Farmers urged to take part in workshop to develop advances in plastics, polymers

Brainstorm session slated in Pittsburg Feb. 23-25

PITTSBURG, Kan. – Scientists and extension agents are hoping to rally farmers to southeast Kansas in late February for a tell-all session about the challenges on America’s farms.

Their hope: Identify problems that polymer scientists – those that work on making plastics – can work on to create innovative farm solutions that can be addressed through advances in plastics and polymers.


More information, including an agenda and free registration, is available online.

“For one day, polymer scientists just listen and ask questions to producers, including livestock, crop and specialty crop growers; and those from industry and the service sector,” said Dale Helwig, an agricultural agent with K-State Research and Extension’s office in Cherokee County.

Tim Dawsey, the executive director of the Kansas Polymer Research Center at Pittsburg State University, said some examples of topics that may be discussed include recyclable containers for pesticides and other products; water efficiency; herbicide, pesticide and fertilizer migration; agricultural mulches; using waste as feedstock; and more.

“There will be many other unanticipated learnings, I am certain,” Dawsey said. “Ultimately, we would like to build on the strong bio-based competence at the KPRC in developing materials from agricultural products and wastes.”

The workshop is co-hosted by Pittsburg State University, K-State Research and Extension, Virginia Tech, Arizona State University, the Center for Environmentally Beneficial Catalysis and the Kansas Polymer Research Center.
“By partnering with some of the leading research institutions in the nation, there is increased likelihood of finding solutions and helping producers across the nation, while also attracting polymer and plastics manufacturing businesses into the region,” Dawsey said.

Helwig said he and others from the agriculture sector are involved to help bridge the gap between producers and scientists. He said eight extension agents and three specialists from K-State Research and Extension are expected to participate.

“Scientists don’t always understand producer’s lingo, and may have no background in agriculture at all,” Helwig said. “That’s where K-State can play a role...helping to draw out problems that producers are having. Many times, producers just think (their challenges) are a way of life, whereas a polymer scientist wonder why it has to be that way.”

Helwig added that K-State’s relationship with the state’s producers, and the university’s connection to science, “is a perfect match.”

“We also have a passion for wanting the best for our farmers, ranchers and communities,” he said. “If solutions can be identified, then the goal is to develop that industry in and around southeast Kansas to service the solution. In that sense, this is also about economic development.”

-30-

FOR PRINT PUBLICATIONS: Links used in this story
F.A.R.M.S. ’22 (Information and registration), www.pittstate.edu/FARMS

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