Teacher-awareness program showcases modern agriculture

With each generation becoming further removed from agriculture, many teachers and students today have not had the opportunity to visit rural America, tour a farm or ranch, or meet someone who works in production agriculture.

The Kansas Soybean Commission (KSC) partnered with the U.S. Farmers and Ranchers Alliance (USFRA) to launch a teacher-awareness program that creates an opportunity for teachers and students to learn about the modern technologies used to produce food.

The immersion, created for high-school science and social studies classes, will support and promote the Discovering Farmland curriculum. To drive student engagement, it incorporates 360-degree videos of a pig farm and two companion activities that explore aspects of animal care and sustainable food production.

The program encourages farmers to be present during the lessons to provide perspective about how agriculture continuously is improving and to answer students’ questions.

“The Commission is proud to partner with USFRA in this effort. We believe teachers and students should have access to agricultural resources even if they are in an urban or suburban setting,” said KSC Vice Chairman Lance Rezac, Onaga.

“Because today’s students will be making tomorrow’s decisions, it’s important they know about the many facets of agriculture and its importance to society and our economy,” he added.

In addition to the 360-degree video activities, the Discovering Farmland curriculum uses content from the award-winning documentary Farmland, a film by James Moll. It includes activities like the Digital Exploration (investigating food-product labels), SMART Farm Virtual Field Trip and interactive lesson plans, which build off four free lesson plans (“Farming as an Industry,” “Educated Consumers,” “Breaking Down Stereotypes” and “Challenges in Farming and Ranching”).

Those activities inspire students in urban areas to gain insight and an understanding of where their food comes from and how farmers and ranchers produce it.

Through the USFRA and Discovery Education partnership, the Discovering Farmland program has reached more than 1 million students, with nearly 20,000 curriculum downloads.

To access Discovering Farmland’s lessons plans and activities and to learn more, visit http://DiscoveringFarmland.com on the web.

Western commissioner re-elected, at-large appointments made

The Kansas Department of Agriculture (KDA) has announced the farmers from western Kansas who won election to the state’s five commodity commissions in the Jan. 15–March 1 balloting. The elected commissioners began three-year terms April 1.

The Kansas Soybean Commission (KSC) has a single commissioner representing the 31 western counties of districts 1, 2 and 3. Kurt Maurath from Logan County won re-election to that post after serving the past 14 years. He holds a bachelor’s degree in agriculture mechanization from Kansas State University.

The soybean commissioners filled two at-large positions at their March meeting. Lance Rezac, Onaga, was reappointed. Raylen Phelon, Melvern, was appointed to take the seat previously held by Jerry Jeschke, Robinson.

Farmers who wish to be included on the 2019 ballot for a KSC seat in eastern Kansas’ district 7, 8 or 9 must collect 20 signatures from eligible voters on an official petition form, which is available from KDA or KSC. No more than five signatures from any one county are allowed. The filing deadline is Nov. 30, and more information is available via http://KansasSoybeans.org/commissioners on the web.
Study uses Big Data to identify high-yield management practices

It is one thing to learn the management techniques that have brought a single farmer or small group of farmers closer to realizing full-potential soybean yields. When management information is gleaned from several thousand top-yielding farmers across 10 states, however, the power of “Big Data” provides measured productivity you might want to take to heart.

In a presentation at the 2017 Integrated Crop Management Conference in Ames, Iowa, Shawn Conley outlined the key management practices that explain soybean yield gaps across the north-central region. The soybean specialist at the University of Wisconsin, he also offered management techniques that produced higher yields across the board, based on data from 3,568 fields planted to soybeans in 2014 and 2015.

“A major challenge with this kind of data is how to cluster producer fields to identify management factors that consistently lead to higher yields for a given climate and soil combination,” Conley said.

