jericho Woods knew Matt Hilton and he reached out to us to see if we would consider writing a song that would go with a video they were producing about Kentucky farmers; a song that would reflect that kind of sensibility of the farmer's mindset. Having taught agriculture for a long time, and with Paul once being involved in rural radio, I felt this project was easy to do and something we could relate to.

Since Josh mentioned it Paul, how does rural radio benefit its listeners?

I worked in independent rural radio for a big part of my life and it really is a lifeline for farmers. A rural disc jockey is going to give the weather three or four times an hour; they will give the time every time they open the mic, and talk about the cattle market and the grain market. The farmers leave the radio on in their shops, in the barn, and if they have a cab tractor, and I wanted to play the kind of music they like and be that lifeline with other information. You know these people and tend to them. Rural radio is important and those people living there like the kind



of music we, as a band, play and have embraced us.

Sounds like Jericho Woods has been well received by our rural communities. What would you call the kind of music you play and produce?

Josh: People have asked what kind of music we play, and while it can be classified as country music, it's better characterized as rural music and I feel like it speaks to our folks. If you've never lived on a farm and did some of the things you do in rural areas some of our songs won't mean anything to you. But Paul and I both live on a farm. I live on my grandparent's farm in Breckinridge County and I feel like I understand the people in rural Kentucky. We try to connect with them and I think our music, whatever genre it fits in, connects with them.

Paul, what is your rural background?

All we know is rural Kentucky. I grew up around farms and did farm work even though my family had gotten out of farming. Just because Dad didn't have

a farm, it didn't get me out of cutting and housing tobacco or throwing square bales. And today I live on my wife's family farm in scenic Duncan's Valley (also in Breckinridge County) 12 miles from where I grew up. Being in a band is like being a dairy farmer; it's seven days a week every week and growing up farming gives you a work ethic that transitions well to whatever job you might have.

Within the scope of your music, do you feel like you are advocates for agriculture and rural communities?

Josh: Absolutely. People thought I was crazy when I stopped teaching agriculture, but I tell them, all we're doing is farming. We are doing the same thing trying to grow this crop we call music so there will be some kind of harvest at the end of its season. We're still waiting for this harvest but it's the same thing, in its own way, as farming. We tell stories about people we know and our music is very blue collar. Like a farmer loves their crops, we love ours. The dirt in their blood is the same thing as the music in our blood and I can't shake it.

Paul: Farm families are good, wholesome people who work hard but I think sometimes we feel like we are playing for folks who get left out of mainstream entertainment. I think there is an entire demographic of these good people who are completely left out of many forms of entertainment. If you look at the state of modern music and movies, much of it is something most rural folks that I know wouldn't want to see or listen to.

How have you spread your musical message about life in rural America?

Josh: Having come from an ag teaching background, we have been able to work with FFA a lot, and we have worked with RFD-TV. Farm Credit has also had us involved in a lot of their events. These farm families are our folks. In a lot of these shows, I could start with the first paragraph of the FFA Creed and the audience can finish it.

Paul: Our music is something you would want to hear at a Farm Aid concert. Just because you farm doesn't mean you don't need or want a kind of entertainment that is suited to your lifestyle. And we try to bring that kind of music to our shows, everywhere we perform. It's not country, or bluegrass, or folk. But it is rural America's music and we bring that to our shows whenever we play.

With some of the notoriety the band has received, why haven't you moved to Nashville?

Josh: From a music industry standpoint, it makes it harder on us living where we do, but I know it would change the music that comes from us if we left home. I think our community is really proud of what we're doing. The folks I see and know are always asking how it's going. And what we do means something to them and that means something to us. Many of them would like to chase some kind of dream like we are. But to some degree we are already living that dream, the same as they do on the farm.

Paul: The people who live where we do are the key ingredients in our music. If we did move away, even to a larger town in Kentucky, it would

change the way our music sounds. Where we live is critical to the sound that comes from us.

Why is it so important to you to grow this musical crop the way you do and where you do it?

Josh: It may have taken us longer to get wider audiences and we could go somewhere else and perhaps get that. But I have to make a decision as to whether my parents and grandparents would like what I'm doing and singing about and if they would be proud of what I play on stage somewhere. And they are the only real audience I was ever really worried about. At the end of the day, we're trying to be true to what we want to do. That's not always the most popular thing or the most profitable. But we really do love this state so much, and where we are from and where we live.

