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The Meritage Resort | Napa, CA | August 4-9, 2023

Speaker Biographies



ASA EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

Ryan Weston – ASA Chair

Chief Executive Officer, Florida Sugar Cane League

Washington Representative, Rio Grande Valley Sugar Growers, Inc.

Cassie Bladow – ASA Vice Chair

President

United States Beet Sugar Association

Jack Pettus – Secretary/Treasurer

Vice President of Government Relations

American Sugar Cane League

Luther Markwart

Executive Vice President & CEO

American Sugarbeet Growers Association

STATEMENT OF PURPOSE

The American Sugar Alliance is a national coalition of sugarcane and sugar beet producers, including sugar farmers, sugar processors, sugar refiners, sugar suppliers, sugar workers and others dedicated to preserving a strong U.S. sugar industry. The American Sugar Alliance works to ensure that sugar farmers and workers in the U.S. sugar industry survive in a world of heavily subsidized sugar. Only through a united effort can these dedicated Americans continue to offer a plentiful, secure and reasonably priced sugar supply. The American Sugar Alliance provides the backing and support to meet this national need. For information on the Symposium or membership in the American Sugar Alliance, please contact Vickie Myers, Executive Director, at 703-351-5055 or via email at info@sugaralliance.org.

www.sugaralliance.org

Ryan Weston

Chief Executive Officer, Florida Sugar Cane League
Washington Representative, Rio Grande Valley Sugar Growers, Inc.

Ryan joined the Florida, Texas and Hawaii Sugarcane Growers in 2006. He advises and provides strategic planning for his growers, mills and refineries (Domino, C&H and United Sugars) on domestic sugar policy, international trade, nutrition and other issues that impact the sugar industry and agriculture production. He represents the industry before Congress and the Administration and at trade ministerials in the U.S and abroad including in Brussels, Singapore, Ho Chi Minh City and Geneva. He worked with the House and Senate Leadership to ensure passage of the 2014 Farm Bill and to defeat five votes that would have altered the sugar program.

Ryan is the current Chairman of the American Sugar Alliance which represents all U.S. sugar production and most U.S. sugar refining interests. He serves on the Commodity Futures Trading Commission's Agriculture Advisory Committee and the Department of Agriculture and United States Trade Representative's Agricultural Trade Advisory Committee (ATAC) for Sweeteners.

Ryan worked for the U.S. House of Representatives' Committee on Agriculture for over 10 years and organized more than 50 hearings and completed two Farm Bills. He specialized in farm and conservation programs, trade agreements, derivatives trading, rural development, energy and specialty crops. He staffed Committee Members during negotiations for the Commodity Futures Modernization Act of 2000, the 2002 Energy Conference and the Public Health Security and Bioterrorism Preparedness and Response Act of 2002 Conference in addition to the 1996 and 2002 Farm Bill Conferences.

Ryan and his wife, Carmen, live in Arlington, Virginia. Ryan was raised on a cattle ranch near Springview, Nebraska where his parents still live and where he enjoys working whenever possible. He graduated Magna Cum Laude from Nebraska Wesleyan University with a major in finance and a minor in political science. Carmen is an elementary school teacher in Virginia.

Rep. Kat Cammack (R-FL-03)

House Agriculture Committee; House Committee on Energy and Commerce;
House Judiciary Select Subcommittee on the Weaponization of the Federal Government

Congresswoman Kat Cammack proudly serves Florida's Third Congressional District, which includes Alachua, Baker, Bradford, Columbia, Dixie, Gilchrist, Hamilton, Lafayette, Levy, Marion, Suwannee, and Union Counties in North Central Florida. During her first term in 2021-2022, she served as the youngest Republican woman in the 117th Congress.

Kat is a third-generation commercial sandblaster who grew up on a cattle ranch outside Denver, Colorado, participating in local 4-H programs, the local rodeo, and sports. When she was younger, she had hopes of continuing the family business, but shortly before graduating from college at Metro State University Denver, an Obama-era housing program forced her family to lose their small cattle ranch and home. As a result, Kat was motivated to fight back against the failures of big government and has since dedicated her life's work to fight big government and advance individual freedoms.

