



The Hythe Vail | Vail, CO | August 1-6, 2025

Speaker Biographies



ASA EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

Luther Markwart, ASA Chair

Executive Vice President & CEO

American Sugarbeet Growers Association

Ryan Weston, ASA Vice Chair

Chief Executive Officer, Florida Sugar Cane League

Washington Representative, Rio Grande Valley Sugar Growers, Inc.

Cassie Bladow, Secretary/Treasurer

President & CEO

United States Beet Sugar Association

Jamison Cruce

Vice President of Government Relations

American Sugar Cane League

STATEMENT OF PURPOSE

The American Sugar Alliance is a national coalition of sugarbeet and sugarcane 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.

sugaralliance.org

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 nine farm bills (1981, 1985, 1990, 1996, 2002, 2008, 2014, 2018 and 2025).

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 (22 years) leading the first successful introduction of sugar produced from genetically engineered sugarbeets or sugar cane in the world. He is the 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, VA, with his wife, Terri, and three children, Christian, Lauren and Megan.

David Wasserman

Senior Editor and Elections Analyst, the Cook Political Report;
Political Analyst for NBC News

David Wasserman is Senior Editor & Elections Analyst for The Cook Political Report with Amy Walter, where he is responsible for analyzing U.S. House races and is recognized as one of the nation's top nonpartisan election forecasters. The Los Angeles Times has called David a "whip smart" and "scrupulously nonpartisan" analyst whose "numbers nerd-dom was foretold at a young age." In 2016, David drew praise for his accurate pre-election analysis, including his piece "How Trump Could Win the White House While Losing the Popular Vote," written two months before election day. In 2020, his forecast of Biden's win was correct in 49 of 50 states, missing only North Carolina. David has served as an analyst for the NBC News Election Night Decision Desk since 2008, and has also appeared on Fox News, CNN, C-SPAN and NPR. In May of 2024, David was awarded a Carnegie Fellowship to study ways to combat political polarization.

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.

Brandon Lipps
Co-Founder & Principal
Caprock Strategies

Brandon Lipps, J.D., is co-founder and principal of Caprock Strategies and a nationally recognized leader in food and nutrition policy. He advises organizations on federal policy, food systems and rural communities, drawing on extensive experience in government, agriculture and public affairs. Brandon previously served in the role of USDA Deputy Under Secretary for Food, Nutrition and Consumer Services, overseeing a \$100 billion portfolio that included SNAP, WIC and school meals, and helping lead development of the 2020 Dietary Guidelines. Prior to serving at USDA, Brandon served as Chief of Staff to the Chancellor and Director of Federal Affairs of the Texas Tech University System. Brandon previously served as Counsel and Senior Professional Staff for the U.S. House Committee on Agriculture during development and passage of the 2014 Farm Bill. He serves on the boards of Midwest Food Bank and World Food Program USA and is a frequent speaker on food access, public health and nutrition policy.

Zack Clark

Vice President of Government Affairs, American Sugarbeet Growers Association
Washington, DC

Zack Clark, a native of Norwich, Connecticut. Zack received a Bachelor of Arts degree in political science from the University of Connecticut and a master's degree in International Security Affairs from the National Defense University. He came to Washington, DC in 2008 where he worked for then-Senator Joseph I. Lieberman (I-CT) and then for Congressman Joe Courtney (D-CT-02), who served as a member of the House Agriculture Committee for the 2012-2014 Farm Bill process. Zack spent five years with the National Farmers Union where he focused on federal policy related to commodities, credit, tax, and labor issues. He arrived at American Sugarbeet Growers Association in 2019, serving as Director of Government Affairs and then as Vice President of Government Affairs. In 2026 the ASGA Board of Directors selected Zack to serve as the Executive Vice President and CEO of the association.

Zack lives in Washington, DC with his wife Heather and two sons Anson and August.

Rep. Shontel Brown (D-OH-11)

Vice Ranking Member on the Committee of Agriculture;
Ranking Member on the Subcommittee on Cybersecurity, Information Technology, and
Government Innovation, House Committee on Oversight and Accountability;
Select Committee on the Strategic Competition Between the United States and the Chinese
Communist Party

Congresswoman Shontel M. Brown is a relentless public servant who is committed to delivering results for the people of Ohio's Eleventh Congressional District. She was first elected to the House of Representatives in 2021 and was sworn in on November 4, 2021.