Paul: By looking at what we are doing, we want other people, especially young people, to understand they can do whatever they want, and they can do

it in their hometowns. And we want to be supportive of people and businesses here. If a Kentucky artist puts out a record, we're going to buy it and push it because we know how hard it is. When we recorded this song for KFB, we went to Ricky Wasson, who is a great musician and recording person with a studio in Clay City. And we came to him because he is a Kentucky business owner, as well. I wouldn't mind if we recorded everything we ever do with Ricky right there in Clay City because it's awesome and it's rural Kentucky.

Can you summarize your thoughts on your involvement in the music industry?

Josh: Being involved in music is a wonderful place to be. But I won't ever leave where I live and when someone asks me what I'll do when we make it, I feel like in many ways, we've already made it.

Paul: It's hard to make a living playing music but it would sure be hard for me to live without playing music.

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COUNTY CORNER

Snapshots of County Farm Bureau activities



CARTER COUNTY

Recent Carter County events included Kids Day held at the local farm supply with approximately 200 attendees; county fair activities that included purchasing livestock and furnishing backpacks for children; and Farmers Appreciation Day when breakfast and lunch were provided at the local farm supply.



HART COUNTY

Hart County Farm Bureau Board of Directors recently held a reception honoring Fritz Giesecke for his years of service as a Kentucky Farm Bureau District 3 Director and as 2nd Vice President of Kentucky Farm Bureau. In attendance was Kentucky Farm Bureau 1st Vice President Eddie Melton.



CASEY COUNTY

Harvey Luttrell was recognized by his fellow directors in Casey County for over 50 years of distinguished service to agriculture. Pictured left to right is Area Program Director Jeremy Roy, recipient Harvey Luttrell and County President Tim Goodlett.



CRITTENDEN COUNTY

Stephen Hill, Crittenden County Farm Bureau President, presented Crystal Wesmolland a check for \$1000 to Crittenden County Family Resource and Youth Service Center to assist with Thanksgiving baskets to 75 families. These baskets include everything for a Thanksgiving meal and approximately a months-worth of can goods.

ROBERTSON COUNTY

Robertson County recognized FFA advisor Frank Gifford as leading where he stands with a certificate. Pictured from left: Jaime Brumagen VP, Troy Martin, President, Frank Gifford, Principal of Robertson County Principal Sanford Holbrook.



BULK-FILL PLANTING? WATCH YOUR WEIGHT.



Top photo: U.S. Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell presented KFB President Mark Haney with a framed Congressional Record denoting 2019 as the Centennial Year for KFB. Haney also presented McConnell with a Friend of Farm Bureau Award. This award recognizes those legislative leaders who support the organization's agricultural policy and its advocacy efforts.

Middle photo: Congressman James Comer was presented the Friend of Farm Bureau Award from Kentucky Farm Bureau President Mark Haney. Comer was the keynote speaker during the Annual Meeting's Public Affairs Breakfast.

Bottom photo: American Farm Bureau Federation President Zippy Duvall, who was presented a Louisville Slugger baseball bat from Agriculture Commissioner Ryan Quarles for Duvall's efforts in "going to bat" for agriculture.

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From left: House Agriculture Committee Chair Richard Heath, KFB Director of Public Affairs Jeff Harper, and Senate Agriculture Committee Chair Paul Hornback.

2019 LEGISLATIVE SESSION PREVIEW FOR KENTUCKY AGRICULTURE

Commodity leaders discuss issues and hear from House and Senate Ag Committee Chairs

In what has become an annual tradition, Kentucky Farm Bureau (KFB) leaders welcomed the state agriculture commodity representatives to Louisville to talk about issues each are facing in their respective agricultural sectors, and to get a preview of possible legislative actions related to the industry in the upcoming General Assembly session.

The yearly meeting has become a staple in the ongoing efforts by KFB to network with all state agriculture commodity groups as advocates for the ag industry and rural Kentucky.

KFB President Mark Haney spoke to the commodity leaders and emphasized the importance of their roles.

"I can't begin to tell you how important it is to work together when confronting the kinds of agricultural issues we face today on our family farms," he said. "We are very fortunate to live in a state where we have so many great partnerships and relationships between our ag organizations and commodity groups. I think we can accomplish so much more when we speak as a collective group, with a common message."

Haney also said that bringing these leaders together is critical in sharing ideas and understanding what each sector is about as they face ag-related issues on a daily basis.

In addition to the discussions held between the represented commodity groups, Kentucky's Senate and House Agriculture Committee Chairs, Senator Paul Hornback and Representative Richard Heath, shared information about possible legislation that will affect their respective sectors during the 2019 session.

Heath said the biggest thing lawmakers can do in this session is to not do anything to hurt farm families.

