



**This news release from K-State Research and Extension is available online at <https://ksre-learn.com/master-farmer-farm-homemaker>

Note to editors: Photos of award winners and their families are available by contacting Pat Melgares, melgares@ksu.edu.

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Six Kansas couples named Master Farmers, Farm Homemakers

Families will be honored during banquet in Manhattan on March 22

By Maddy Rohr, K-State Research and Extension news service

MANHATTAN, Kan. — Six couples will be honored on March 22 as the 2023 class of Kansas Master Farmers and Master Farm Homemakers in recognition of their leadership in agriculture, environmental stewardship and service to their communities.

The statewide awards program is in its 97th year and is sponsored by K-State Research and Extension and Kansas Farmer Magazine.

This year's honorees are:

- Tim and Robyn Raile, Cheyenne County (Sunflower Extension District).
- Conrad and Donna Trost, Republic County (River Valley Extension District).
- Andrea and Hugo DeJesus, Riley County.
- Douglas and Stacey Keas, Rooks County.
- Ken and Patricia Stielow, Russell County (Midway Extension District).
- Kenton and Deb, Michael and Ladonne Weltmer, Smith County (Post Rock Extension District).

The annual awards banquet will begin at 6 p.m. on Friday, March 22 at the Hilton Garden Inn in Manhattan. Reservations for dinner are required by March 10 and can be made by contacting Cheryl Christian at 785-532-5820 or cchristi@ksu.edu.

Tim and Robyn Raile, Cheyenne County

With a rich farming history spanning six centuries, Raile Farms is a 100% certified organic operation growing winter wheat, winter durum, proso millet, irrigated corn and irrigated sunflowers.

When son Michael left Syngenta to return to the farm in 2011, he saw a need for a more holistic approach and helped introduce a transition to organic farming. The farm's main goals because soil stewardship and positive environmental impact.

As they researched potential crops for northwest Kansas, winter durum and proso millet had potential and the projected premiums. Now, Raile Farms is one of the only farms growing winter durum for commercial sale in the country. Additionally, their proso millet can be found in a variety of protein bars sold commercially.

The challenge of meeting the demand for a more diverse American diet while lowering their carbon footprint is a legacy Tim and Michael want to leave to the next generation. Tim and Robyn have participated in a variety of press and speaking engagements to advocate for organic farming.

Tim and Robyn have two children: Jessica and husband, Geiler, have two daughters, Rhen and Evian; Michael and wife, Ashley, have two sons, Cole and Brooks.

Conrad and Donna Trost, Republic County

Conrad Trost grew up farming with his dad and brother in Republic County. After graduating from Kansas State University, Conrad and his wife, Donna, got married and returned to the farm.

A tragic farm accident three years later left Conrad's dad wheelchair bound, resulting in a change of direction. Conrad and his brother Justin, a graduating senior at K-State at the time, formed Trost Land and Cattle, now operated by Conrad, Donna and their son, Colby.

Trost Land and Cattle currently includes more than 5,000 acres of farm ground and pasture for 700 commercial Angus cow-calf pairs with long-term goals of building large, on-farm grain storage and a facilities to finish their own cattle on farm to improve and recover carcass merit.

They said this will allow further vertical integration of crops and livestock segments, and ensure relevance in rapidly changing agriculture sectors.

Actively involved in their community, Conrad has served on various fair and community boards and is a member of the Baptist Church of Concordia where he has served in multiple roles. Donna has worked in elementary education for more than 20 years, served on several community committees and councils and has been a 4-H leader and youth minister at their church.

The Trost's said their willingness to serve is a condition of the heart. This overflows into their philosophy that farm life is truly a family affair, from bucket calves to riding in the combine. Their life goal is to help another generation raise a family on the farm.

The Trosts have five children: Colby and wife Kendsey; Delaney and husband Matthew (who have one child, Emmeryn June); Bethany; and adopted siblings Phillip and Gabriella.

Andrea and Hugo DeJesus, Riley County

Attending farmers markets since she was two weeks old, Andrea has been immersed in agriculture and customer service her whole life. After being stationed in Georgia and Alabama with her husband Hugo, who was in the army, Andrea returned to Manhattan in 2007. Hugo opened a mechanic shop and Andrea purchased part of her mother's farm and started A & H farm.

Now expanded to four farmers markets and operating their own farm store, drip irrigation is used for fruits and vegetables. Overhead irrigation is used for pumpkins and sweet corn. With a goal of having crops growing 350 days a year, A & H Farms has fruits and vegetables as well as rye and wheat cover crops. They also put up hay and run cattle.

