

## Farm Bill Summit Speaker Biographies



### **Laura Batcha, CEO/Executive Director, Organic Trade Association**

Laura Batcha is CEO and Executive Director of the Organic Trade Association (OTA). OTA, an umbrella organization uniting more than 8,500 member companies across the entire supply chain, promotes and protects today's \$43 billion organic industry. Under her leadership, OTA has established its Farmers Advisory Council to improve communication

with organic producers, brought back Sector Councils to build community among groups of members, and developed OTA's voice in Washington through Organic PAC. She brings 20 years of direct experience as a certified organic producer and handler, and more than 10 years of hands-on experience in the private sector of the organic industry.

Batcha is a member of the Agricultural Policy Advisory Committee (APAC) appointed by USDA and the U.S. Trade Representative's Office and a member of USDA's Advisory Committee on Biotechnology and 21st Century Agriculture (AC21). She also serves on the Board of Trustees for The Organic Center, an independent non-profit research and education organization operating under OTA's administrative umbrella.



### **Philip Brasher, Senior Editor, Agri-Pulse**

Philip Brasher has reported on a wide variety of food and agriculture policy topics for almost 20 years. Prior to joining Agri-Pulse, He served as editor of "CQ on Agriculture and Food" for CQ Roll Call, a unit of The Economist Group. Brasher also worked for The Associated Press, The Des Moines Register and Gannett.

He has served as a key reporter on award-winning projects examining the future of biofuels, the impact of climate change on agriculture and the environmental and economic effects of changing land ownership patterns. A native of Texas, with a bachelor of journalism from The University of Texas at Austin, he

is a member of the Society of Environmental Journalists and North American Agricultural Journalists.



**Carrie Calvert, Director of Tax & Commodity Policy, Feeding America**

Carrie Calvert is the Director of Tax and Commodity Policy at Feeding America, the nation’s largest anti-hunger organization. Through a network of 199 food banks and 60,000 local agencies, Feeding America feeds 46 million Americans a year and leads efforts to reduce hunger in America. Carrie is a member of the public policy team in the D.C. office and leads the policy team’s work on the farm bill, protecting federal nutrition programs, food waste, tax issues and nonprofit governance, including federal incentives for food and fund donations. She also has extensive experience in federal and state policies that promote food rescue and strengthened capacity in food rescue organizations.



**Spencer Chase, Associate Editor, Agri-Pulse**

Spencer Chase grew up on a farm near Wolsey, South Dakota. He served as a summer intern with Agri-Pulse in 2013, covering agricultural policy issues on Capitol Hill, interviewing lawmakers for the "Meet the Lawmaker" series and assisting with the web site and social media. Since that time, he joined the Agri-Pulse team as Associate Editor, focusing on writing, audio and video projects.

In addition to producing the “Daily Voice” for Agri-Pulse, Chase produces “Washington Week in Review,” “Meet the Farm Hands,” “Meet the Lawmaker,” and other video projects.

He currently serves as the East Region Vice President for the National Association of Farm Broadcasting and Vice President, DC Jacks (Washington, D.C., area South Dakota State University Alumni Association). During his time at SDSU, he was a member of a number of student organizations, including FarmHouse Fraternity.



### **Congressman Mike Conaway, R – Texas, Chairman, House Agriculture Committee**

Serving his sixth term in the U.S. House of Representatives, Congressman Mike Conaway represents 29 counties in Texas' 11th congressional district, including the cities of Midland, Odessa and San Angelo. A conservative Republican, Rep. Conaway believes in the principles of lower taxes, smaller government and a secure nation. His background as a CPA gives him a unique perspective on fiscal responsibility and ensuring every taxpayer dollar is being spent wisely. In the House, Congressman Conaway is the chairman of the House Committee on Agriculture and also serves on the House Armed Services

Committee and the Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence. He is a deputy Republican whip, a position he has held since the 112th Congress.

A native Texan, Conaway earned a Bachelor of Business Administration degree in accounting from Texas A & M University-Commerce in 1970. After serving in the Army at Fort Hood, he returned to the Permian Basin with Price Waterhouse and settled in Midland, later working with George W. Bush as the chief financial officer for Bush Exploration.



### **Chuck Conner, President & CEO, National Council of Farmer Cooperatives**

Charles F. (Chuck) Conner became president & CEO of the National Council of Farmer Cooperatives (NCFC) on January 22, 2009. As president of NCFC, Conner oversees the organization's work to promote and protect the business and public policy interests of America's farmer-owned cooperatives and to seek new ways in which to add value for its membership.