She served for nearly a decade as the deputy chief of staff for Florida's Third Congressional District prior to her election in 2020. While in this role, she advocated for small business owners, veterans and military families, agricultural producers, and hardworking families like her own, motivated by her family's story. She holds a Master's Degree in National Defense & Strategic Studies from the United States Naval War College and has used her experience in the national defense.

During the 117th Congress, Kat served on the House Agriculture and Homeland Security Committees, along with the Select Committee on the Economy. While serving on these committees, Kat brought attention to the challenges faced by working-class families and Florida's farmers, ranchers, and producers with rising inflation, labor challenges, and supply-chain issues. She also worked to highlight the historic border crisis, visiting the southern border and questioning the Department of Homeland Security Secretary Alejandro Mayorkas multiple times before Committee. Now serving in her second term during the 118th Congress, she works to prioritize constituent advocacy and service, fighting for families, national security, and government accountability.

Kat is the proud wife to her husband Matt, a Gainesville native, who serves with the Gainesville Fire Rescue as a firefighter/paramedic and SWAT medic. Kat and Matt have several backyard chickens and ducks and in their rare bit of spare time enjoy spending time with their critters, fishing, football, and traveling.

Rob Johansson, PhD
Director of Economics and Policy Analysis
American Sugar Alliance

Dr. Rob Johansson serves as the Director of Economics and Policy Analysis for the American Sugar Alliance, the national coalition of sugarbeet and sugarcane growers, processors, and refiners. There he analyzes sugar supply and demand fundamentals as well as domestic and foreign sugar and general agricultural policies, including Farm Bill topics and international trade negotiations.

Previously, Dr. Johansson was the Chief Economist for the U.S. Department of Agriculture. Dr. Johansson served in that role from January 2015 to January 2021. As Chief Economist, he was responsible for the Department's agricultural forecasts and for advising the Secretary of Agriculture on programs, regulations, and legislative proposals. During that period, Rob was the Chairman of the Federal Crop Insurance Corporation Board of Directors and also was responsible for setting up the Farm Production and Conservation (or FPAC) mission area in 2017 – combining NRCS, RMA, and FSA.

Dr. Johansson has held positions at the Office of Management and Budget, the Congressional Budget Office, and the White House Council of Economic Advisers. He received his B.A. in economics from Northwestern University and then served with the U.S. Peace Corps from 1990 to 1995. After returning to his home State of Minnesota in 1995, he received his Ph.D. in Agricultural & Applied Economics from the University of Minnesota in 2000.

Toby Cohen
Vice President of Market Analysis at ASR Group

Toby Cohen is Vice President Market Analysis at ASR Group where his team is responsible for the analysis of commodity market risks affecting the group's refineries. ASR Group is a vertically integrated cane refiner with a leading presence in the US, Canada and Europe. Toby began his career in commodities with Czarnikow in 1990. In the late 1990s he was based in Singapore at the time of the Asian financial crisis. In 2002 he moved from physical trading to market analysis and was appointed to the board of Czarnikow Group in 2006. He joined ASR in 2014. He has been a regular speaker at commodity industry events throughout his career and is based in London.

Frank Jenkins
President
JSG Commodities

Frank Jenkins is president of JSG Commodities, a commodities brokerage and consultancy located in South Norwalk, Connecticut. He has nearly 40 years of commodity market experience. Prior to founding JSG in 1993, Mr. Jenkins was a vice president with the Merrill Lynch Private Client Group in Manhattan. He started his career in the sugar industry with the Man Group in New York. He regularly addresses industry forums and was recently a Key Note speaker at the ISO Sugar Conference in London. He has served as President of the Sugar Club of New York and currently serves as Chairman of the ICE Domestic Sugar Committee. He is a graduate of Boston University and lives with his wife Kristen in Wilton, Connecticut.

Marie-Christine Ribera
Director General
European Committee on Sugar Manufacturers (CEFS)

Marie-Christine Ribera is a French citizen and lives in Brussels. She is a lawyer by training. She began her professional career in 1987 with an internship at the European Commission (DG Agri) before becoming a policy officer in variety of settings, initially with the French National Federation of Rural Territory Management and later in the regional Chamber of Commerce of Industry of the Ile-de-France region. In 1991, Marie-Christine Ribera joined the French National Centre for Young Farmers as Advisor in charge of European Community matters. During this time, she was also a substitute member of the Economic and Social Committee of the EU. In 1993, she became legal advisor to the Director General of the French inter-professional National Cereals Office.

