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Getting to Know Acting Secretary Josh Svaty

by *Lisa Taylor*



Josh Svaty, Acting Secretary of Agriculture

Governor Mark Parkinson named former Representative Josh Svaty acting secretary of agriculture July 14, just as Adrian Polansky was leaving office to head the Kansas Farm Service Agency with the U.S. Department of Agriculture.

“Farming is in Josh’s blood—he’s the fifth generation to farm in Ellsworth County,” Parkinson said on making the appointment public. “He’s demonstrated tremendous leadership in the Kansas House of Representatives and he’s going to do a great job leading the Department of Agriculture. I know that Josh has loved serving the people of the 108th, and he is excited about now serving the entire state as a Cabinet secretary.”

The Svaty Farm is a diversified operation in the heart of the Smoky Hills that includes wheat, milo, soybeans, corn, sunflowers, a cow-calf herd and sheep.

Josh served as the state Representative of the 108th District in Kansas from 2003 until he was appointed acting secretary. While serving in the House of Representatives, he was a member of the Energy and Utilities Committee, was the ranking member on Agriculture and Natural Resources Committee, and he was on the joint committee on Energy and Environmental Policy.

Svaty has spoken nationally and has testified before the U.S. Congress on matters of energy, agriculture and water policy. He also serves on the national advisory council for his alma mater, Sterling College.

Since his appointment to acting secretary of agriculture, Svaty, his wife, Kimberly, and their baby son, Jackson, moved to Topeka, to be closer to the Department of Agriculture. However, he continues his close ties to his family in Ellsworth County.

Svaty is awaiting preliminary authorization by the Senate Confirmation Oversight Committee to exercise the powers, duties and functions of office until the full Senate can consider the nomination.

To help folks get to know him, Svaty answered the following questions for KDA Connection readers.

Fun Facts About Kansas Agriculture

Kansas has more than
65,500 farms with an
average size of 705
acres.

The
KDA Connection
is a quarterly electronic
newsletter published by
the Kansas Department
of Agriculture.

You were a member of the Kansas House of Representatives when Governor Parkinson appointed you secretary of agriculture. How will your background as a lawmaker influence your leadership role at the Kansas Department of Agriculture?

The Department of Agriculture has several connections to the legislative process. First of all, we implement the policies set forth in the statutes created by the Legislature. Secondly, we operate on a budget funded in part by state general funds, which are divided among the state agencies by the Legislature. Because of that, I can provide strong relationships with many of the individuals making those decisions at a legislative level. It is critical that state lawmakers understand the ramifications of policies they might put in place, and the more open the dialogue between the department and the Legislature, the better.



*Svaty discusses his
Statehouse experience.*

You have a family background in farming. What is your vision for the future of Kansas agriculture, and how has your vision been shaped by your own family's experience farming?

Kansas will always be at the center of food production for the United States and the world. As a department that oversees the regulation of most of our agricultural entities, we must maintain the high standards of quality so that the world will naturally expect that Kansas is synonymous with the very best in food production. Within the state, I think that it is vitally important that we make an effort to improve the abilities for young people to return to the farm. While aging and expanding farm operations are the trend, if we want our rural communities to be vital, sustainable economies, we must have young people returning to operate farms that they can own themselves. The difficulty of land transfer to the next generation of farmers has been driven home to me as we make that transition on our farm.

What plans do you have for the future direction of the Department of Agriculture?

I was blessed to inherit a position vacated by a very gifted administrator. Secretary Polansky created a very efficient, responsive agency that focused on common-sense solutions for producers and stakeholders statewide. The department has been cited as a very well-run, efficient agency, and I plan on continuing that tradition. We will focus on our core mission of regulating various agricultural stakeholders and developing long-range strategies to manage one of our state's most valuable resources, our water.

Many state agencies are struggling with budget shortfalls. Is that the case for the Department of Agriculture, and how do you plan to address it?