Prior to joining NCFC, Conner had served as the Deputy Secretary at the U.S. Department of Agriculture since mid-2005. In this capacity, he was the Chief Operating Officer (COO) overseeing day-to-day operations of the department. Conner interacted directly with President George W. Bush and his senior staff to formulate domestic and international food, trade, security and energy policy. He led development of the Bush Administration's \$300 billion Farm Bill proposal and the strategy to educate and inform industry, constituents and Congress. From August 2007 to January 2008, Conner served as both USDA Acting Secretary and Deputy Secretary. He played a key role in developing the Administration's immigration policy including important changes to the H2A program. Conner's experience also includes the assignment of Special Assistant to the President, Executive Office of the President, from October 2001 to May 2005, working on the 2001/2 Farm Bill to develop the strategy behind the transfer of several USDA agency functions to the newly formed Department of Homeland Security. From May 1997 to October 2001 Conner served as President of the Corn Refiners Association. He also

served for 17 years as an advisor to U.S. Senator Richard Lugar of Indiana. Conner is a graduate of Purdue University, with a Bachelor's of Science degree and is the recipient of Purdue's Distinguished Alumni Award.



**Jonathan Coppess, Professor, University of Illinois**

Jonathan Coppess is a clinical assistant professor and Director of the Gardner Agricultural Policy Program and the Bock Ag Law & Policy Program in the Department of Agricultural and Consumer Economics at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign.

Previously, he served as Chief Counsel of the Senate Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition and Forestry for Chairwoman Debbie Stabenow. Prior to joining the Ag Committee, he was appointed Administrator of the Farm Service Agency at USDA. Before being appointed at USDA, Jonathan was a Legislative Assistant for Senator Ben Nelson. Jonathan grew up on his family's corn and soybean farm in Western Ohio and practiced law in Chicago before moving to Washington to work on agriculture policy. He

earned his Bachelor's from Miami University in Oxford, Ohio and his Juris Doctor from The George Washington University Law School in Washington, D.C.



**Neil Dierks, CEO, National Pork Producers Council**

Neil Dierks is Chief Executive Officer of the National Pork Producers Council (NPPC). In this position, he is responsible for the overall implementation of all NPPC programs. Dierks' position requires him to spend time in both Des Moines, Iowa, the national office of NPPC, and Washington, D.C.

Beginning in 1990, Dierks served NPPC in a series of senior executive positions, including Executive Director of Operations, Vice President for Research and Education and Senior Vice President for Programs. Prior to his service with NPPC, Dierks was the Special Activities Director for the Iowa Pork Producers Association and Marketing Director for the Iowa Corn Promotion Board. Dierks currently serves on the Supporters of Ag Research

(SoAR) Foundation Board of Directors, the CFTC Ag Advisory Committee and is a recipient of the Distinguished Support of Animal Science Award from the American Society of Animal Science. Neil grew up on a livestock farm in eastern Iowa and remains involved in a family farming operation. He is a graduate of Iowa State University.



**Zippy Duvall, President, American Farm Bureau Federation**

Vincent “Zippy” Duvall—a poultry, cattle, and hay producer from Greene County, Georgia—was most recently president of the Georgia Farm Bureau (GFB). He was elected GFB President in December 2006, and served a total of 15 years as a member of the Board of Directors. A Farm Bureau member since 1977, Duvall has held numerous leadership positions in the Greene County Farm Bureau—including president and vice president. Duvall has served on numerous Georgia Farm Bureau Commodity Advisory Committees, the Policy Development Committee, and as past chairman of the Young Farmer Committee.

He has represented Georgia as a voting delegate at the American Farm Bureau Federation convention since being elected to the state board and served on the AFBF Board of Directors in the 1980’s as chairman of the AFBF Young Farmers & Ranchers Committee. In addition to his Farm Bureau leadership, Duvall also served as a member of former Georgia Governor Sonny Perdue’s Agricultural Advisory Council. He is the past chairman of the Greene County Board of Commissioners and is a member of the Association of County Commissioners of Georgia. He has served on the Rayle Electric Membership Corporation Board of Directors for 16 years. Duvall is a member of the Greensboro Farmers Bank Board of Directors and is a member of the Greensboro/Greene County Chamber of Commerce.



**Suzy Friedman, Senior Director of Agricultural Sustainability, Environmental Defense Fund**

Suzy Friedman directs EDF’s work to collaborate with farmers, grower organizations, agribusinesses, and food company/retail partners to create a U.S. agricultural system that drives climate stability, clean water and food security. She has worked at EDF since January 2001. By collaborating with decision-makers at every point in the supply chain – from retailers and food companies to agribusiness and farmers – Suzy’s work helps to strengthen demand for sustainable production and generate supply, showing how achieving sustainability makes good business sense and increases our resiliency to the impacts of climate change.

