

Cameron Bradshaw

This is Kansas Profile. I'm Ron Wilson, director of the Huck Boyd National Institute for Rural Development at Kansas State University.

Let's go to Washington, DC, to the national office of the U.S. Department of Agriculture where a top administrator is conferring with African-American farmers from across the nation. Among those in this discussion are a father and son from rural Kansas. It's today's Kansas Profile.

Cameron Bradshaw is a student at Kansas State University. In 2014, he and his father were a part of this discussion at USDA.

The Bradshaw family farm is located in Hodgeman County, Kansas. Rod and Arzella Bradshaw farm 2500 acres, including 1100 acres of wheat, and operate a cow-calf herd. They have three children, the youngest of whom is Cameron.

The family has deep roots in rural Kansas. "Some of the ground we farm has been in the family for 130 years," Cameron said.

As a student at Jetmore High School, Cameron got involved in agricultural education classes and FFA. He especially enjoyed livestock judging. Cameron served as a chapter FFA officer, built up a registered Angus cowherd of his own, and competed at the national land judging contest. He was even named District FFA Star Farmer for the southwestern district of Kansas.

Cameron came to K-State and majored in agriculture. He received a college scholarship from the National Black Farmers Association, which has played a key role in fighting discrimination facing African-American farmers.

The National Black Farmers Association was formed in 1995 in response to discriminatory policies by USDA's local Farmers Home Administration offices. The association was founded by Dr. John Boyd, a fourth-generation farmer near Baskerville, Virginia, who experienced racial discrimination when seeking support from USDA. Many other examples were found around the nation where African-American farmers were denied loans while similarly situated white farmers received them.

Unfortunately, Cameron Bradshaw's family encountered such discrimination as well. "My grandfather and even my father experienced discrimination while trying to work with USDA," Cameron said. Rod Bradshaw connected with John Boyd and got involved with the National Black Farmers Association.

This association has a strong presence in Washington DC advocating for black farmers. In 2010, the USDA and Department of Justice settled a discrimination lawsuit which had been filed by a number of black farmers. The National Black Farmers Association continues to work on behalf of these producers in various ways. In 2014, Cameron Bradshaw accompanied his father Rod to Washington DC to meet with a top USDA administrator about the challenges facing black farmers.

With scholarship support from the National Black Farmers Association, Cameron Bradshaw came to K-State in fall 2015. He joined the Block & Bridle club and later joined another student organization called MANRRS – Minorities in Agriculture, Natural Resources and Related Sciences. The K-State MANRRS chapter was founded with Dr. Zelia Wiley as advisor after Zelia became Assistant Dean for Diversity in the K-State College of Agriculture. In 2007-8, Zelia served as National President of MANRRS. In 2016, she was named Interim Associate Provost for Diversity for the entire university.

After one year at K-State, Cameron Bradshaw was elected as the Ag Student Council representative for the MANRRS chapter.

What has his experience been like as a minority at K-State? “There are very few minorities in my ag classes, but I’m used to it,” Cameron said. “We’re the only minority family that still farms around Jetmore,” he said. As for the adjustment from high school to college, Cameron found he was able to adjust academically and socially.

“The biggest change was in the size of my classes,” Cameron said. “There were 22 in my graduating class, and here I don’t have any classes smaller than 80 people. My biggest class is sociology which has hundreds of students in it,” he said.

Of all these students, Cameron is surely the only one who has met personally with top USDA administrators. That’s quite a compliment for someone who comes from a rural community such as Jetmore, population 933 people. Now, that’s rural.

It’s time to leave Washington DC, where Cameron and his father Rod met with top officials at USDA. We commend Cameron Bradshaw, Rod Bradshaw, and all those involved with MANRRS and the National Black Farmers Association for making a difference with involvement and advocacy.

For the Huck Boyd National Institute for Rural Development, this is Ron Wilson with Kansas Profile.