In 1999, Marie-Christine Ribera joined COPA-COGECA (the Committee of professional agricultural organizations and agricultural cooperatives) in Brussels as Policy Advisor with special responsibility for arable crops and bilateral agreements. Over the past 9 years, Marie-Christine Ribera has been deeply involved in agriculture, environment and food policies of the European Union, developing a robust network of relations on the Brussels/EU scene.

In 2008, Marie-Christine Ribera was promoted to the position of Director of Commodities & Trade, reporting directly to COPA-COGECA's Secretary General and managing a team of 9 persons. She had direct responsibility over arable crops, technology in agriculture (including GMOs), relationships with international farming organizations and bilateral trade agreements between the EU and third countries.

Present position (since June 2009), CEFS Director-General.

Luther Markwart
Executive Vice President & CEO
American Sugarbeet Growers Association

Raised on a family dairy farm in eastern Michigan and grew sugarbeets for 9 years as a 4-H project. His grandparents and parents raised sugarbeets beginning in 1933.

Bachelor's Degree in Business Administration from Michigan State University.

Executive Vice President of the Farmers and Manufacturers Beet Sugar Association in Saginaw, Michigan 1979-1982, representing all sugarbeet growers in Michigan and Ohio.

Executive Vice President of the American Sugarbeet Growers Association in Washington, DC since 1982, representing all sugarbeet growers in 11 states.

Advisor to the U.S. Congress, the Department of Agriculture, the Office of the U.S. Trade Representative, and other federal agencies that have direct or indirect impact on the domestic sugar industry.

Directly involved in the formulation and passage of the sugar provisions of the last eight farm bills (1981, 1985, 1990, 1996, 2002, 2008, 2014 and 2018).

Advisor to USDA and USTR for international trade negotiations, beginning with the International Sugar Agreement in Geneva in 1982; the North American Free Trade Agreement; the Uruguay Round of the GATT; the Doha Round of the WTO, and pending and ongoing regional and bilateral free trade agreements. Served six years on the USDA Agricultural Technical Advisory Committee (ATAC) for Sweeteners, then served on the Agricultural Policy Advisory Committee as an advisor to Secretaries Ann Veneman and Mike Johanns and USTR Ambassador Zoellick. He was reappointed to the ATAC for Sweeteners in 2015 by USDA Secretary Tom Vilsack and USTR Michael Froman and currently serves on the committee. He was involved in the antidumping and countervailing cases against Mexico and the negotiated suspension agreements between the two countries.

Served eight terms as Chairman of the industry-wide American Sugar Alliance (1989/90, 1994/95, 2000/01, 2004/05, 2011/2012, 2015/16, 2017/18, 2021/22).

Served as Co-Chairman of the Sugar Industry Biotechnology Council since 2003 (20 years) leading the first successful introduction of sugar produced from genetically engineered sugarbeets or sugar cane in the world. 2017 recipient of the prestigious Savitsky Award for his leadership in introduction, adoption and defense of biotechnology in the beet sugar industry. The Savitsky award is the highest award given by the American Society of Sugar Beet Technologists.

Member of the Agriculture CEO Council (Washington, DC) 2018 – present

Served as President of the Commodity Club of Washington, D.C., 1996/97

Served as President of the New York "Sugar Club," 2005/2006.

Contributing editor for sugarbeet trade magazines; The Sugar Producer and The Sugarbeet Grower.

He lives in McLean, Virginia with his wife, Terri, and three children, Christian, Lauren and Megan.

Barbara Fecso, PhD
Commodity Analysis Branch and lead on Sugar Program
Farm Production and Conservation (FPAC)
U.S. Department of Agriculture

Title and Responsibilities: Branch Chief, Commodity Analysis Branch, Economic and Policy Analysis Division of FPAC, Farm Production and Conservation Business Center, U.S. Department of Agriculture. Responsible for overseeing the administration of the domestic sugar, dairy, livestock, cotton, peanuts, grains and oilseeds programs. Provides guidance to the Secretary of Agriculture in the formulation and implementation of national policies and procedures, as well as economic and budgetary impact analysis of those programs.