Areas of expertise: environmental science and policy, nutrient use efficiency, agricultural sustainability, agricultural supply chains, USDA conservation programs, precision agriculture. She is a member of Field to Market and a member of Sustainability Council of the Innovation Center for US Dairy.



**Joe Glauber, Senior Research Fellow, International Food Policy Research Institute**

Joe Glauber is a Senior Research Fellow at the International Food Policy Research Institute in Washington, D.C., where his areas of interest are price volatility, global grain reserves, crop insurance and trade. Prior to joining IFPRI, Glauber spent over 30 years at the U.S. Department of Agriculture, including as Chief Economist from 2008 to 2014. As Chief Economist, he was responsible for the Department’s agricultural forecasts and projections, oversaw climate, energy and regulatory issues, and

served as Chairman of the Board of Directors of the Federal Crop Insurance Corporation. From 2007-2009, Glauber was the Special Doha Agricultural Envoy at the office of the U.S. Trade Representative where he served as chief agricultural negotiator in the Doha talks. He served as economic adviser at the so-called Blair House agreements leading to the completion of the Uruguay Round negotiations.

He is the author of numerous studies on crop insurance, disaster policy and U.S. farm policy. Dr. Glauber received his Ph.D. in agricultural economics from the University of Wisconsin in 1984 and holds an AB in anthropology from the University of Chicago. In 2012, he was elected Fellow of the Agricultural and Applied Economics Association.



**Krysta Harden, Vice President of Public Policy and Chief Sustainability Officer, DuPont**

Krysta Harden is vice president of Public Policy and chief sustainability officer, joining DuPont in February 2016. Most recently, she served as deputy secretary of the U.S. Department of Agriculture, where she helped shape food and agriculture policy, including leading implementation of the 2014 Farm Bill. At USDA and throughout her career in agriculture, Harden has focused on growing the ranks of agriculture and expanding opportunity for women, young people, immigrants, socially disadvantaged producers, returning veterans and retirees. Prior to her service as

deputy secretary, she held USDA leadership positions as chief of staff to the Secretary of Agriculture Tom Vilsack, and assistant secretary for Congressional Relations. Preceding her service at USDA, Harden spent five years as CEO of the National Association of Conservation Districts (NACD), providing national leadership on natural resource conservation issues.

In addition, she also has worked with the American Soybean Association as senior vice president of Gordley Associates, where she concentrated on conservation and renewable energy issues. Prior to that, she served 12 years on Capitol Hill, as staff director for the House subcommittee on Peanuts and Tobacco and as chief of staff and press secretary for former Congressman Charles Hatcher. Ms. Harden received her B.A. in journalism from the University of Georgia.



### **Blake Hurst, President, Missouri Farm Bureau**

Blake Hurst was first elected the 14th president of Missouri Farm Bureau on December 7, 2010. Blake was a district board member on the Missouri state board for eight years, and served seven years as Missouri Farm Bureau vice president. He raises corn and soybeans with his father, brothers, nephews and son-in-laws. He also operates a wholesale greenhouse business with his wife, Julie; daughter, Lee; and son-in-laws, Ryan Harms and Matt Schlueter. The family raises flowers in two acres of greenhouses.

Blake and Julie have three children. Lee works in the greenhouse with her family, Ann is the development director for their local hospital and Ben practices law in Kansas City. Blake and Julie have six grandchildren. Blake is also a freelance writer. His work has appeared in Agri-Pulse, the Wall Street Journal, The

American, Weekly Standard, Wilson's Quarterly, Reader's Digest, Today's Farmer and the Show Me magazine of Missouri Farm Bureau



### **John Keeling, Executive Vice President & CEO, National Potato Council**

John Keeling has been the Executive Vice President and CEO of the National Potato Council since 2002. He directs the development and implementation of policy for the only national association of potato growers in the U.S.

The NPC has been highly successful in representing the diverse interests of U.S. potato producers and influencing policy that directly affects growers' ability to compete domestically and globally. Recently the NPC was instrumental in reversing the ban on fresh white potatoes in the WIC feeding program.

Keeling previously worked for the National Food Processors Association and the American Farm Bureau Federation, where he spent ten years. He and his brother operate a small farm in central Virginia. Keeling received his MS in Agricultural Economics from Virginia Tech.



**Rob Larew, Senior Vice President of Public Policy & Communications, National Farmers Union**

As Senior Vice President for Public Policy and Communications for National Farmers Union, Rob Larew advocates for family farmers, ranchers, and rural communities in Congress and the executive branch.