His analysis grouped fields – based on climate, soil, annual growing degree days, an aridity index, annual temperature seasonality and plant-available water-holding capacity in the rooting depth – into technology extrapolation domains (TEDs). It estimated annual yield potential using measured weather data – including solar radiation, rainfall, and maximum and minimum air temperatures – collected at meteorological stations near the surveyed fields. The yield gap was calculated as the difference between the potential and average yields.

Planting date had the most consistent effect on narrowing the yield gap. High-yielding fields were planted, on average, seven days earlier than low-yielding fields in both irrigated and dryland scenarios. The yield penalty for late planting across the TEDs ranged from 0 to −0.5 bushel per acre per day.

Planting dates were not as important when moisture was limited over the season. Limited water availability at pod setting produced more yield drag than at the early-vegetative, vegetative and seed-filling phases, however, because of later planting dates.

“This study confirms the notion that nothing makes up for early soybean planting,” Conley said, “but don’t mud them in.”

Soybean farmers seem to be closing the gap between potential and realized yields, particularly on irrigated fields. Average estimated yield potential in dryland TEDs ranged from 48 to 80 bushels per acre, while in irrigated fields, it varied from 80 to 91 bushels per acre across TEDs.

Average yield consistently was lower than potential yields on both dryland and irrigated fields across all TEDs. There was a large variation in average annual yield across TEDs, ranging from 39 to 73 bushels per acre. The yield gap tended to be larger in dryland than in irrigated TEDs. At the regional level, the dryland yield gap averaged 22 percent in contrast to the irrigated yield gap of 13 percent.

University scientists in nine states, including Kansas, helped with the study, and the North Central Soybean Research Program (NCSRP) funded it. The Kansas Soybean Commission is among the 12 state soybean boards that collaborate on NCSRP (http://ncsrp.com).

Partnership receives funding to address algae in Milford Lake

Runoff from precipitation events is a source of nutrient loading, contributing to aquatic conditions that promote harmful algal blooms (HABs) within Milford Lake. Runoff also erodes soil, which ends up in waterways and is transported downstream, eventually contributing to sedimentation in the lake.

To improve water-quality conditions within the Milford Lake watershed, the Kansas Water Office (KWO) recently received $2.88 million from the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP).

“We are elated the … Milford Lake project was selected for funding and appreciate the support of the 28 contributing partners,” said Gov. Jeff Colyer, M.D. “As this lake serves as a water source to many Kansas communities, this project exemplifies the potential for a comprehensive watershed approach and presents a tremendous opportunity to impact nutrient loading within the lake.”

Milford Lake supplies water to several utilities and cities that serve nearly 1 million Kansans, more than one-third of the state’s population. The frequency of HABs in the lake over the years has stakeholders worried about public water supplies and the ability to provide safe, potable water.

The project will implement livestock- and cropland-related conservation practices within the watershed to decrease nutrient runoff and erosion. It also will improve fish and wildlife habitat, provide better soil health, test innovative phosphorus-reduction technology and support future agricultural productivity.

One of the largest efforts undertaken within the Milford Lake watershed, the project unites the partners and NRCS to implement conservation practices. KWO is the lead partner, with 28 other entities contributing.

The Kansas Soybean Commission is on the partnership team, which also includes state agencies, public water suppliers, farm organizations, local units of government, university and state researchers, county conservation districts, agricultural groups, private businesses, and nonprofit organizations.

For more information, visit http://kwo.ks.gov/projects/milford-rpp on the web.
National Soyfoods Month promotes balanced diets

Each year, April is designated as National Soyfoods Month (NSFM), when consumers are reminded to include soyfoods as part of a well-balanced diet.

“Soy is the only plant-based complete protein, and it is cholesterol-free and low in saturated fat,” said Charlene Patton, a Topeka-based home economist who serves as consumer-media specialist for the Kansas Soybean Commission (KSC).

Including soy does not require new recipes. Soyfoods easily can be included as an ingredient in many recipes. Soy milk, soy flour, soynut butter, edamame, black or yellow soybeans, soy nuts, and tofu are just a few options that can be included in favorite recipes. Soyfoods are readily available in most stores. Ask the store manager if you are unable to locate a specific soy product. Soyfoods may be in the natural food section or in the main grocery aisles.

