

Local Listening Session Summary High Plains Core Region

The Kansas Department of Agriculture held four local listening sessions across the state in October 2025. KDA surveyed ranchers and landowners about their ideas to improve and conserve private working grasslands in Kansas. The information and feedback helped shape and create an Issue Brief, a report about the state of Kansas grasslands with action steps to encourage and support the enhanced conservation of these working lands in our state.

KDA worked with the Kansas Association of Conservation Districts on the project, with support from the Natural Resources Conservation Service. Local ranchers in four of the state's core grassland regions helped inform and invite participants to the meetings. The High Plains meeting took place at the Buffalo Bill Cultural Center in Oakley on October 22. More than 16 ranchers and landowners took part in the listening session.

The goal was to better understand both regional opportunities and challenges as well as efforts that could be made at the state level. Below is a summary of the meeting that took place in Oakley. The resulting report, as well as summaries of the notes from the other October in-person meetings and the statewide online survey, can be accessed at www.agriculture.ks.gov/grasslands

Some of the top concerns about the future of grasslands in Kansas:

- Water:
 - Ability to provide stockwater.
 - Need to haul water to cattle based on availability.
 - The growing interest in establishing Rural Water Districts in western Kansas.
- Concerns about the use of language like “hunting potential” to discuss land that is taken out of agriculture production
- Labor and workforce competition (H-2A visas)
- Technology
- Young people coming back and staying
- Issues with erosion, water quality
- Small towns drying up
- “Grass is made to be grazed”
- Concerns about economic benefits for owners, not tenants
- Not enough crews for burning/no prescribed burn crews
- Consider revisions to the Livestock Forage Program that prioritize rent by acres vs rent by the day
- Bring back Sodbuster laws
 - In a follow-up conversation after the meeting in Oakley, one rancher suggested reviewing protocols for local conservation staff to provide or enforce a checklist for landowners who are considering converting native grasslands to crop land. This checklist would include ensuring that steps would be taken to reduce soil

erosion and nutrient displacement that could affect nearby creeks, streams, playas and other waterways.

- Study the economics related to the CRP program and its impact on rural communities
- “Grass is made to be grazed”

What can the state do to support producers?

- Ensure the results of research being conducted on Kansas ranches and in grasslands is shared back with the land owners and managers.
- Address noxious weeds — some counties are aggressive, others are lax in enforcement.
 - Add tax credit for addressing these weeds.
- Public entities aren’t addressing invasive grasses in public rights of way.
- Need to have check and balances on government actions.
 - Enforce existing laws and regs to the same standards everywhere.
 - Provide oversight, not regulation.

Ideas to improve grasslands:

- Keep grass grass and graze it.
- Don’t take money from federal programs and then let acres sit idle.
- Use the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) more effectively.
- Make CRP an incentive for local landowners and managers to keep the local \$s in the local communities.
- The state could be an educational resource to help ranchers understand the pros and cons of government-sponsored programs (but be neutral).
- Create a “Rangeland Consultant” position within the state (modeled after a crop consultant).
- KDA could hire a “rangeland specialist.”
 - Model after Irrigation Technology program.
 - Provide on-site education to producers.