Prior to his employment with NFU, Larew served over 22 years in Congress and USDA working on agriculture policy and communication. Most recently he was the staff director of the House Committee on Agriculture where he oversaw the committee’s efforts during the 2008 and 2014 farm bills. He previously served as the Director of Congressional and Public Affairs at the Food Safety and Inspection Service at USDA and worked as an agricultural aide to Rep. Collin Peterson and the

late Sen. Paul Wellstone. Larew was raised on a dairy farm in Greenville, West Virginia. He graduated from Virginia Tech with a Bachelor of Science degree in Dairy Science and completed graduate work in agronomy from Penn State.



**Galen Lee, President, American Sugarbeet Growers Association**

Galen and his parents, Art and Freda, own and operate Sunnyside Farm, LLC, which is a diversified row crop and livestock operation in New Plymouth, Idaho. In addition to 230 acres of sugarbeets, the 1,250-acre operation also raises asparagus and peppermint as cash crops, and alfalfa, corn silage, peas, and earlage for the 250 head dairy and 85 head co/calf operation. They also raise all their heifers and steers from both operations. Galen grew up on the farm, and after college and three years working in the Midwest, he returned in the summer of 1991.

Lee currently serves as President of the Nyssa-Nampa Sugarbeet Growers Association and has been on that board for 14 years. He has served three years on the Snake River Sugar Company Board of Directors and five years on the American Sugarbeet Growers Association Board of Directors and goes to Washington D.C. yearly to lobby for the sugar industry. Lee was elected President of the American Sugarbeet Growers Association in 2016. Outside of sugarbeets, he is on the Board for the Idaho Mint Growers Association, Peyette Valley D.H.I.A, and is President of Payette County Farm Bureau. He has been active in Farm Bureau on the county, district and state level for several years, one of which he served as state Chairman for the Young Farmers and Ranchers.



**Eric Lindstrom, National Manager of Agriculture Policy, Ducks Unlimited**

Eric Lindstrom is Ducks Unlimited's National Manager of Agriculture Policy, stationed in Bismarck, North Dakota. Eric began his career with DU in 2005 as a private lands biologist working with farmers and ranchers along the Texas Gulf Coast. During the past 11 years, Eric has worked on private lands conservation delivery, grant writing, fundraising, budget administration and public policy. In his current role, Eric works closely with volunteers, staff, partners and policy makers across the country to help advance agricultural and conservation policies important to DU's mission. Eric grew up in west-central Minnesota and received his B.S. in Wildlife and Fisheries Science from South Dakota State University and his M.S. in Waterfowl/Wetland Ecology from Southern Illinois University Carbondale.



**Leif Magnusson, President, CLAAS Global Sales Americas, Inc.**

Leif Magnusson is President of CLAAS Global Sales Americas, Inc. In his role within the CLAAS organization, he oversees three sales regions made up of CLAAS of America, CLAAS Argentina and CLAAS America Latina. He leads the strategic planning and operational direction in each of these areas with a focus on customer satisfaction and distributor development. Prior to his current role, Leif was President of CLAAS of America, where he oversaw the company's operations throughout the U.S. and Canada.

In 2016, Leif was also the Chair of the Association of Equipment Manufacturers (AEM), where he worked on behalf of the organization's 900+ members to help educate and influence the leadership in Washington on policies that affect the manufacturing of agricultural and construction equipment. He has been involved with the organization since 2010 and served on multiple committees during his tenure, including the Chair of the AG Sector Board in 2014. Before joining CLAAS, Leif spent 18 years in manufacturing and distribution of heavy equipment, including off-road products. Originally from Sweden, Leif's assignments in the U.S., Europe, Southeast Asia and Australia give him a unique global perspective on agricultural markets.



**Tina May, Senior Director of Sustainability, Land O'Lakes**

Tina May currently serves as senior director of sustainability at Land O' Lakes, Inc. Prior to her time there, she worked in multiples roles in government on agriculture policy. She previously served as chief of staff to Deputy Secretary of Agriculture Krysta Harden, where she also managed the departmental implementation of the 2014 Farm Bill. Prior to her time at the Agriculture Department, she served as policy director on the U.S. Senate Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition and Forestry for Chairwoman Debbie Stabenow (D-MI) during the formulation, debate, and successful passage of the 2014 Farm Bill. She also served as legislative director for the Office of

Congressional Relations at the Agriculture Department and worked on the U.S. Senate Agriculture Committee under Chairman Tom Harkin (D-IA) during the 2008 Farm Bill. Ms. May earned her B.A. from the University of Minnesota and her M.S. in food policy from the City University of London.



**Travis Medine, Sugarcane Farmer, Medine Farms, Inc.**

Travis Medine is a 35-year old fifth generation Louisiana sugarcane farmer who helps manage the family farm, Medine Farms Inc., along with his father Brian and two younger brothers Trent and Tracy. The farm consists of approximately 4,000 acres just over the river from Baton Rouge in both Iberville and West Baton parishes.