The department, like other state agencies, is struggling with budget shortfalls. Last year, the department actually suffered cuts greater than most state agencies. Since the department is primarily regulatory, we are heavily funded by state general funds, making us more vulnerable to the ups and downs of budget cycles. To our credit, we have found efficiencies throughout the department in an effort to address smaller budgets. However, since we have

done such a good job managing and operating within our resources for the past several years, so we are no longer able to cut the “low-hanging fruit.”

My plan is to critically look at every program to make sure we are not funding nonstatutory programs. In a tough economic climate like this, I understand how critically important a job can be for someone putting food on the table. As much as possible, I hope to keep existing jobs for employees so that they can continue to provide the valuable services to our stakeholders. This is one of the areas I think I can make a difference legislatively. The Legislature needs to understand that we are now at the point of providing core services mandated by statute, and the Legislature must step up to the plate and find a way to fund those programs that they deemed necessary and important for the state.

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Dairy Inspectors Ensure Safe Milk, Preserve Marketing Options

by Jessica Bowser

I was thrilled to get to wear my cowboy boots and jeans to work for a day. I traveled throughout northeast Kansas with Celia Bissen, Kansas Department of Agriculture dairy inspector, who conducted five dairy inspections in three counties in one day.

Bissen has worked for the department for nearly eight years. She graduated from Iowa State University in dairy science and has a passion for working in the dairy industry. Her inspection territory covers 12 counties, and she inspects dairy farms, milk haulers and milk processing plants. There are more than 406 dairy farms (Grade “A” and “B” facilities) statewide, as well as 192 milk haulers and 12 dairy processors. I watched dairy farm inspections, but Bissen could inspect all three types of facilities in any given week.



Dairy Inspector Celia Bissen conducts a dairy inspection in northeast Kansas.

We arrived at the first dairy shortly after 9 a.m. Inspections are unannounced to ensure that dairies are following regulations every day, not just the day they are inspected. The first thing Bissen looks for in the barn is the dairy’s license, milk pickup sheet and the last dairy inspection, all of which must be displayed. Once she locates the items, the inspection begins.

I followed Bissen throughout the dairy barn, where she checked the condition of the cows; the cleanliness of the equipment, facilities and workers; the temperature of the milk tank; proper labeling of medicine and contact information for the veterinarian who supplied it; adequate pest control; and several other items. The inspection report contains 82 compliance entries.

The U.S. Food and Drug Administration collaborated with local, state and federal government, dairy industry, and research and technical institutions to create the Grade “A” Pasteurized Milk Ordinance. The ordinance is used by all 50 states to provide uniform inspection for interstate milk shippers.



Bissen checks milk in the bulk tank.

Grade “A” dairies belong to milk marketing cooperatives that pool and market the individual dairy’s milk. To market the milk in interstate commerce, each dairy farm must meet Pasteurized Milk Ordinance requirements.

George Blush, Dairy Inspection program manager, said that the interstate milk shippers program relies on states to conduct inspections as outlined in the Grade “A” Pasteurized Milk Ordinance. That means Bissen is responsible for enforcing Kansas dairy laws, as well as FDA’s Grade “A” Pasteurized Milk Ordinance.



Bissen inspects milking equipment.

After the inspection is complete, Bissen refers to the dairy’s last inspection sheet to verify that past violations have been corrected. This inspection sheet serves as notification to the dairy operator that his or her permit may be suspended if violations are not corrected.

One farm we visited had not corrected mistakes from the previous inspection, so its operator received a warning letter from Blush stating that the dairy’s permit would be suspended if violations were not corrected by the time a follow-up inspection occurred. If the dairy is not in compliance at the follow-up inspection, and its license is suspended, the milk marketing cooperative cannot market the dairy’s milk.

In September, the Dairy Inspection program started conducting performance-based inspections for Grade “A” dairy farms. Before that, dairy farms were inspected at least once every six months. The performance-based system categorizes dairies to undergo inspection every three, four, six, or 12 months based on their performance the previous 12 months, including the type and number of violations and lab results from milk samples. Of the five farms we visited, two were on a four-month inspection interval and the other three were on a six-month interval.