Work Experience: Barbara has almost 30 years of government service in USDA with an emphasis on program analysis, operations and budgetary analysis. She started USDA in 1994 analyzing conservation technical assistance, watershed and animal waste management programs for the Natural Resources and Conservation Service. She moved to the Farm Service Agency in 1997 as a wheat and pulse crop analyst before shifting to sugar in 2002. She was named Director of FSA's Dairy and Sweeteners Analysis branch in 2014 and played a critical role in the negotiation of the current sugar trade agreement with Mexico. In October 2018, she was named Branch Chief under USDA's reorganization, and now oversees a staff of economists that cover 33 commodity programs. Her expertise lies in advising USDA decision makers on managing sugar supplies.

Education: Barbara received a Ph.D. in Agricultural Economics from Purdue University at West Lafayette, Indiana in 1994.

Background: She was born and raised in Chicago, Illinois and lived for almost twenty years in central Illinois. She has three children, five grandchildren and now lives in Arlington, Virginia with her husband.

Randy Green
Principal, Watson Green LLC;
Consultant, Sweetener Users Association

Randy Green, owner of Watson Green, has seen food and agriculture policy from all sides, having served in both the executive and legislative branches of government and in the private sector. Over his career he has been closely involved in the development of five multi-year farm bills, as well as major legislation affecting derivatives, financial reform, food safety and nutrition. Randy came to Washington in the 1980s to work for Representative Charles Stenholm (D-Tex.) and later served Senator Richard Lugar (R-Ind.) on the staff of the Senate Agriculture Committee. With the exception of a year as a deputy under secretary of agriculture, Randy served on the agriculture committee staff continuously from 1989 to 1999. The last two years he was chief of staff. In 1999 Randy became a senior government relations representative at McLeod, Watkinson & Miller, a DC firm specializing in agriculture and agribusiness law. Earlier in his career, he managed government relations for the American Soybean Association and was director of the Wheat Export Trade Education Center.

Rob Johansson PhD
Director of Economics and Policy Analysis
American Sugar Alliance
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Jack Pettus
Vice President of Government Relations
American Sugar Cane League

Jack Pettus served in the late 1980s on the legislative staff of the U.S. House Committee on Agriculture and for a federal commission to improve the risk management tools available to farmers. Jack has been an advocate and consultant to barley growers, rice farmers, cotton warehouses, a technology start-up and numerous global commodity trading companies. Jack has represented the Louisiana sugarcane industry since 2001 and has served as Vice President for Government Relations for the American Sugar Cane League and as a member of the Executive Committee of the American Sugar Alliance since 2006.

Jack resides in Alexandria, Virginia, with his wife, Laura, and their k9id, Dexter.

Parish Braden
Republican Staff Director
House Committee on Agriculture

Parish has served in roles on and off Capitol Hill since 2005. Since 2021, he's served as the staff director for the House Committee on Agriculture where he's responsible for managing the Committee's Majority and Shared Staff under current Chairman Glenn "GT" Thompson of Pennsylvania. Prior to the House Agriculture Committee, he served as staff director of the House Committee on Natural Resources, which has jurisdiction of the U.S. Department of Interior and federal environmental laws. Prior to work on House Committees, Parish served as a regional press secretary at the Republican National Committee, policy and communication roles in Chair Thompson's personal office, and as legislative assistant to then-Rep. Wayne Gilchrest, the district representing Maryland's Eastern Shore, where he was born and raised. Parish is a graduate of Virginia Tech and lives in Arlington, Va. with his wife Eileen and two children.

Carly Esser
Republican Professional Staff
Senate Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition & Forestry

Carley Esser currently serves as professional staff for the U.S. Senate Agriculture, Nutrition, and Forestry Committee under Ranking Member John Boozman. She leads the Title I commodity programs, disaster programs, and crop insurance portfolios.

Formerly, Esser was the senior legislative assistant for Missouri Congresswoman Vicky Hartzler where she handled the agriculture committee portfolio in addition to trade, energy, environment, education, foreign aid, transportation and infrastructure policy portfolios since 2018.

Other experience in the industry includes the U.S. Grains Council in their Global Strategies department, a stint with U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), and extensive involvement with the National FFA Organization and Agriculture Future of America (AFA) organizations.

Esser graduated with a degree in Agricultural Education from the University of Missouri where she was able to work with agriculturalists across her home state.