Congresswoman Brown's top priorities are securing federal funds for our region, defending the benefits her constituents rely on, and advancing legislation that helps working people in Ohio, of all backgrounds, live a better life. Congresswoman Brown is a proud member of the Congressional Black Caucus, and in office she has authored bills to close the racial health gap, strengthen anti-discrimination laws, and expand opportunity for Black Americans. In the 119th Congress, Congresswoman Brown is a member of the [House Agriculture Committee](#), where she proudly serves as Vice Ranking Member.

Additionally, Congresswoman Brown serves on the House Agriculture Committee's Subcommittees on General Farm Commodities, Risk Management, and Credit; and Nutrition and Foreign Agriculture.

She also serves on the [House Committee on Oversight and Reform](#), where she serves as Ranking Member on the Cybersecurity, Information Technology, and Government Innovation Subcommittee. Additionally, she serves on the [Select Committee on the Strategic Competition Between the United States and the Chinese Communist Party](#).

She is an active member of several Congressional caucuses, coalitions, and Task Forces. Some memberships include the Congressional Black Caucus, the New Democrat Coalition, the Congressional Progressive Caucus, the Democratic Women's Caucus, Pro-Choice Caucus, Congressional Heartland Caucus, Great Lakes Task Force, and Gun Violence Prevention Taskforce.

Across her career in public service, Congresswoman Brown has promised to always put the people first. She continues to keep this promise by speaking out and fighting for solutions on issues of importance to the people of Northeast Ohio. She consistently works to strengthen our public education system, improve the health of children and families, ensure that no American goes hungry, improve protections for Ohio workers, and address the poverty crisis that has plagued her district and others like it for far too long.

A proud, lifelong Clevelander, Congresswoman Brown has served the people of Northeast Ohio for more than a decade. She first entered public service in 2012, when she was elected as a Warrensville Heights city council member. In 2014, she was elected to represent the 9th district on the Cuyahoga County Council, one of the most diverse in the County, with constituents in the City of Cleveland, as well as inner- and outer-ring suburbs. As a County Council Member, she earned a reputation as a proven and unifying leader, drawing job-creating projects to the district, improving access to affordable health care, and supporting public education.

Before her election to public office, Congresswoman Brown worked in the private sector as a marketing professional. She also founded a small business, based in Northeast Ohio, that provides technology solutions to regional clients.

Congresswoman Brown currently resides in Warrensville Heights, Ohio.

Rob Johansson, Ph.D.
Director of Economics & Policy Analysis
American Sugar Alliance

Dr. Johansson is the Director of Economics & Policy Analysis for the American Sugar Alliance, representing American sugarbeet and sugarcane growers, processors, and refiners. Previously, Dr. Johansson worked in the U.S. government for 23 years. In the early 1990's, he was a Peace Corps aquaculture extension agent working with farmers in Zaire and Gabon; later as a government economist, he was a Senior Economist with the White House Council of Economic Advisers in the mid-2000's; and finally, he finished his government career as the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Chief Economist. There he was responsible for developing the first Trump Administration's programs for farmers affected by the trade war with China as well as the farm assistance program for the COVID disruption of ag markets.

Jeff Dobrydney
Senior Vice President, Head of Futures & Options
JSG Commodities

Jeff has been with JSG Commodities since 2005, when he started as an Assistant Trader. Born and raised in Milford, CT and a graduate from Jesuit schools Fordham University and Fairfield Prep, Jeff has solidified his role within the Sugar trading community covering both the USMCA and World futures markets which includes penning a daily report. He is now the Sr. Vice President of JSG and Heads the Futures & Options desk that executes trades for Sugar, Cocoa, Coffee and Grains for a wide array of clientele. Jeff also served as the President of the Sugar Club of New York and is a featured speaker at the annual Datagro conference in New York. A resident of Trumbull, Connecticut with his wife and two girls, Jeff also serves as President and Head Coach of the Connecticut Timberwolves, a 501(c)3 travel softball program and is the principal trumpet player of a local church.