FDA requires that interstate milk shippers be surveyed every 24 months for sanitation compliance and that state inspectors be surveyed for enforcement ratings. Blush is the FDA milk sanitation rating officer and sampling surveillance officer for the state, as well as manager of the Dairy Inspection program. He audits dairy farms that provide milk to interstate milk shippers, as well as the department’s inspectors. To ship milk across state lines, milk shippers must score at least 90 out of 100 on their raw milk score and enforcement rating. The ratings are based on compliance with the requirements of the FDA Grade “A” Pasteurized Milk Ordinance.

Several inspections and audits are conducted all along the milk production, processing and retail chain. The audits and inspections ensure that milk is safe for consumers to drink.

Dairy inspectors work with industry fieldmen from the milk marketing cooperatives to ensure that dairy farms supplying milk to them are in compliance. Bissen stated if she has inspected a farm and a warning to suspend the dairy's license is issued, the industry fieldman for that dairy is the first person she calls. She said she will work with the fieldman to help the dairy operator come back into compliance.

Throughout the day I watched Bissen interact with dairy producers. They all recognized her and knew what she was there to do. She had great rapport with the dairy operators and could tell me the history of the dairy farms we inspected and the farms we drove by on the road. Bissen enjoys helping dairy operators find ways to improve on-farm sanitation, which ultimately leads to a better product for consumers and allows dairies to continue marketing their milk across state lines.

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Division of Water Resources Staff Protects Kansas' Water Supply

by *Jessica Bowser*

There are more than 4,000 active water rights in the eastern third of Kansas, and environmental scientists Jessica Ebert and Milton McCabe of the Division of Water Resources help people, cities and industry obtain and maintain those rights.



Environmental Scientists Jessica Ebert and Milton McCabe compile information for a water compliance investigation.

On the coldest day in October, I joined Ebert and McCabe as they conducted field inspections and compliance investigations.

A field inspection is an interview with a potential water right holder to evaluate the right before the certification process is complete, and to determine the amount of water being diverted. The certificate establishes the rate of diversion, water use, annual quantity, point of diversion and place of use. Water right holders, other than municipalities, have five years to perfect a water right but that can be extended.

Compliance investigations verify that permit conditions, statutes and regulations are being followed.

The first stop was a field inspection with the city of Gardner. Ebert and McCabe asked city employees about the city's water use to make sure it aligns with the permit. Ebert and McCabe determined the city was pumping water within its permit and told employees to contact the Division of Water Resources if anything changed.

After that, we met a farmer to conduct a compliance investigation on his irrigation system, which required him to turn on his irrigation pivot in the chilly weather. This allowed Ebert and McCabe to gather information about the power unit, irrigation pump, meter, well and gear head.



McCabe prepares the meter to record water flow rate data.

McCabe attached a meter to the pipe that extends from the water source to the pump so it could read water flow rates. For ten minutes the meter took a series of readings to record in gallons per minute the amount of water that was being pumped. Back at the office, readings would be downloaded from the meter and an average of the water pumped per minute would be determined. The data can then be compared to the amount of water the individual is authorized to pump.

In this investigation, the farmer didn't have a meter at the pump or the irrigation system. The Division of Water Resources has authority to require any water user to install meters, gages, or other measuring devices, and one was required in this instance because all new water permits are required to have meters. Ebert told the farmer he needed to install a meter and gave him a list of meters that are certified to meet Kansas' specifications. She also told him he would get a letter from Katie Tietsort, water commissioner for the Topeka field office, documenting that without the meter his diversion is not in compliance and to give him a deadline to install one.

Back on the road, Ebert said that she tries to engage the water right holders she meets by asking a lot of questions about his or her operation. She believes building a relationship with the water user is important because it allows him or her to feel comfortable calling with water right questions.

