



\*\* This news release from K-State Research and Extension is available online at <https://ksre-learn.com/taps-names-winners-2025>

Note to editors: A photo to accompany this story is at <https://www.flickr.com/photos/ksrecomm/54318676377>

To acquire photos of local winners, please contact Kelsey Stremel, [stremelk@ksu.edu](mailto:stremelk@ksu.edu)

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### **Farmers test innovative water-saving strategies in Kansas competition**

Organizers hail success of effort to conserve water while helping farmers maintain profits

*By Kelsey Stremel, K-State Research and Extension news*

HAYS, Kan. – Organizers of a Kansas farm competition that promotes sustainable farm resource management are celebrating a successful year, highlighting its role in helping farmers adopt innovative strategies to conserve water while maintaining profitability.

The announcement comes on the heels of Kansas Gov. Laura Kelly's recent comments on the importance of water to rural economies.

"Without water, the agricultural industry that fuels our economy and sustains our rural way of life cannot survive," said Kelly in her recent State of the State address.

Organizers say Kelly's words are a strong testimony for a multi-state program known simply as TAPS or Testing Ag Performance Solutions, an innovative, producer-oriented competition that challenges farmers to implement new crop-growing technologies that save water while maintaining their profits.

According to Daran Rudnick, director of sustainable irrigation at Kansas State University, the TAPS program in Kansas is unlike traditional yield-focused competitions in that it offers a unique experimental environment at K-State Research and Extension's Western Kansas Research-Extension Centers.

"This exchange of ideas ensures that the competition's outcomes are rooted in real challenges, and helps drive meaningful progress in efficiency, profitability and sustainability," Rudnick said.

He said the program's nearly 100 participants made key decisions on technology, hybrids, planting dates, irrigation, nitrogen, crop insurance, and marketing strategies.

"This blend of virtual and real-world competition gives farmers the chance to test their approaches, experiment with innovative technologies, and gain insights into what drives long-term farm profitability and sustainability," he said.

In January, TAPS presented first-year awards to winning water-saving teams, as well as those who harvested the most successful crop. By category, the winners include:

**Most Economically Profitable Under Q-Stable (which relates to annual pumping rates of water) – Russ Martin (Thomas County), Matthew Murrow (Gove County), Ward Taylor (Wallace County) and Jay Ostmeyer (Riley County)**

Despite a 36% rainfall deficit in western Kansas, the team achieved a profitability of \$38.15 per acre. Their strategic financial management, including the use of futures and spot cash contracts, allowed them to succeed in an exceptionally dry year, showcasing the power of innovation and resource efficiency.

**Greatest Grain Yield and Most Economically Profitable – Kent and Aaron Higerd (Thomas County)**

The father-son duo was recognized for their grain yield of 238 bushels per acre, and their use of timely forward and spot cash contracts for an average price sold of \$4.44 per bushel.

**Highest Input Use Efficiency – Garret Smith, Kel Grafel, Nick Higgason, and Mike Barton (Barton County)**

The team's award-winning results emphasize the power of optimizing the use of resources, as they achieved 207 bushels per acre with minimized input usage.

"These experiences with TAPS have been invaluable, testing various strategies while using state-of-the-art tools," said Martin, the Thomas County farmer who brought home one of this year's cash awards. "It's not just about making decisions on the fly; TAPS offers a platform to try different approaches, learn from other teams, and conserve water while maintaining positive cash flow."

Susan Metzger, director of the Kansas Water Institute, said the success of the inaugural competition sets the stage for continued growth, with TAPS leading the charge in addressing the pressing challenges of food and water security, both in Kansas and across the globe.

"TAPS emphasizes interdisciplinary collaboration, integrating agronomy, engineering, economics and social sciences," Metzger said. "The program fosters a community of innovation, where participants can learn from each other and share insights that will shape the future of agriculture."

Organizers said K-State is now accepting sign-ups for the 2025 TAPS program, featuring three competitions designed to explore decision-making in production agriculture in Colby and Garden City.

For more information about the Kansas TAPS program or to register for the 2025 competition, visit <https://www.k-state.edu/taps>, or contact Renee Tuttle, K-State Research and Extension irrigation associate at [rstuttle@ksu.edu](mailto:rstuttle@ksu.edu), or 620-805-9045.

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