Clark Ogilvie
Democratic Special Counsel
House Agriculture Committee

Clark Ogilvie is Special Counsel on the Democratic staff of the House Committee on Agriculture. This is his third return to the Committee having served from 2005—2014 and from 2018—2019. During that time, he has worked on the past three Farm Bills, the Dodd-Frank Act, and the 2008 reauthorization of the Commodity Futures Trading Commission (CFTC). In addition to working on the Committee, Clark Ogilvie served for 2 ½ years as Chief of Staff of the CFTC and two years as General Counsel for the Farm Credit Administration. He has a law degree from George Washington University and a B.A. from Rhodes College.

Josh Tonsager
Democratic Senior Professional Staff
Senate Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition and Forestry

Josh Tonsager is the Senior Professional Staff for the Senate Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition and Forestry under Chairwoman Debbie Stabenow. Previously he was the staff director of the General Farm Commodities and Risk Management Subcommittee of the House Agriculture Committee under Chairman David Scott. Prior to his positions with the House and Senate Agriculture Committees, he served as the Vice President of Policy and Communications for the National Association of Wheat Growers and a Legislative Assistant to former U.S. Senator Tim Johnson of South Dakota. He began his career with the National Farmers Union after receiving his Bachelor of Business Administration in Economics and Political Science from the University of South Dakota. He comes from a family farm near Oldham, SD.

Trevor White
Republican Professional Staff
House Committee on Agriculture

Trevor White serves as Senior Professional Staff on the House Agriculture Committee handling the commodity policy, crop insurance, disaster aid, and credit portfolio for Chairman Glenn ‘GT’ Thompson (PA-15). During the 2018 Farm Bill he was the lead negotiator for House Republicans on the provisions in Titles 1 and 11. Prior to joining the Agriculture Committee in March of 2017, Trevor spent over 8 years working with Combest, Sell and Associates, an agriculture policy focused lobbying firm. Trevor was raised on a cotton farm in New Home, TX. He holds a Bachelor’s degree in Agricultural Economics from Texas Tech University and a Master’s degree in Applied Economics from Johns Hopkins University.

Cassie Bladow
President
U.S. Beet Sugar Association

Cassie Bladow is President of the U.S. Beet Sugar Association. She works to advance the unified objectives of America's sugarbeet cooperatives. Cassie provides leadership in navigating issues of importance to the nine manufactures of beet sugar in the U.S., which operate 21 processing facilities. She previously served the association as director of government affairs, then vice president.

Cassie has served as an advocate for agriculture throughout her career. Prior to rejoining the U.S. Beet Sugar Association, she served as chief of staff for Senator John Hoeven. Through various roles on Senator Hoeven's staff, she worked to represent the interests of constituents in North Dakota. She played a crucial role in developing policy for farmers and ranchers through two Farm Bills and Senator Hoeven's role on the Senate Agriculture Appropriations Subcommittee.

Cassie resides in northern Virginia with her husband, Shaun, and son, Theodore. She grew up on a sugarbeet farm in northwestern Minnesota, which her family still operates. She graduated from North Dakota State University.

Rep. Jim Costa (D-CA-21)
House Agriculture Committee;
House Committee on Foreign Affairs; Blue Dog Coalition

James Manuel Costa has represented the San Joaquin Valley in the United States House of Representatives since 2005. Costa proudly represents California's 21st Congressional District, which includes parts of Fresno and Tulare counties.

A grandson of Portuguese immigrants, he was raised on a dairy farm in Fresno's Kearney Park area and is a third-generation family farmer in the San Joaquin Valley. Costa is a product of Fresno County schools, an alumnus of San Joaquin Memorial High School and California State University, Fresno.

As a member of Congress, Costa has applied his farming background to fighting for water, agriculture, healthcare, and the economy. In these capacities, he has protected California agriculture, enhanced water storage, repaired critical infrastructure, and advocated for a strong national defense to keep us safe from threats here at home and abroad.

His efforts in Congress have been recognized by organizations like the American Farm Bureau Federation, the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, and the National Organization for Victim Assistance. Costa is committed to building a stronger nation for our children and protecting the future of our democracy for generations to come.

The Honorable Gloria Montañó Greene
Deputy Under Secretary, Farm Production and Conservation (FPAC)
U.S. Department of Agriculture

Gloria Montañó Greene was appointed Deputy Under Secretary for USDA's Farm Production and Conservation (FPAC) mission area on February 22, 2021. Her experience is focused in government and community work and includes federal policy, politics, advocacy, intergovernmental relations, communications, and management.