Our next stop was at a golf course for a field inspection involving two irrigation pumps. The first pump tested normal, while the second pump's meter was 80 gallons per minute higher than the test meter. Ebert also conducted a time test using a stop watch to determine gallons per minute. McCabe told the golf course superintendent that he would analyze the data and, if it showed that the golf course's meter was not within 6 percent of the test meter reading, the golf course would need to get a new meter.



Ebert takes a closer look at an irrigation pump.

We also stopped at a nursery to check if a meter had been installed on a portable pump. The nursery had two pumps, but only one meter. Tietsort had sent a letter to the nursery giving them until October 1, 2009, to install a meter on the portable pump, but when we stopped there the owner was on vacation. McCabe left word for the owner to call as soon as he got back. If the meter is not on the portable pump, the Division of Water Resources will file a cease-and-desist order to stop all water pumping at the nursery. If the nursery fails to comply, it could result in fines or a loss of the water right.

After conducting field inspections, the inspectors had data to download and information to record in the respective water right files.

Both inspectors say they enjoy being in the field and providing a service to Kansans. McCabe, a 17-year water rights specialist, said that people shouldn't be nervous when he

or one of his coworkers conducts a field inspection.

“We are there to check compliance, and if there is a mistake we will work with you to fix the problem,” he said.

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Food Safety Tips for the Holidays

If you are like most Americans, you are faced with a veritable smorgasbord of holiday goodies from Thanksgiving to the beginning of the new year, which makes observing food safety even more important. To see you and your family safely to the new year, we offer the following food safety tips by holiday:

Thanksgiving

For many families, nothing says Thanksgiving like the traditional turkey dinner. The Kansas Department of Agriculture publishes a fact sheet, [Turkey Safety](#), that provides guidance on how to safely thaw, cook and store turkey.

The United States Department of Agriculture provides guidance on safely roasting other popular meats in its fact sheet, [Roasting Those “Other” Holiday Meats](#), which covers the gamut from lamb, beef and pork to wild game and fowl.

USDA also operates a toll-free hotline to answer your questions about safely cooking and serving holiday meats. The hotline is at (888) 674-6854 and operates from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. Eastern time, Monday through Friday. Guidance is in English and Spanish. TTY service is available for the hearing impaired at (800) 256-7072.

Christmas and the New Year

A popular way to celebrate holidays is to invite friends and family to a buffet. However, this type of presentation, where foods are left out for long periods of time, leaves the door open for uninvited guests—bacteria that cause foodborne illness.

While not geared specifically to this type entertaining, the Kansas Department of Agriculture publishes a fact sheet, [Food Safety for Group Functions](#), which provides some good, basic food safety tips suitable for the buffet host.

USDA also publishes a seasonal food safety fact sheet, [Holiday or Party Buffets](#), that explains how to safely serve food in a buffet setting.

Learn More

More food safety guidance is available from the Kansas Department of Agriculture's [Food Safety and Lodging Program](#), from [USDA's Food Safety and Inspection Service](#) and [FoodSafety.gov](#).

Ask KDA

Q. My local newspaper publishes restaurant inspection information provided by your office. How can I find out how my favorite restaurants did on their last inspection?

A. The Kansas Department of Agriculture licenses and inspects all food and lodging businesses in Kansas, including restaurants. Inspection reports are posted on our website and anyone can view them any time they choose. From our [Inspection Reports](#) page, choose "View Food and Lodging Inspection Reports." You will be taken to a page where you agree that you will not use the information in a way that violates the Kansas Open Records Act. You are then taken to the search page, where you can enter the name of your favorite restaurant to search for their inspection history. However, you are not limited to restaurant inspections alone. The search feature will allow you to look at the inspection history of any food or lodging business in Kansas. You can search by name, by city or by county, and you can specify the time frame you are most interested in to manage the number of results you get. You can even sign up to receive an [e-mail alert](#) whenever there are new inspection results added to the site based on criteria you provide.



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