Chris Bergin
Trader
CSC Sugar

Chris Bergin is a trader at CSC Sugar, with over 12 years of experience in the sugar market. He began his career as a corporate financial analyst at one of the company's liquid sugar refineries in Fairless Hills, Pennsylvania, before moving to the trading team at CSC's Connecticut headquarters in 2016. Chris manages the company's white refined sugar book and is actively involved in the flow of raw sugar to U.S. cane refineries. In his role, he works closely with domestic producers and end users, and provides market outlooks and hedging strategies to U.S. food manufacturers navigating the relationship between domestic sugar and global markets.

Patrick Chatenay
President
ProSunergy (UK) Ltd.

Patrick Chatenay has been involved with the sugar industry since 1985 when he joined Saint Louis Sucre, at that time the second-largest sugar and ethanol producer in France, as Director for Economic Analysis. In 1990, he was appointed to Saint Louis's Executive Board where he was in charge of strategic analysis, data processing and management accounting, and on which he served until he left the company in 2008. As part of his responsibilities for Saint Louis, he acted as Assistant Managing Director of Azucarera Ebro, the largest Spanish sugar producer, and as a board member of IANSA, the Chilean sugar producer and food processor. From 2003 to 2008, Patrick researched investment opportunities in the Brazilian sugar/alcohol industry for the Südzucker Group, following its acquisition of Saint Louis in 2000. In 2008, he founded ProSunergy, which provides strategic advice and implementation services for the world's sugar, renewable energy and bio-fuel industries. Clients include corporations, industry associations, governments and international multi-lateral institutions. Patrick is an independent non-executive director of MIWA Limited, which produces sugar in Kenya and Tanzania. He holds a Master's degree in econometrics and a B.A. in English from the University of Paris, a Diploma in Public Administration from the Political Science Institute of Paris and an MBA from Columbia University in New York.

Paul Schlagel

Director, Colorado Sugarbeet Growers Association &
American Sugarbeet Growers Association

Paul Schlagel grew up on his family's farm in Longmont, Colorado. Paul and his wife, Vicki, live on the family farm, where he and his son, Scott, farm together. Paul represents the fourth generation of Schlagels in the Longmont farming community. Paul's family has produced sugarbeets in Colorado for over one hundred years. He and Scott currently farm 1500 irrigated acres in Western Weld County and Eastern Boulder County. Their primary crops consist of sugarbeets, malt barley, corn, and alfalfa. Paul has been involved and continues to be involved in many agricultural related organizations. He serves on the American Sugarbeet Growers Board of Directors, Chairman of the ASGA Science and Innovation Committee and a board member of the Sugar Association. Paul is also on local boards of: Agfinity Coop, Colorado Sugarbeet Growers, FAIR (Farmers Alliance for Integrated Resources), and several irrigation ditch boards.

Ryan Weston

President & CEO, Florida Sugar Cane League;
Washington Representative, Rio Grande Valley Sugar Growers – Washington, DC

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 U.S. Sugar) 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 such as those held in Brussels, Singapore, Ho Chi Minh City and Geneva. He has worked with the House and Senate Leadership to ensure passage of several Farm Bills, including the 2014 Farm Bill during which Ryan worked to defeat five votes that would have altered the sugar program.

Ryan serves on the board 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, crop insurance, pesticides, 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 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.

The Honorable Stephen Vaden
Deputy Secretary
U.S. Department of Agriculture

Judge Stephen Alexander Vaden was appointed as the Deputy Secretary of the U.S. Department of Agriculture on July 7, 2025. Alongside Secretary Brooke L. Rollins, Deputy Secretary Vaden leads the Department's operations and implements policies that support America's food and farm systems. A native of Union City, Tennessee, Deputy Secretary Vaden brings expertise in agricultural policy, law, and rural development. Previously, he served as a judge on the U.S. Court of International Trade and as General Counsel of USDA. Throughout Deputy Secretary Vaden's time as General Counsel, he led successful Supreme Court litigation, advanced regulatory reform, and supported the implementation of the 2018 Farm Bill. He is a graduate of Yale Law School and Vanderbilt University. A public servant with strong agricultural roots, Deputy Secretary Vaden is committed to revitalizing rural America and ensuring an abundant, affordable, and resilient U.S. food supply.