"We have to defend the farmers' needs for things like their agricultural tax exemptions. The farmer doesn't need to pay income tax on their input costs," he said. "We also need to uphold the provisions in House Bill 44, which deals with property taxes. Our role going forward is going to be defending farmers."

He added that in the industry itself, the market situation with tariffs and low grain prices are causing farmers

to struggle especially with young farmers, but initiatives like the Kentucky Agricultural Development Fund are helping in many situations and there is a need for programs such as that.

Hornback said he thinks there will be some legislative protections for agriculture in the upcoming session, but he thinks the biggest things will come by way of investments for rural Kentucky's infrastructure needs.

"Whether it be in the roads and bridges or some of the language put in to free up the ability of private industry to come in and build out our broadband system. I think those are the things that move rural Kentucky forward and affects all of agriculture."

Hornback added that he feels Kentucky legislators, by and large, whether they are from rural parts of the state or urban areas, realize the importance of agriculture.

"Agriculture has a very strong voice in Kentucky and they (legislators) know it's a very strong industry in this state and has made Kentucky what it is," he said.



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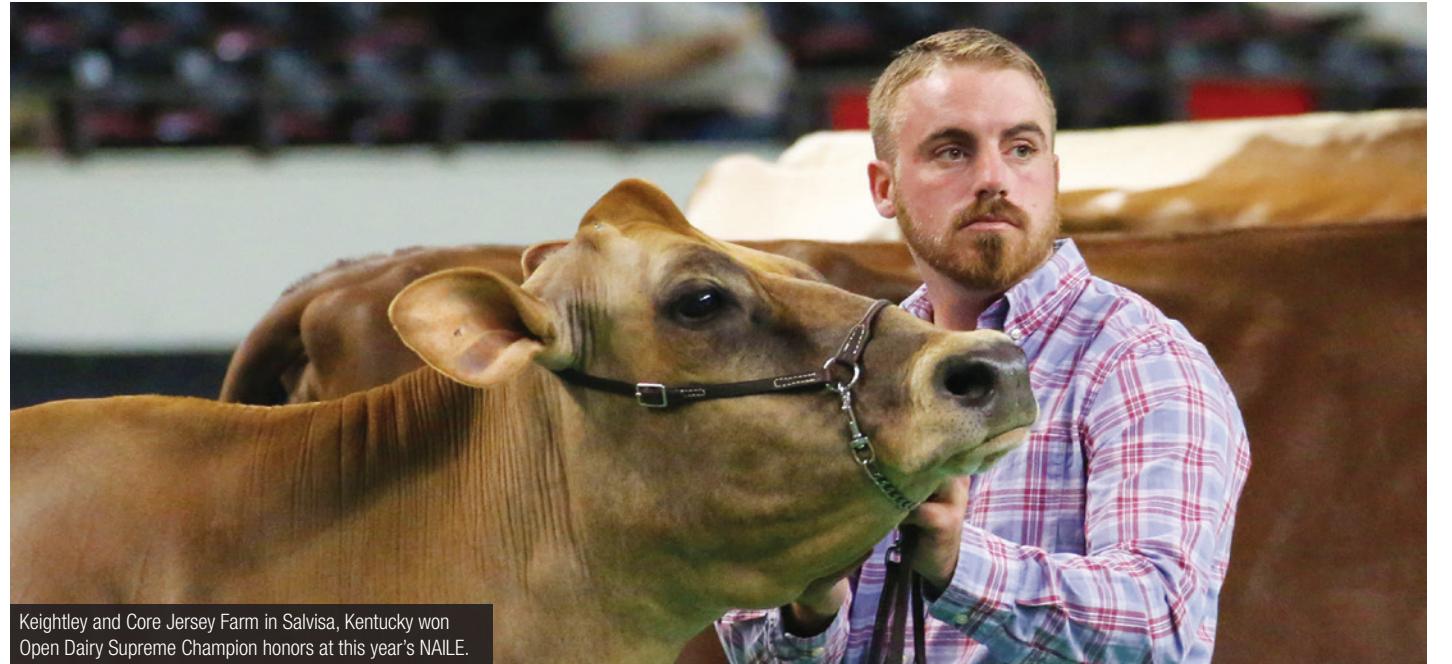


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Keightley and Core Jersey Farm in Salvisa, Kentucky won Open Dairy Supreme Champion honors at this year's NAILE.

NAILE STILL REIGNS AS THE BIGGEST AND BEST

This year's North American International Livestock Exposition (NAILE) proved that it's still the biggest and best purebred livestock show in the world, drawing nearly 30,000 entries with competitors, exhibitors and attendees from 49 states and six foreign countries.