Consumers may not realize, when purchasing vegetable oil, the only ingredient it contains is soybean. Soybean oil, known as vegetable oil, contains unsaturated fat and linoleic acid, and it is low in saturated fatty acids and high in polyunsaturated fat. It is one of the few plant sources of omega-3 fatty acids. According to the Soyfoods Council, health authorities recognize that linoleic acid lowers blood cholesterol levels and, as a result, the risk of coronary heart disease.

“Consumers are encouraged to explore the many soyfoods available and incorporate healthy soyfoods into their families’ balanced diets alongside soy-fed beef, pork, poultry and dairy products. Animal agriculture is the largest ‘processor’ of soybeans. In fact, poultry and livestock consume the vast majority of the soybean meal produced in this country, so the soybean checkoff encourages consumer choices toward a balanced diet,” Patton said.

The Commission celebrated NSFM with a colorful and delicious Edamame Corn Salsa. Congratulations to Margaret Miller, Burdett, who won first place in the Quick and Easy Snacks category of KSC’s Invent a Heart-healthy Food Competition at the 2017 Kansas State Fair with the recipe. For additional information and soyfoods recipes from appetizers to desserts, visit http://KansasSoybeans.org/soyfoods on the web.

Aquaculture catches more value

Casting a wider net to increase soybean-meal demand is paying off. The soybean checkoff, the Soy Aquaculture Alliance (SAA) and others are opening doors to increase soybean use in U.S. aqua feeds.

Following years of checkoff-funded research, the Association of American Feed Control Officials authorized a new definition for the use of synthetic taurine in fish feeds. Approving taurine from additional sources reduces the need for fishmeal in feeds and allows for more soy protein.

“Years ago, we recognized that taurine was a limiting factor to maximizing our share of a fast-growing market,” said SAA Chairman John Wray, Ottawa. “That approval opened up a significant part of the aquaculture diet for soy.”

Soybean meal offers a high-quality, renewable protein source for many species of fish. That makes it an economical choice for fish-feed manufacturers. The potential for increased demand in that market will affect the price farmers receive for their soybeans.

Demand for seafood is growing at a staggering rate. Identifying the opportunity years ago ensured farmers would be able to capture a share of the associated value.

“This is a great example of the checkoff’s commitment to maximizing soybean farmers’ profitability,” noted Wray, a former United Soybean Board farmer-director. “We will see our efforts from that innovative investment in aquaculture pay off for years to come.”

Alliance seats ’18 executive committee

During its December 2017 meeting, the Soy Aquaculture Alliance (SAA) board of directors conducted elections. Serving as SAA chairman this year is John Wray, Ottawa. He previously served as treasurer and secretary.

“The Soy Aquaculture Alliance is an organization that I have served for several years. I am looking forward to a new role as the chairman,” Wray said. “As a farmer, I am committed to developing diverse markets for the soybeans I grow. With global aquaculture increasing so rapidly, we are committed to meeting the growing demand for aquaculture feeds.”

SAA ensures a safe supply of affordable seafood for America and an abundant supply of the highest quality soybeans and soy ingredients for the aquaculture-feed industry.

Comprising both private industry and a number of state soybean boards, including the Kansas Soybean Commission, SAA (http://www.SoyAquaAlliance.com) works to make U.S. soy the most widely trusted and commonly used aquafeed ingredient.

Soy Notes is a service of the Kansas Soybean Commission – the soybean checkoff.