Tom Sell
Co-Founder & Manager of Combest, Sell & Associates

Tom Sell is the GOP nominee for Congress in Texas' 19th Congressional District.

Tom is the founder and manager of Combest, Sell & Associates, a firm focused on advocating for U.S. farm and ranch families, Main Street businesses that depend upon agriculture, and rural America, including the American Sugar Alliance. Prior to founding CS&A, Tom served as Deputy Staff Director for the House Committee on Agriculture, where he was instrumental in crafting the 2002 Farm Bill and major improvements to crop insurance under the Agricultural Risk Protection Act of 2000.

He also served in the President George W. Bush Administration, including on the transition team in 2000.

Tom earned both his undergraduate degree in agricultural economics and his law degree at Texas Tech University. He is a member of the Texas State Bar and is active with the Davis College of Agriculture at Texas Tech.

Tom is married to his college sweetheart, Kyla, and they have four grown children — Noah, Luke, Daniel and Naomi. Noah is an officer in the United States Army and he and his wife, Avery, recently had a son, Micah James, making Tom and Kyla grandparents for the first time. Tom is actively engaged in his family farm and ranch alongside his 85-year old dad, George.

Luther Markwart
Executive Vice President & CEO
American Sugarbeet Growers Association
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Randy Green
Principal, Watson Green LLC
Consultant, Sweetener Users Association

Randy Green, the owner of Watson Green LLC, 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 several multi-year farm bills, as well as major legislation and regulations affecting derivatives, food safety, animal health and human nutrition.

Randy came to Washington in the 1980s to work for the late Representative Charles Stenholm (D-TX) and later served the late Senator Richard Lugar (R-IN.) on the staff of the Senate Agriculture Committee. With the exception of a stint 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 entered the private sector to represent agricultural and food industry clients at the firm now known as Watkinson Miller. Earlier in his career, he managed government relations for the American Soybean Association and was director of the Wheat Export Trade Education Center.

In 2013, Randy and Lisa Watson formed Watson Green LLC, a firm centered on food and agriculture policy and public affairs. With Lisa's retirement at the end of 2022, Randy continues to operate the company.

Randy and his wife of 41 years, Mary, have five grown children and four grandchildren.

Rob Johansson, Ph.D.
Director of Economics & Policy Analysis
American Sugar Alliance
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Carlann Unger
Economist
U.S. Department of Agriculture
Farm Production and Conservation Business Center

Carlann Unger is an economist for the U.S. Department of Agriculture where she covers sugar, wheat, and pulse crop markets for the Economic and Policy Analysis Division within the Farm Production and Conservation Business Center. She's held this position since 2022, providing economic and policy analysis support to Farm Service Agency programs and USDA leadership. Since starting her federal career in 2012, Carlann has served as an economist for many different government agencies, including the Department of Commerce and the Department of the Interior where she focused on economic development and Indigenous policy. She received both her bachelor's and master's degrees in economics from New Mexico State University. Carlann lives in Chicago with her husband and two boys.

Shawn Arita
Associate Research Professor and Associate Director
at the Agricultural Risk Policy Center
North Dakota State University

Shawn Arita is an Associate Research Professor and Associate Director at the Agricultural Risk Policy Center at North Dakota State University. Shawn directs research teams in global commodity markets, trade disruptions, and risk management and leads policy outreach and DC engagement with Federal, Congressional, and industry stakeholders: ensuring direct communication of agricultural policy economic analysis and research. His work bridges rigorous academic research with practical policy implementation, translating complex analyses into actionable insights for decision-makers across government and industry. Before joining NDSU, Shawn served as Senior Economist at the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Office of the Chief Economist, where he conducted economic analysis surrounding global commodity markets, trade policy, agricultural supply disruptions, input costs, and farm safety net. Additionally, Shawn provided model-based assessments for WTO trade dispute arbitration and evaluations of agricultural markets under trade agreements. Shawn previously served with the U.S. Trade Representative and, prior to that, was a research economist at the Economic Research Service.