Travis attended Catholic High School in Baton Rouge as well as Louisiana State University. He serves as a director for the American Sugar Cane League, as a commissioner for the Port of Greater Baton Rouge, a board member at Iberville Parish Farm Bureau, and an advisory board member for First South Farm Credit.



**James Mulhern, President & CEO, National Milk Producers Federation**

Jim Mulhern has served as President & Chief Executive Officer of the National Milk Producers Federation (NMPF) since January 1, 2014. He is a veteran agriculture and food policy strategist with over 30 years of experience working with Washington, D.C., legislators, regulators, and the media. This is a return engagement for Jim at NMPF. He previously directed the organization's government affairs activities, and played a key role in shaping NMPF's policy and communications strategy. Jim was instrumental in the dairy industry's successful effort to establish the whole herd buyout (Dairy Termination Program) in the 1985 farm bill, and he led NMPF's efforts on numerous other policy efforts including major drought relief legislation, brucellosis eradication funding, establishing an emergency food assistance program to dispose of dairy surpluses, food labeling and nutrition initiatives, and several trade-related measures.

From NMPF, Jim went to Capitol Hill where he served as chief of staff to Wisconsin Sen. Herb Kohl, directing the Senator's Washington, D.C., and state operations. Prior to his return to NMPF as Chief Operating Officer in 2013, Jim was managing partner of Watson/Mulhern LLC, a life sciences communications and public affairs firm that focused on policy challenges facing the food and agriculture community. Over his career Jim has provided expert strategic counsel to a host of Fortune 500 companies, and has worked extensively in government relations, issues and crisis management, media relations, and litigation communications. Jim is a graduate of the University of Wisconsin-Madison with a degree in agricultural journalism. He began his career managing communications for a five-state Midwest dairy marketing cooperative, and has worked on dairy policy issues throughout his entire career.



**Jeff Nalley, Contributing Editor, Agri-Pulse**

Jeff Nalley is a 33-year veteran of radio and farm broadcasting. Nalley conducts weekly Open Mic audio interviews for Agri-Pulse. He also works with the Cromwell AG Network, which serves farmers in Illinois, Indiana, Kentucky, Missouri and Ohio with daily farm broadcasts. He is a past president of the National Association of Farm Broadcasting (NAFB) and has received numerous awards for excellence in broadcast media from within the NAFB as well as other farm organizations.

Nalley has received distinguished service awards from Purdue University, the United Soybean Board, Kentucky Soybean Association, Kentucky Pork Producers, and the Kentucky Farm Bureau Federation. Nalley was named the 2010 Farm Broadcaster of the Year by the National Association of Farm Broadcasting.



### **Michel Nischan, CEO, Wholesome Wave**

Michel Nischan is a three-time James Beard Award winning chef with over 30 years of experience advocating for a more healthful, sustainable food system. He is Founder and CEO of Wholesome Wave, Co-Founder of the Chefs Action Network, as well as Founder and Partner with the late actor Paul Newman of the former Dressing Room Restaurant. Along with his team at Wholesome Wave, Nischan has successfully influenced legislative language for the recently passed Federal Farm Bill, supporting affordable access to healthy, locally grown fruits and vegetables for low income consumers.

He's also the author of three cookbooks and a variety of articles focused on sustainable food systems and social equity through food. A lifetime Ashoka fellow, he serves as a director on the

board of the Jacques Pepin Foundation; on the advisory board of Chef's Collaborative, The Amazon Conservation Team, TerraVia, and The National Young Farmers Coalition. In Spring 2015, the James Beard Foundation honored Nischan with the Award for the 2015 Humanitarian of The Year.



### **Matt Perin, Head of Government Relations, The Kroger Company**

Perin is responsible for Kroger's federal government relations efforts, including working closely with the company's supermarket operating divisions and other subsidiaries to counsel and guide state and local advocacy activities.

He previously served as deputy director of government relations for the Bayer Corporation. Before joining Bayer, Perin was staff director for the U.S. House of Representatives Committee on

Agriculture's Subcommittee on Nutrition & Horticulture. He has also served as a Congressional legislative assistant and political campaign manager. He is a graduate of the University of Cincinnati.



**Congressman Collin Peterson, D–Minn., Ranking Member, House Committee on Agriculture**

Congressman Peterson grew up on a farm near Glyndon, Minnesota and was educated in the local public schools. He graduated from Minnesota State University-Moorhead in 1966 with a double major in Business Administration and Accounting, and also served in the North Dakota National Guard from 1963 to 1969. Before being elected to the House of Representatives, he was a Certified Public Accountant and small business owner in Detroit Lakes, Minnesota, and also served for ten years in the Minnesota State Senate. He was first elected to the U.S. House of Representatives from the Seventh Congressional District of Minnesota in 1990. His primarily rural and agricultural district

reaches from the Canadian border in the north, almost to the Iowa state line in the south; along Minnesota’s border with North and South Dakota.