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Chairman.................................Kurt Maurath
Vice Chairman............................Lance Rezac
Secretary.................................Mike Bellar
Treasurer................................Bob Hasewood

United Soybean Board Directors

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Director of Communications.........Brad Parker
Director of Operations...............Adam O’Trimble
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Accounting Assistant..................Dawn Bradley
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Above: John Wray (far right), Ottawa, is serving as SAA chairman. (SAA photo)

Below: John Wray (far left), Ottawa, chairs an SAA meeting. Bradley Holder (far right), Denton, observed it as part of his Emerging Leaders Academy (http://KansasSoybeans.org/ela) Phase 3 experience. KSC Administrator Kenlon Johannes sits next to Wray. (KSC photo)
Cover-crop field days focus on soybeans

No-till on the Plains Inc. (NTOP) recently offered two opportunities to see soil-health practices in action. The field days – both co-sponsored by the Kansas Soybean Commission (KSC) – allowed farmers to see how cover crops can enhance their bottom lines.

The events were great opportunities to visit with farmers who once had questions about incorporating livestock into their enterprises and to learn from their experiences. Attendees also saw how cover crops can control weeds in soybeans and how that allows for extended rotation synergism.

The May 2 event was at Santa Fe Trail Farms near Windom, and the May 8 event was at Lloyd Farms near Clay Center. The tours included 2017 fields planted to cover crops for weed control, cover crops planted ahead of 2018 soybeans, wheat following cover-crop soybeans and livestock grazing cover crops.

The best agronomic practices can improve farmers’ efficiency and profitability, while providing other benefits, including less soil erosion and sedimentation, improved wildlife habitat, and sequestered carbon dioxide. NTOP (http://NoTill.org) is an educational organization that provides information about those high-quality, continuous-no-till systems. KSC often partners with it to provide practical, relevant advice from the farmers and scientists who are setting the standard in no-till systems.

WISHH works with K-State in Cambodia

More than 140 attendees from 16 countries participated in the first Sustainable Agricultural Intensification and Nutrition (SAIN) Conference, Jan. 12–13 in Cambodia. Kansas State University’s Feed the Future Innovation Lab for Collaborative Research on Sustainable Intensification (SIIL, http://k-state.edu/siil) and the Center of Excellence on Sustainable Agricultural Intensification and Nutrition (CE SAIN, http://cesain.org) at the Royal University of Agriculture in Phnom Penh, Cambodia, organized it.

Alan Poock, who directs the Asia Division of the World Initiative for Soy in Human Health (WISHH, http://wishh.org), delivered a talk and led a roundtable about his organization’s work with the private sector and how it complements public research and development activities. SIIL and CE SAIN aim to increase the level of engagement with the private sector, so they appreciate the partnerships WISHH is developing with feed mills and other commercial enterprises in Cambodia.

WISHH forms agricultural value chains in emerging markets, creating trade and sustained demand for U.S. soy. Created in 2000, it is an American Soybean Association program. Kansas Soybean Commission Chairman Kurt Maurath, Oakley, serves on the WISHH committee.

Checkoff aims to improve Belizean nutrition with soy protein

Belize is one of the poorest countries in Central America, with high incidence of undernourishment. To improve nutrition there and to help communities encourage healthier lifestyles, Xpand2 LLC (an international marketing consultancy) and the Kansas Soybean Commission are developing a nutritional strategy based on soy protein and a self-sustainable microbusiness model using soy cows. It all starts by being affordable for the Belize population.

Promoting food security and looking for an economic way to provide healthy food ensure poor communities receive at least some of their daily nutritional needs. Hygiene education helps avoid malnutrition and diseases related to food management and processes.

Nutrition education encourages consumers in the selected communities to adopt new, healthier diets that include soy protein. Health education provides them with more information about soy and health benefits, encouraging them to prevent chronic diseases by eating more soy protein.

Following a model from Colombia, the project supports the chosen communities with soy-cow know-how. It takes about eight months to get a community’s project up and running.

Through their checkoff dollars, Kansas soybean farmers have an opportunity to become the driving force behind a healthier lifestyle, better nutrition and self-sustaining microenterprises while supplying them with soybeans. Selected communities learn the value of soy in combating malnutrition.

The project will allow people to see how microbusiness can increase employment and community development. Its success will be determined by how well a community accepts food safety and hygiene and adopts soy into its diet.