Jennifer Cervantes
Vice President, Florida Sugar Cane League;
Washington Representative, Rio Grande Valley Sugar Growers

Jennifer Cervantes is the Vice President of the Florida Sugar Cane League and Washington Representative of the Rio Grande Valley Sugar Growers of Texas. She conducts educational briefings for members of Congress and staff on the positive contributions and necessary role that sugar cane farmers and processors have in their communities and with consumers, and how federal legislation and regulations impact the industry. Jennifer has provided written and oral testimony on Capitol Hill, as well as led issue briefings and negotiations for industry stakeholders with staff and high-level executives within the Executive Branch, including the White House, the U.S. Department of Agriculture, State Department, Office of U.S. Trade Representative, U.S. Department of Interior, and the International Boundary and Water Commission. Jennifer also serves as a member of the Agricultural Technical Advisory Committee (ATAC) for Trade in Sweeteners and Sweetener Products.

Jennifer received her B.B.A from St. Edward's University in her hometown of Austin, Texas. In 2001, after moving to the Washington, DC area, she began working at the Department of Agriculture. After a few months, she accepted a position in the White House Office of Presidential Personnel, working to recruit and recommend candidates to fill senior-level appointments within the federal government. She presented these recommendations to the President of the United States in Oval Office meetings. After several years, Jennifer returned to the Department of Agriculture, where she focused on the Department's management issues. She finished her time as Deputy Chief of Staff for the Secretary of Agriculture.

Srdzan Lazarevski
Supervisory Immigration Program Analyst
U.S. Department of Labor

Srdzan (Serge) Lazarevski currently serves as one of five H-2A Supervisors for the Office of Foreign Labor Certification (OFLC). He oversees the case processing mainly focusing on the Midwestern Region of the U.S. on the H-2A program. Mr. Lazarevski currently resides in Chicago, IL and is married and has two sons, ages eleven and seven. Mr. Lazarevski has been with OFLC for 15 years and has worked on various OFLC programs, but mainly H-2A.

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, VA, and a graduate of James Madison University.

Trevor White
Republican Professional Staff
House Agriculture Committee

Trevor White serves as Policy Director on the House Committee on Agriculture for Chairman Glenn ‘GT’ Thompson (PA-15). Prior to this role he was Senior Professional Staff handling the commodity policy, crop insurance, disaster aid, credit, and agricultural labor portfolios for Chairman Thompson and his predecessor Chairman K. Michael Conaway (TX-11). Trevor was raised on a cotton farm in New Home, Texas. He holds degrees in economics from Texas Tech University and Johns Hopkins University.

Jamison Cruce
Vice President of Government Relations
American Sugar Cane League

Jamison Cruce is the Vice President of Government Relations for the American Sugar Cane League, representing Louisiana's sugarcane growers and processors in Washington, D.C., and is the president of Cruce Capitol Consulting LLC. Most recently, Cruce led government affairs for the USA Rice Federation and previously worked for the American Farm Bureau Federation and the Georgia Peanut Commission. A native of Suches, Georgia, he holds a Bachelor of Science degree in agriculture from the University of Georgia and a Master of Business Administration degree from Louisiana State University Shreveport.

Cruce and his wife, Elise, reside in Alexandria, Virginia, with their sons, Walker and Sam Henry.

Coleman Garrison
Republican Senior Professional Staff
Senate Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition and Forestry

Coleman Garrison works for Chairman Boozman on the Senate Agriculture Committee as Senior Professional Staff handling the conservation and forestry portfolios. He joined the committee in 2022 after overseeing government and public affairs for the Irrigation Association and the National Association of Conservation Districts. In addition to his extensive experience managing conservation and forestry policy for industry and non-profit groups, Garrison is a seasoned Hill veteran with years of service as a legislative staffer in the U.S. House of Representatives including for former Rep. Randy Neugebauer (R-TX), Vice-Chair of the House Agriculture Committee during the 2014 Farm Bill. A native of Texas, Garrison attended Texas Tech University and is an avid supporter of the Red Raiders.

Kyle Varner
Democratic Senior Professional Staff
Senate Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition and Forestry

Kyle Varner is a Senior Professional Staff member for Ranking Member Amy Klobuchar on the U.S. Senate Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition, and Forestry where he handles agricultural trade and credit policy. He has served on the Committee since 2013 and worked on the development of the 2014 and 2018 Farm Bills. Kyle grew up on his family's diversified row crop and livestock farm in central Michigan and earned his bachelor's degree from Michigan State University where he focused on agriculture and natural resource policy.