As the FPAC Deputy Undersecretary, Montañó Greene leads agencies that deliver farm programs and services to farmers, ranchers, and agricultural producers. These programs include farm loans, conservation, disaster assistance, crop insurance and price support.

Montañó Greene is a former State Executive Director for the Farm Service Agency in Arizona from 2014-2017. With FSA in Arizona, Montañó Greene led implementation of the 2014 Farm Bill programs across the state.

She previously served as Deputy Chief of Staff and Chief of Staff to Congressman Raúl M. Grijalva of Arizona. Montañó Greene also served as Deputy Director for Chispa Arizona, a program of the League of Conservation Voters focused on the empowerment of Latino voices in Arizona on issues including energy, public lands, and democracy access. Montañó Greene is originally from rural Arizona. She is a proud graduate of the University of Arizona.

Cassie Bladow
President
U.S. Beet Sugar Association
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Rep. Ashley Hinson (R-IA-02)

House Appropriations Subcommittee on Agriculture, Rural Development, Food and Drug Administration; House Select Committee on the Strategic Competition between the United States and the Chinese Communist Party

Congresswoman Ashley Hinson proudly represents Iowa's 2nd district in Congress.

During her years as a reporter, Ashley shared the stories of countless Iowans on the local news. As their Congresswoman, she is bringing those stories to Washington to help shape federal policy and improve the lives of workers, farmers, seniors, veterans, and families in Iowa.

An Iowa native, Ashley is an award-winning journalist and a proud wife and mother of two. Ashley previously served in the Iowa state House and represented Iowa's 67th House district, serving Hiawatha, Robins, Cedar Rapids, and Marion, where she currently resides. As a state Representative, she worked successfully to balance the budget, cut taxes, and protect the most vulnerable in her community.

In Congress, she continues to be a common-sense leader and pursue pro-growth policies. She has introduced and supported bipartisan legislation to improve child care access for working families in Iowa, root out corruption in Washington through federal lobbying bans, and create opportunities for workers in the community. She is a member of the House Appropriations Committee and the Select Committee on the Chinese Communist Party, where she oversees the government funding process and fights to ensure every taxpayer dollar is accounted for and spent responsibly. As a mother of two, she also has a keen interest in protecting the safety and security of Iowa families.

Prior to serving Iowans in public office, Ashley was a reporter for KCRG-TV in Cedar Rapids. For more than a decade, she had the opportunity to connect with Iowa's small business owners and community leaders. Ashley's extensive reporting on rising healthcare costs, devastating flooding, and other critical issues impacting Eastern Iowa drove her to seek opportunities to better serve her community and take action to solve the problems she had covered for years.

While working as a reporter, Ashley earned recognition as a two-time Midwest regional Emmy award winner, an RTDNA Health Reporting Fellow, and a Waypoint Tribute to Women Honoree. She received her B.A. in Broadcast Journalism from the University of Southern California before returning home to Iowa to work and raise a family.

Ashley and her husband Matt are raising their two sons in Marion. Her children motivate her every day to fight for a better community and a stronger economy for all Iowa families. Ashley is also an active member of her community, regularly playing violin at Antioch Christian Church and volunteering with local charities.

Ryan Weston

Chief Executive Officer, Florida Sugar Cane League
Washington Representative, Rio Grande Valley Sugar Growers, Inc.

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Rob Larew
President
National Farmers Union

Rob Larew is president of the National Farmers Union (NFU), a grassroots organization that represents more than 220,000 family farmers and ranchers and rural communities across the United States. Before being elected to lead the organization at NFU's 118th Anniversary Convention in 2020, Larew served as its Vice President of Public Policy and Communications.

Prior to joining NFU, Larew worked over 22 years in Congress and USDA crafting agriculture policy. 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 former Rep. Collin Peterson and the late Sen. Paul Wellstone.

Larew splits his time between the family farm in Greenville, West Virginia, and the National Farmers Union office in Washington, D.C.

Joby Young
Executive Vice President,
American Farm Bureau Federation

Joby Young became the Executive Vice President of the American Farm Bureau in July 2022. He leads the AFBF staff, managing across all departments to achieve the goals of the President and Board of Directors and fulfill AFBF's mission.

