

North Central Region New Administrator's Bootcamp

July 28-30, 2026

Speakers and Instructors

Rob Anderson serves as Manager of Government Relations for Michigan Farm Bureau, leading the organization's state legislative and regulatory advocacy efforts. A Hope College graduate and longtime public policy professional, Anderson has more than 35 years of experience with Michigan Farm Bureau, including leadership roles in membership services, legislative affairs, and government relations. He is widely respected for his expertise in agricultural policy and his work advancing the interests of Michigan farmers.

Sheila Burkhardt is the Chief Corporate Affairs Officer for the Michigan Milk Producers Association. Established in 1916, MMPA is the 10th largest U.S. dairy farmer-owned cooperative serving members in Michigan, Ohio, Indiana and Wisconsin. Sheila was raised on a family dairy farm in Kent County and has worked with MMPA for over 30 years. In her role, she is responsible for government, member and industry relations activities for MMPA. Sheila also serves on the Michigan Dairy Memorial and Scholarship Foundation, Michigan Youth Livestock and Scholarship Fund and the Michigan Livestock Expo Board of Directors. She is past President and current Trustee of the Michigan 4-H Foundation Board of Trustees.

Joe Cramer is Executive Director of the Michigan Bean Commission, where he leads efforts to support research, promotion, and market development for Michigan's dry bean industry. An MSU College of Agriculture and Natural Resources graduate, Cramer brings nearly 40 years of agricultural business and leadership experience, including 27 years with Star of the West Milling Company. He is widely recognized for his advocacy on behalf of Michigan bean growers and for fostering strong partnerships between industry and Michigan State University. He is deeply connected to MSU Extension and AgBioResearch and is a current member of the MSU Extension and AgBioResearch State Advisory Council.

Patrick Cudney was appointed the director of government and stakeholder relations for Michigan State University's College of Agriculture and Natural Resources (CANR), MSU AgBioResearch and MSU Extension on November 15, 2021. Prior to this, Cudney served as associate director for operations of MSU Extension since September 1, 2014.

Jared Evert is a Financial & Program Data Analyst at UNL where he specializes in fiscal management, data governance, and systems-based analytics that support strategic planning across a complex, multi-fund environment. Jared has a Business Degree and a Master's in Agricultural Economics, both from UNL, where he has 17 years of service.

Gregg Hadley is the Assistant Vice President and Director for Extension at Kansas State University. He also serves as the director's Chair of the North Central Cooperative Extension Association and is a voting member of the Extension Committee on Organization and Policy.

Chadwick Higgins, PhD, Vice Chancellor for Extension and Engagement, University of Missouri Chief Engagement Officer, UM System

Dr. Higgins provides leadership for statewide extension and continuing education efforts, as well as UM System-wide engagement, through its campus and statewide network of county offices and specialists in all 114 Missouri counties and the City of St. Louis.

Shibu Jose serves as the associate dean for research in the College of Agriculture Food and Natural Resources at the University of Missouri and as the director of the Missouri Agricultural Experiment Station.

Lisa Kaslon is the Professional Development Coordinator for Nebraska Extension. As Professional Development Coordinator her role is to: 1) foster an organizational culture dedicated to regular, high-value professional growth; 2) identify, create and implement contemporary professional growth offerings; and 3) organize and coordinate professional and personal skill development programs. She is certified as a facilitator for the 7 Habits of Highly Effective People, the 7 Habits of Highly Effective Teens, the 5 Choices of Extraordinary Productivity, The Trust Edge Experience, Talent Dynamics and Real Colors.

Veronica Law is the HR Director at the College of Agricultural and Life Sciences, University of Wisconsin-Madison. She has 27 years of professional HR experience in the public and higher education sector managing HR functions and strategic initiatives in the areas of employment relations, recruitment, compensation, and performance management.

Troy Runge became interim dean of University of Wisconsin–Madison’s College of Agricultural and Life Sciences (CALS) in July 2026. Prior to that, he served as CALS associate dean for research and extension. In those joint roles, he fostered a robust research environment and ensured compliance with funding agency requirements, animal care and use regulations, biosafety standards, intellectual property policies, and the responsible conduct of research. A professor of biological systems engineering, Runge’s research focuses on biobased products and bioprocessing systems.

Jean Schueller has been with Michigan State University Extension for 15 years, serving as Budget Director since 2014. In this role, she provides strategic leadership in budgeting, financial planning, and resource management, helping ensure the responsible stewardship of organizational resources and long-term financial sustainability.

Robin Shepard is the executive director for the North Central Cooperative Extension Association (NCCEA), an organization comprised of 12 universities from 12 states. In this capacity he works directly with Cooperative Extension deans and directors to support multi-state programming across the upper Midwest region of the United States. His work also involves representing member universities at the federal level with partners and policymakers.

Matt Smego is Senior Director of Policy for Michigan Corn, where he oversees state and federal advocacy efforts on behalf of Michigan's corn growers. A Michigan State University graduate and lifelong agricultural advocate, Smego brings more than 25 years of experience in agricultural policy and stakeholder engagement, including leadership roles with the Michigan Farm Bureau. Raised on his family's farm in Cass County, he is widely recognized for his work advancing agricultural and environmental policy in Michigan

Dr. George W. Smith is the Director AgBioResearch, Senior Associate Dean for Research for the College of Agriculture and Natural Resources, and Professor of Animal Science at MSU.

Dr. Smith is responsible for strategic direction and administrative oversight for AgBioResearch, whose university-wide research mission is linked directly to promoting dynamic solutions for food systems and the environment in Michigan and beyond.

Ben Steffen farms in the southeast corner of Nebraska producing corn, soybeans, wheat, and hay. Ben is a long-term beneficiary of and advocate for Land Grant Universities, currently serving on the national Executive Committee for the Council for Agricultural Research, Extension, and Teaching and Chair of the North Central Region.

Dr. Jeanette Thurston is Executive Director of agInnovation North Central, where she advances collaboration and strategic initiatives supporting agricultural research and the LGU mission. Previously, she held leadership positions at Kansas State University and USDA-NIFA. Also, as a former USDA-ARS research microbiologist, she has over 20 years of experience in research, higher education, and science policy and leadership.

Dr. Quentin R. Tyler serves as Director of Michigan State University Extension and Senior Associate Dean for Outreach and Engagement at Michigan State University, positions he has held since 2021. He provides strategic leadership for MSU Extension's statewide programs, more than 700 faculty and staff, and a budget exceeding \$110 million, advancing the university's land-grant mission through research-based education and community engagement.

Mary Weinzwieg has been with Michigan State University for 40 years, reaching this milestone in March 2026. She has served as the Budget Director for AgBioResearch, the Agricultural Experiment Station, for the past 12 years. As a member of the leadership team, she provides oversight of financial planning, budgeting, resource allocation and organizational management.