During his public service career, Peterson has been a strong advocate for farmers and small business owners, and a leader on both federal tax policy and conservation issues. He has been a leader on the last three Farm Bills passed by Congress. He is a founding member of the conservative Democrats’ “Blue Dog” Coalition, which continues to be a voice for fiscal responsibility and pragmatic government policies. Peterson is the most senior member of the House Committee on Agriculture and currently serves as its Ranking Member. He previously served as Chairman in the 110th and 111th Congresses and as Ranking Member in the 109th Congress. Peterson has taken a leading role in Congress promoting biofuels as a homegrown way for America to meet its growing energy needs, and he has introduced legislation to expand biofuel production and use. Peterson’s leadership led to the successful passage of the 2008 Farm Bill, which preserved the safety net for farmers while making historic new investments in food, farm and conservation programs that are priorities for all Americans.

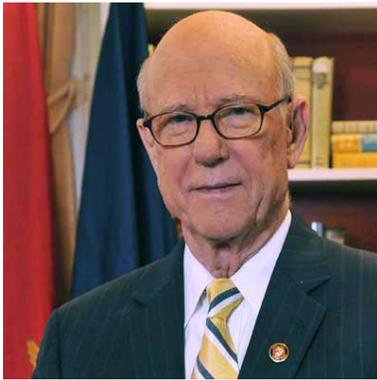


**Ryan Quarles, Kentucky Commissioner of Agriculture, NASDA Communications Work Group**

Ryan grew up on his family's farm in Scott County, coming from a family that has lived in central Kentucky for over 200 years. Ryan completed three undergraduate majors and two graduate degrees in just four years at the University of Kentucky, graduating in 2006. In 2008, Harvard University awarded Ryan a full scholarship with the Zuckerman Fellows Program, which enabled him to continue his studies at the Harvard Graduate School of Education, the Kennedy School of Government, and Harvard Law School. In 2009, he graduated from Harvard with a Master’s degree in higher education

before moving back to Kentucky to finish his last year of law school. Ryan was elected to the Kentucky General Assembly in 2010, representing Scott, Owen, and Fayette counties.

Ryan served as vice-chairman of the House Judiciary Committee and served on the Agriculture and Small Business Committee, the Tobacco Master Settlement Oversight Committee, and the Banking and Insurance Committee. In 2015, Ryan was elected Kentucky's Commissioner of Agriculture. At 32, Commissioner Quarles is currently the youngest statewide elected official in the United States. He currently chairs the National Association of State Departments of Agriculture's Communications Working Group.



**Sen. Pat Roberts, R-Kan., Chairman, Senate Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition & Forestry**

U.S. Senator Pat Roberts was born in Topeka, Kansas. He earned his journalism degree from Kansas State University. For 16 years, he represented the Big First District, including his home of Dodge City, in the U.S. House of Representatives. In 1996, he was elected to the U.S. Senate. He is currently serving his fourth term. Roberts has built a reputation as a national leader in agriculture, health care and defense. He is an advocate of a strong education system, free and fair trade policies, increased investment in science and technology, a focused foreign policy and a strong military. He is the most senior former Marine in the Congress and established the Senate Marine Corps Caucus in 2015.

Roberts was the first member of Congress in history to have chaired both the House Agriculture Committee and now the Senate committee. He has also served as the ranking member of each committee. He is senior member of the Senate Finance Committee and a member of the Health, Education, Labor and Pensions (HELP) Committee. As co-chairman of the Senate Rural Health Caucus, Roberts has worked hard to ensure rural communities have access to the same affordable high quality care as their urban counterparts. Roberts has helped pass major biosecurity legislation, assisted Kansas State and other Kansas schools in gaining federal research investments, leading to the Biosecurity Research Institute (BRI) at Kansas State (housed in Pat Roberts Hall). Finally, he led the state's effort to compete and earn the National Bio and Agro-Defense Facility (NBAF), a new federal laboratory to replace the aging federal plant and animal research facility at Plum Island. Senator Roberts is also privileged to be a member of the Senate Rules Committee and the Senate Ethics Committee.



Photo courtesy National Journal

**Anne Simmons, Democratic Staff Director, House Committee on Agriculture**

Anne Simmons is the Staff Director of the House Agriculture Committee's Democratic staff for the Committee's Ranking Member, Collin Peterson of Minnesota's 7th District.