Joby has more than a decade of experience in food and agriculture policy, from the halls of Congress to the Executive Branch. He served as Chief of Staff to Agriculture Secretary Sonny Perdue after serving in that same role for the Deputy Secretary and several USDA offices. He also previously served as Chief of Staff in the House of Representatives and as a consultant in the private sector.

Joby is a graduate of the University of Georgia, with degrees in History and Communications, and he holds a law degree from the UGA School of Law.

Luther Markwart
Executive Vice President & CEO
American Sugarbeet Growers Association
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Carrie Vicenta Meadows
Vice President of Government Affairs,
U.S. Beet Sugar Association

Carrie Vicenta Meadows serves as the Vice President of Government Affairs for the U.S. Beet Sugar Association. Carrie has spent her career working on agricultural policy. Prior to joining the U.S. Beet Sugar Association, Carrie served as the Agriculture Advisor to Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) Administrator Andrew Wheeler. As a senior advisor at EPA, Carrie led the office that served as the primary advocate and liaison for U.S. agriculture at EPA. Before joining EPA, Carrie was a 16-year veteran of Capitol Hill where she held positions including Chief of Staff to Congressman Dan Newhouse (WA-04), and Legislative Director and agricultural policy advisor to Congressman Bob Goodlatte (VA-06). Carrie is a native of Lynchburg, Virginia, and a graduate of James Madison University.

Dan Christenson
Senior Director of Government Affairs
PepsiCo

Dan Christenson joined PepsiCo in April of 2016 and is the Senior Director for Government Affairs based in Washington, DC. In this role, Dan leads PepsiCo's policy engagement with the Federal government. Previously, Dan served at the US Department of Agriculture from 2011 to 2016, where he was Deputy Chief of Staff for Policy to Secretary Tom Vilsack from 2014 to 2016. Before joining USDA, Dan served for several years as a Senior Professional Staff Member on the U.S. Senate Agriculture Committee (2005-2011); first under Chairman Tom Harkin (2005-2009), and later to Chairwoman Blanche Lincoln (2009-2011). Dan is a magna cum laude graduate of Luther College, and received his M.A. from Iowa State University. He resides in Kensington, Maryland with his wife Betsy and their two daughters, Hannah and Alice.

Kenneth Gravois, Ph.D.
Sugarcane Specialist
LSU AgCenter

Dr. Kenneth Gravois grew up on the family sugarcane farm in St. James parish. His father a farmer and mother a schoolteacher, a career in Ag research seemed inevitable. He received his Ph.D. in plant breeding and genetics from Louisiana State University (LSU) in December 1988. Dr. Gravois spent nine years at the University of Arkansas working as a rice breeder. In 1997, he returned to the LSU Agricultural Center's Sugar Research Station as a sugarcane breeder, working in that position for 14 years. He led a team effort that released several successful varieties for the Louisiana sugar industry.

Dr. Gravois is now the Louisiana State University AgCenter's sugarcane specialist.

Rebecca Larson, PhD
VP of Government Affairs & Chief Scientist
Western Sugar Cooperative

Dr. Rebecca Larson has spent more than 20 years working in the beet sugar industry. She received her Bachelor of Science degree in Ecology and Field Biology from St. Cloud State University in 1999 and went on to receive her doctorate in Plant Science with an emphasis in Plant Pathology and Biochemistry from Montana State University in 2003. The work from her dissertation led to patenting and commercialization of a novel disease control agent which landed her induction into Montana State University's Inventors Society in 2014. Early in her career Dr. Larson established a proteomics program at the USDA-Agricultural Research Service when working for the Agency as a Plant Physiologist. Her work elucidated the biochemical foundations of plant resistance/tolerance in sugarbeet. The findings were extensively published in the peer-reviewed literature and created the foundation of her expertise in integrated pest management. Looking to expand her knowledge in applied agronomy, plant breeding and crop protection, Dr. Larson moved to private industry where she ultimately joined the North American R&D Leadership Team at Syngenta overseeing end-to-end research activities for Diverse Field Crops, which included sugarbeet. In 2015, Dr. Larson joined Western Sugar Cooperative and currently serves as Vice President of Governmental Affairs and Chief Scientist.