In addition to the many livestock shows and auctions, NAILE is home to its Sale of Champions, which raised

\$64,500 this year, with proceeds distributed to youth exhibitors of market animals, charities and promotion.

The Expo also plays host to the North American Championship Rodeo, which set a new attendance record during the 2018 edition, with more than 21,000 fans enjoying the three performances in Freedom Hall.

The annual Farm-City Luncheon, hosted by the Agribusiness Industry

Network, is another regular event held during the NAILE. Each year, the Harold Workman Agriculture Leadership Award, and the Agribusiness of the Year Award are given during the luncheon. This year's winners were Douglas Shepherd, Hardin County agriculture and natural resources extension agent, and the Bulleit Distilling Company, respectively.

For more information, visit www.livestockexpo.org.

KFB AG TOUR 2018: EASTERN KENTUCKY

This year's annual Kentucky Farm Bureau (KFB) Agricultural Tour brought KFB executive committee members and leaders from the Federation, along with leadership from the Insurance Company, to a number of venues including county offices and rural businesses throughout several counties in Eastern Kentucky.

This annual event has become a tradition for the organization as KFB leadership takes this opportunity to keep local members informed of organizational events and advocacy, while hearing about issues at the local level.

"Being a grassroots organization, these annual tours are so valuable to the leadership at KFB to hear from our members where they live and work,"

said KFB President Mark Haney. "It also gives us a chance to keep these local members informed on issues and efforts at the state and national levels related to the agriculture industry, as well as our insurance company."

This year, KFB leadership visited Harlan, Letcher, Pike, Johnson, Lawrence, Carter, Boyd, and Greenup counties. And while this annual event has taken place for several years, many local attendees heard from KFB's new Executive Vice President Drew Graham for the first time.

"I really enjoyed seeing so many of our members attend each event as we made our way through Eastern Kentucky, during this year's Agricultural Tour," he said. "In this day of instant communications with computers and cell

phones, nothing can replace the value of meeting these folks face-to-face, and hand-in-hand, to hear what's on their minds and to keep them informed of our efforts on their behalf at KFB."

KFB Insurance Executive Vice President and CEO John Sparrow spoke to local members about insurance company happenings throughout the year. He emphasized the importance of these annual tours to the organization collectively.

"The Federation and the Insurance Company may be two entities, but we are one organization working together every day," he said. "In doing so, we are solidifying our mission of not only being a voice for agriculture but also being the best insurance company we can be for every member across this state."

KFB STARS IN HISTORY CHANNEL SHOW

Kentucky Farm Bureau Insurance was recently featured in History Channel's scripted reality television show, "It's How You Get There." The episode debuted Sunday, Dec. 2.

The premise of the show is as follows: Three stars (Julian Taylor, Sam Nehme, and Jenn Barlow) journey across the country looking to indulge in each region's specialty mode of transportation (think Jeeps in Moab, Utah, or ATVs in the Appalachian Mountains). For this trio, it isn't so much where they go; instead, it's all about how they get there.

So what exactly does Kentucky Farm Bureau have to do with any of this? Quite simply, it was a unique marketing opportunity that the company couldn't pass up.

"The producer of the show called us and explained that they were going to be in Kentucky and were looking for a local insurance company to write into the script," said Dan Smaldone, Director of Communications at KFB Insurance. "The value for us was immeasurable from an advertising and marketing perspective. Through our involvement in the show, we were able to help tell the story of why insurance is important. This was a unique way to positively represent our brand and state not only within Kentucky's borders, but across the entire U.S. as well."



Boyle County farm Bureau member, Bennie Gilbert, gives "It's How You Get There" star, Julian Taylor, a crash course in tractor driving.



TV MAGIC

The majority of the episode was shot in and around the Gilbert's property on Oct. 9. The crew often used a drone to capture breathtaking footage aerial footage of the Kentucky countryside. The Gilbert family was gracious enough to offer their beautiful farmhouse as a base for the crew, going so far as to open their doors for meals, bathroom breaks, and equipment charging.

Squeezing in a variety of scenes and shots was a sun-up to sun-down affair that ended with a homemade meal prepared by Terry Gilbert herself. The production team, which is based in Miami, was thankful for the Kentucky hospitality and a little taste of home-cooking.