The agritourism side of the operation has grown immensely since its start in 2010. In 2022, A & H Farms had more than 25,000 visitors to their farm store or activities, including baby animal days, strawberry festival and sunflower bazaar.

Produce is sold directly to consumers through farmers markets, Farm to Table boxes or the farm store. In 2020, A & H began supplying produce for the Farmers' Feeding Families Food Boxes Program and local food banks and schools in Kansas.

Raising her family on the farm, Andrea says her children work on the farm, in the farm store and at farmers markets and have the knowledge of where their food comes from at an early age.

Andrea and Hugo have eight children: Hugo, Andrew, Barbra, Ana, Andrea, Richard, Rebeka and Clara.

Douglas and Stacey Keas, Rooks County

With a diverse skillset, Doug Keas spent time on a wheat custom cutting crew, a purebred and commercial hog farm and managed a large sow operation before returning to the farm with his father and uncle. Later, Doug added milo, sunflowers, corn and soybeans as well as growing the cow-calf operation to 275 head.

Implementing a no-till practice as soon as it was introduced, Doug's goal is to conserve water and replenish the soil. With an array of equipment and machinery, Doug also does custom planting and harvesting in the area.

Doug won the Kansas Wheat Yield contest Central Kansas division in 2014 and 2016. His willingness to try new practices has given his operation a reputation for success and encouraged surrounding farmers to do the same.

The Keas believe in supporting local business and serving their community through the Rooks County Free Fair board, 4-H and church. Doug lives by the value that when you commit to something, you follow through and finish.

Doug and Stacey have been hosts for multiple exchange students from around the world and hosted international students interested in learning about American agriculture through the International Foreign Youth Exchange.

Doug and Stacey have three children: Seth and wife, Catherine, have three children, Dawson, Audra and Brenden; son Jared; Amy and husband, Jesse, have one daughter, Oakleigh.

Ken and Patricia Stielow, Russell County

Bar S Ranch in Russell County has grown significantly since its founding in 1900. The ranch headquarters near Paradise has hosted 33 annual bull sales, where Bar S Ranch sells approximately 120 Angus, Red Angus and Charolais bulls each year.

Aiming to produce cattle that can be successful in a low input management system, Bar S Ranch runs about 800 cows focusing on longevity, fertility and predictability by utilizing artificial insemination and embryo transfer in their program. They also operate a dryland farming program of wheat, milo and forage crops.

An investment Ken made several years ago evolved into Innovative Livestock Services, a leading cattle feeding, farming and agribusiness enterprise in Kansas and Nebraska.

Family is an important component of Bar S Ranch as Patricia does the bookkeeping for the ranch and Ken manages the feeding and development of sale cattle and replacement heifers as well as the farming operation. Daughter Stephanie does the paperwork and record keeping of registered cattle while son-in-law David oversees the cattle breeding decisions and daily care. Grandsons Grady, Ethan and Jayce also have roles on the ranch.

Ken and Patricia's son Chris was born with Downs Syndrome, and Patricia has been heavily involved with Special Education and Special Olympics as a result.

Kenton and Deb, Michael and Ladonna Weltmer, Smith County

Richard Weltmer Farms, now W & S Ranch, was founded in 1955 when Richard Weltmer returned from the Korean War. Three generations later, the cattle still carry the W over S brand.

With a goal of increasing operation size by 10% each year, Kenton and Michael value time spent in formal education and continuing education through extension and trade organizations. From purchasing and operating a swine finishing facility, building a custom feed mill and purchasing the livestock auction in Smith Center, everyone in the Weltmer family had a role in the diverse operation.

With a change in focus, the family operation now consists of 5,800 crop acres, 1,100 grass acres, 30 registered Angus cows and 170 commercial cows, and a small feedyard.

In 2021, W & S Ranch was named the Beef Improvement Federation Commercial Producers of the Year.

Faith, family and farm is the guide to the Weltmer's success. Each generation is encouraged to follow their passion, whether that's on the farm or not – though knowing that the skills and work ethic growing up on a farm carry with them no matter what career they choose.

Kenton and wife, Deb, have two sons: Simeon (passed in 2014) and wife Jennie have one son, Austin. Timothy and wife, Dayna, have two daughters and two sons: Deklynn, Dayvie, Drake and Darris.

Michael and wife, Ladonna, have two sons: Philip and wife, Jessica, have one daughter and two sons, Kaylee, Kaden and Korey; Steven and Vanessa have three daughters and one son, Tessa, Cora, Clara and Micah.

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