During her tenure with Western Sugar much of her work has been sustainability focused. She developed and implemented a Sustainability Management System and Continuous Improvement Program. She led the farmers through on-farm sustainability certification, making Western Sugar the first verified supplier of 100% sustainably produced sugar in the Americas. Dr. Larson also spear-headed the first life cycle assessment of sugarbeets in North America to create the foundation for continuous improvement and research investments for the cooperative. Her efforts today focus on optimizing nutrient use efficiency, improving and maintaining soil health, and the commoditization of ecosystem services.

Trent Wimmer
Key Account Sustainability Lead
Syngenta

Trent Wimmer is a Key Account Sustainability Lead for Syngenta supporting their Sustainable and Responsible Business team. He helps farmers, ag retailers, and value chain partners across North America tell their story through farm and field-level data. His responsibilities include industry engagement, project management, and business development; as well as supporting customers through implementation of Syngenta's digital Cropwise platform and tools.

Trent has worked at Syngenta for more almost 25 years. He has held roles in R&D, sales, and marketing across North America before joining the Sustainability team in 2017. He holds a Bachelor's degree in Biology and Chemistry from Nebraska Wesleyan University and a Master's degree in Business Administration from the University of Denver.

Trent and his wife Lindsey live in Eden Prairie, MN with their children, Grant (18), Bennett (15), and Austyn (12). The Wimmers spend their free time attending their kids' activities, travelling, being outdoors, and volunteering with their foundation.

Courtney Gaine, PhD, RD
President & CEO
The Sugar Association

Courtney Gaine, Ph.D., R.D., is the President and CEO of the Sugar Association in Washington, D.C. Prior to her appointment in January 2016, Dr. Gaine served as the Vice President of Scientific Affairs. Before her positions at the Sugar Association, Dr. Gaine served as senior science program manager at the North American branch of the International Life Sciences Institute (ILSI North America), a public, nonprofit scientific foundation that advances the understanding and application of science related to the nutritional quality and safety of the food supply. Prior to ILSI, Dr. Gaine held positions of project director, nutrition and wellness, at the nonprofit organization Convergence and science manager at FoodMinds, a public relations firm. She began her career in academia as an assistant professor at East Carolina University. A native Washingtonian, Dr. Gaine obtained her Ph.D. in nutritional sciences and biochemistry and bachelor's degree in dietetics from the University of Connecticut, where she was also a co-captain of the UConn women's basketball team.

Ron Sterk
Senior Editor, Markets, Food Business News and Milling & Baking News;
Editor, Sosland Sweetener Report

Mr. Sterk is senior editor, markets, for Milling & Baking News and Food Business News, and is the creator and editor of the Sosland Sweetener Report, the only newsletter dedicated to covering the domestic sweetener market. In addition to sugar, he covers a wide array of ingredient markets pertinent to grain-based foods and other food manufacturers. He has a bachelor's degree in agricultural journalism from Iowa State University and a master's degree in business from Rockhurst University in Kansas City.

Jim Wiesemeyer

Washington Policy Analyst Pro Farmer/ Farm Journal

From his office near Washington, DC, Mr. Wiesemeyer contributes daily to Pro Farmer's online website at profarmer.com, providing members with the latest information on agricultural policy and trade developments. He also is a twice-weekly participant in Farm Journal's Agri-Talk radio program, has his own podcast called Signal to Noise and serves as a Washington analyst for Pro Farmer and Farm Journal.

Since 1978, Mr. Wiesemeyer has frequently reported on and interviewed senior government officials, including Presidents Reagan and Carter, as well as USDA Secretaries since Early Butz. He has traveled extensively in his assignments and is a frequent speaker on farm policy and trade issues. Wiesemeyer rejoined Pro Farmer a few years ago, after serving as their Washington consultant for 19 years while at Informa Economics, and before that as an employee of Pro Farmer, then owned by Oster Communications. Mr. Wiesemeyer also is one of the writers for the Agriculture Letter, formerly the Kiplinger Ag Letter, now owned by Farm Journal Media. Mr. Wiesemeyer also was the Washington bureau chief for Futures World News (FWN), formerly owned by Oster Communications. Prior to ProFarmer, he was a Washington editor with Doane's Agricultural Report and Washington editor and managing editor of the Washington Farmlatter.

Jack Pettus

Vice President of Government Relations

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