THE STORYLINE

For the Kentucky-based episode of "It's How You Get There," Sam and Julian hit the state's beautiful, winding back-roads in a pair of heavy-duty extended cab trucks. (Due to prior obligations, Jenn sat this episode out). During their joy ride, Julian becomes distracted by his oversized cowboy hat and crashes his Ford F-150 into a local farmer's fence.

That's where KFB comes into play. The farm just so happens to belong to Bennie Gilbert — a KFB member on the show AND in real life. The Gilbert family's property, Rhodesia Farms, was selected for the show due to its picturesque setting in central Kentucky.

Long story short, Bennie calls up his insurance agent, who quickly arrives on the scene to ease the group's anxieties. The agent is played by George Bates, a Claims Director at KFB Insurance.

In the meantime, Bennie tells the bickering stars that they'll need to earn their keep on his farm to repay him for the damage to his fence, facetiously issuing Julian and Sam a good ol' fashioned field-mowing competition.

We don't want to give away too much in case you haven't watched the episode yet, but seeing these two city slickers hop into the Gilberts' pair of John Deeres for the first time is quite a sight.

- If you missed this episode's debut on Dec. 2, be sure to keep an eye out for season two of the show, scheduled to drop on Amazon Prime Video in the spring of 2019.



Down the Backroads

By Tim Thornberry

It seems somewhat ironic that a person who loves the Christmas season as much as I do would be afraid of Santa Claus, but alas, it's true. Growing up, I so loved the lights and decorations; the music and festivals; and the food; oh, the food!

All things Christmas made me feel so happy and jolly with the exception of the big guy in the red suit.

And as I grew older, I couldn't seem to explain that fear. After all, the person we knew as Ole Saint Nick, Father Christmas, Kris Kringle, Pere Noel (that's French), or Santy, as we called him, was the one bringing gifts to children around the world! How could I be afraid of him?

I would watch other children, including my brother and sister run to stand in line at the department store to get a chance to sit on Santa's lap. My sister would actually hug his neck and tell him how much she loved him! As for me, I would stand behind the gift wrap watching from afar despite the coaxing from my mother.

I figured my letter to the North Pole would suffice each year and it did for the most part. Santa never seemed to forget me. But deep down, I longed to embrace Mr. Claus the way other children did; the way my sister did.

However, there was this one Christmas that made me rethink the Santa fear factor. I had reached the age that year when many of the kids at school were beginning to doubt the very existence of a Santa Claus, and I was trying hard not to fall prey to peer pressure. I would just keep my mouth shut when the subject came up at recess.

I asked my mother about it on many occasions and her answer was pretty simple, and always the same. "As long as you believe in Santa, Santa will believe in you," she would say.

I'm not sure I understood it at the

time, but later in life I would, when I had children of my own.

As always on Christmas Eve, it was difficult to go to sleep and for some reason that fateful year, I couldn't sleep at all. My brother and I shared a room in a house that had no fireplace, but it did have an attic with only one entrance except for a window positioned above the front porch roof. That lone entrance was in our bedroom.

As the night moved on, I feverishly tried to fall asleep because I knew Santa Claus doesn't show up until the children are all sleeping soundly. But the harder I tried, the less success I had.

Suddenly I heard a loud thud coming from the front of the house. It sounded like a sleigh landing on the front porch roof. Oh my goodness! Santa was here and about to discover we had no fireplace. There seemed to be only one way in; he would have to come through our attic, and through my bedroom to get to the Christmas tree! I was about to come face-to-face with the one and only Santa Claus!

I'm not sure what happened next because I must have passed out. Before I knew it, my brother and sister were trying to wake me to see what Santa had left.

As we entered the living room, I saw an array of gifts surrounding our

tree while my mother greeted us with a hearty "Merry Christmas." Santa had once again made a successful entrance and exit undetected.

My dad was sitting rather quietly with his leg propped up on the couch looking completely worn out. It seems he had to give Ole Saint Nick a little help upon his arrival, according to the story I got from Mom.

Wow, I thought. My father was Santa's helper. I guess that explained the ladder against the front porch. My close encounter that year seem to temper some of my fears and I never forgot that night nor did I ever stop believing in Santa Claus.

I have always been thankful to my parents for teaching us to believe in Christmas magic. However, as much as Santa was a part of our Christmas tradition, my dad never failed to read the Christmas story from the Bible, teaching us the real reason for the season.

And, as an adult, I have also had to help Santa out a time or two just as my father did. But that close encounter, so many years ago, still seems like yesterday each year when the Christmas season rolls around and we move a little further down the backroads.

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30 - KENTUCKY FARM BUREAU NEWS

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KENTUCKY FARM BUREAU NEWS - 31



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