She joined the Agriculture Committee staff in 1993 as a subcommittee staff director and also worked for former Chairman Kika de la Garza (TX) and Ranking Member Charlie Stenholm (TX). Prior to joining the Ag Committee, she was a member of then-Congressman Tim Johnson's (SD) congressional staff.

Anne was raised on a corn, soybean, and livestock farm near Spencer, Iowa, and graduated from Cornell College in Mt. Vernon, Iowa.



**Sen. Debbie Stabenow, D-Mich., Ranking Member, Senate Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition & Forestry**

Born in Gladwin and raised in Clare, Stabenow earned her bachelor's and master's degrees from Michigan State University. She worked with youth in the public schools before running for public office. She was elected to the U.S. Senate in 2000.

Stabenow is also a member of the Senate Energy, Finance, and Budget Committees. She was elected to the Ingham County Board of Commissioners when she was 24 years old, and in just two years, was elected Chair of the Board. She was elected to the Michigan House of Representatives where she served for twelve years (1979-90) and to the State Senate where she served for four

years (1991-94).

Elected to the U.S. Congress in 1996 representing Michigan's Eighth Congressional District, she made history in 2000 when she became the first woman from the State of Michigan elected to the U.S. Senate. Today, in addition to serving as Michigan's senior U.S. Senator, Debbie Stabenow is a member of the Senate leadership. As Chair of the Democratic Policy and Communications Center, she makes sure there is Michigan voice at the table and that Congress' priorities stay in line with the priorities of middle class families. As Ranking Member of the Senate Finance Subcommittee on Health Care, Senator Stabenow is a champion for Medicare, Medicaid and the Children's Health Insurance Program. She has been recognized for her success making

prescription drugs more affordable. As Co-Chair of the Senate Great Lakes Task Force, Senator Stabenow is also leading the fight to protect our waters from the threat posed by invasive species, and the risks that come from oil pipelines and a nuclear waste facility the Canada government is proposing to build on the shores of Lake Huron. Through her role on the Senate Budget Committee, Senator Stabenow helped to create the Great Lakes Restoration Initiative, which has made it possible for Michigan communities to restore the quality of their water and to strengthen wildlife habitats harmed by pollution. In recent years, no one has fought harder to secure federal funding in support of the Great Lakes, from cleaning up and restoring our waterways to modernizing the coastal infrastructure that links Michigan businesses to the global economy.



**Mary Kay Thatcher, Senior Director of Congressional Affairs, American Farm Bureau Federation**

Mary Kay Thatcher has worked as a lobbyist for the American Farm Bureau Federation for 30 years. She currently serves as Senior Director of Congressional Relations where she lobbies primarily on issues covering farm programs, crop insurance, conservation, and credit. In the past few years, she has also spearheaded AFBF’s participation about the topic of farm data, security and privacy. She serves as President of the Ag Data Transparency Evaluator, a tool developed by Ag Tech Providers and farm/commodity groups to help farmers understand the contracts they sign to share their farm data. She also serves as Secretary of the Ag Data Coalition, a group of 14 members consisting of farm groups, land grant universities, ag equipment manufacturers and technology companies and providers. The coalition is working to develop an ag data cooperative to confidentially maintain a farmer’s data and to facilitate collaboration in the new era of data driven agriculture.

Mary Kay served in the “first” Bush Administration as a political appointee as the director of congressional and public affairs of the Farm Credit Administration. In that capacity, she was responsible for the policy direction and management of the agency’s congressional and public affairs activities. Prior to joining AFBF in 1982, Thatcher served as a legislative assistant for agriculture and trade to Sen. Roger Jepsen of Iowa. She is a graduate of Iowa State University where she earned degrees in animal science and agricultural economics. Thatcher is a fifth generation Iowa farmer. She grew up on a 500-acre Iowa beef, hay and corn farm. She now manages a farm in Iowa producing corn and soybeans, as well as a cow/calf operation.



**Todd Van Hoose, President and CEO, Farm Credit Council**

Todd became President and CEO of the Farm Credit Council January 1, 2016, where he leads the national trade association's efforts to represent the Farm Credit System's interests before Congress, the Administration, and various federal regulatory agencies. Van Hoose also serves on a variety of leadership bodies within Farm Credit, including the Presidents' Planning Committee. His selection as President and CEO marked his return to the Farm Credit Council where he had worked previously in a variety of roles before departing in 2008 as Senior Vice President for Government Affairs.

Prior to rejoining the Farm Credit Council, Van Hoose served as Senior Vice President - Government Affairs at CoBank where he led the bank's Washington Office. He also was a member of the bank's Senior Leadership Team. Todd has over 25 years' experience in the Farm Credit System and before initially joining the Farm Credit Council he worked at the Farm Credit System Assistance Board. He also has held positions in the U.S. Department of Agriculture and on Capitol Hill. Mr. Van Hoose is a graduate of the University of Kentucky with a bachelor's degree in journalism and public relations.