Harlea Hoelscher
Republican Professional Staff
House Agriculture Committee

Harlea Hoelscher has been with the U.S. House Committee on Agriculture for over three years, where she serves as a Professional Staff Member for Chairman Glenn “G.T.” Thompson (R-PA). In this role, she runs point on all commodity policy, crop insurance, credit, and disaster assistance issues. Prior to her time on Capitol Hill, Harlea worked under Dr. Joe Outlaw and Dr. Bart Fischer as a graduate research assistant at the Agricultural and Food Policy Center at Texas A&M University. Hoelscher received a B.S. in Agricultural Economics and Agricultural Communications and Journalism as well as an M.S. in Agricultural Economics, all from Texas A&M University. Originally from Whitharral, Texas, Harlea resides in Washington D.C.

Clark Ogilvie
Democratic Special Counsel
House Agriculture Committee

Clark Ogilvie is Deputy Staff Director of the Democratic staff of the House Committee on Agriculture. He returned to the Committee in May 2023. This is his third time on the Committee having served from 2005—2014 and from 2018—2019. During those previous times, 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 Commodity Futures Trading Commission (CFTC) and two years as General Counsel for the Farm Credit Administration (FCA). He has a law degree from George Washington University and a B.A. from Rhodes College.

Cassie Bladow
President & CEO
U.S. Beet Sugar Association

Cassie Bladow is President & CEO 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 7 manufacturers of beet sugar in the U.S., which operate 19 processing facilities. She previously served the association as director of government affairs, then vice president. She served as Chair of the industry-wide American Sugar Alliance in 2024.

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.

Tyler Hardy
Deputy Chief of Staff/Senior Advisor
Office of Senator John Hoeven (R-ND)

Tyler Hardy serves as Deputy Chief of Staff & Senior Advisor to Senator John Hoeven (R-ND), Chairman of the Senate Appropriations Subcommittee on Agriculture, and a senior member of the Senate Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition, and Forestry. In this role, he manages the Senator's legislative agenda across appropriations, financial services, tax, trade, and transportation policy.

Tyler is focused on data-driven solutions to complex policy challenges and has led the development and enactment of significant legislation on agricultural taxation, agribusiness banking, rural energy development, and rural transportation. Over more than a decade in the public and private sectors, he has worked on major initiatives including annual appropriations bills, the Working Families Tax Cuts Act, the FAA Reauthorization Act, the Ocean Shipping Reform Act, the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act, the CARES Act, the Agriculture Improvement Act, and the Tax Cuts and Jobs Act. An Aviation enthusiast, he regularly serves as a guest lecturer on Aviation Policy at the John D. Odegard School of Aerospace Sciences at the University of North Dakota.

A native of Washington State, Tyler earned a Bachelor of Arts in Political Science from the University of North Dakota. He lives in Leesburg, Virginia with his wife and son.

Justin Benavidez, Ph.D.
Chief Economist
U.S. Department of Agriculture

Dr. Benavidez is the Chief Economist for USDA. He joined the Office of the Chief Economist in January 2026. In this role, Dr. Benavidez leads OCE's team in their mission to ensure USDA's policies and programs are informed by sound, data-driven economic research in support of America's farmers, ranchers, and rural communities.

Prior to joining OCE, Dr. Benavidez served as the Chief Economist for the U.S. House Committee on Agriculture, majority staff. He worked closely with the Chairman, members of the Committee, and their staff on developing policy, estimating the economic impacts and costs of those policies, and advising on agricultural production and economics.

Prior to his tenure with the Committee, Dr. Benavidez was an Extension Assistant Professor in the Texas A&M AgriLife Extension system, stationed in the Amarillo office serving the Texas Panhandle.

Benavidez received his BS, MS, and PhD in Agricultural Economics from Texas A&M University studying production economics and agricultural policy. Justin is originally from Tulia, Texas.

Rob Johansson, Ph.D.
Director of Economics & Policy Analysis
American Sugar Alliance
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