**Dave White, Co-Founder and Partner, 9b Group**

Dave White is the Co-Founder and Partner in the 9b Group, focused on conservation and sustainability consulting. Dave has over 35 years of professional leadership experience in natural resource conservation with the USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) and in the private sector. He was NRCS Chief from January 2009 to December 2012, where he led the nation's largest private lands natural resource conservation organization. Dave has extensive experience in overseeing complex resource protection programs, working with diverse interests, developing and moving conservation legislation, and providing leadership to implement natural resource goals.

Under his leadership, the NRCS created and implemented landscape level conservation initiatives that focused financial and technical resources on solving problems at the appropriate ecological scales. Prior to serving as Chief, he spent significant time on Capitol Hill, helping craft the conservation titles of the 2002 and 2008 farm bills under Sen. Richard Lugar, R-IN., and Sen. Tom Harkin, D-Iowa, and led NRCS efforts in Montana. Dave is also the President of Ecosystem Services Exchange, a start-up company devoted to achieving improved water quality. Dave is an honors graduate of the University of Missouri where he studied agricultural journalism.



### **Sara Wyant, President, Agri-Pulse**

Sara Wyant is President and founder of Agri-Pulse Communications, Inc., the nation's largest communications firm focused on agricultural and rural policy issues. As a veteran farm policy reporter, she is well recognized on Capitol Hill, as well as with farm and commodity association leaders across the country. The firm's e-newsletter and web site ([www.Agri-Pulse.com](http://www.Agri-Pulse.com)) includes the latest updates on farm policy, commodity and conservation programs, trade, food safety, rural development, and environmental and regulatory programs. In addition, Agri-Pulse publishes an early morning news preview when Congress is in session, Agri-Pulse Daybreak, and an early morning news

summary, Daily Harvest, providing busy readers with a quick overview of the latest farm, food and rural policy news each weekday. She frequently speaks at farm and commodity associations around the country.

In 2016, Wyant was awarded the National FFA Foundation's Honorary American FFA Degree, after serving on the Foundation's Board of Trustees from 2014-2016. She formerly served as chairwoman of the Farm Foundation's board of trustees and as past president of the American Agricultural Editors' Association. The National Association of Farm Broadcasting (NAFB) awarded the Dix Harper Meritorious Service Award to Wyant in 2016, in recognition of dedicated service to farm broadcasting. Wyant was also awarded the 2016 North American Agricultural Journalists (NAAJ) Audrey Mackiewicz Special Award, in recognition of outstanding dedication to furthering the cause of agricultural journalism by expanding the coverage of agriculture and its related businesses. In 2015, Wyant was named to the annual Folio: "Top Women in Media" recognition in the Entrepreneurs category. She has been awarded a producer communications award from the United Soybean Board, an Oscar in Agriculture award for excellence in agricultural reporting from the American Agricultural Editors' Association and a leadership award from Agriculture Future of America. In 2013, Wyant was recognized for outstanding service to agriculture by the Missouri Farm Bureau.



**Dr. Thomas P. Zacharias, President, National Crop Insurance Services**

Tom Zacharias currently serves as President of National Crop Insurance Services (NCIS). He joined the organization in 1990. Prior to joining NCIS, Tom was an Associate Professor in the Department of Economics at Iowa State University in Ames, Iowa and an Assistant Professor in the Department of Agricultural Economics at Louisiana State University in Baton Rouge, Louisiana. Tom holds a Ph.D. in Agricultural Economics from the University of Illinois, with B.S. and M.S. degrees in Agricultural Economics from Texas A&M University. During his tenure at NCIS, Tom has served on several USDA and crop insurance industry workgroups and task forces. These efforts have ranged from Farm Bill implementation to USDA reinsurance negotiations. In addition, Tom has served as industry liaison for NCIS with the National Association of Insurance Commissioners. He has been an invited speaker at reinsurance seminars, commodity association meetings, as well as international insurance association meetings. In his role as NCIS president, Tom also serves as an industry spokesperson. His op-eds and letters to the editor have been published in the Washington Post and Roll Call, among others.

Tom has authored and co-authored numerous publications including book chapters, refereed journal articles, book reviews in peer-reviewed journals, as well as other professional and agricultural extension presentations. Most notably, he has been published in the Proceedings of the Casualty Actuary Society Forum and the American Journal of Agricultural Economics. Tom serves as a member on the Board of Directors of the International Association of Agricultural Production Insurers (AIAG). He is a member of the American Agricultural Economics Association (AAEA).