



State Auditor & Inspector Cindy Byrd

June 2021



AUDITOR'S CORNER – *On This Independence Day*

The framers of our *Declaration of Independence* believed so strongly that rights do not come from man they boldly proclaimed “*We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.*”

No king, no tyrant, no dictator, no potentate, no czar – no man bestows rights on other men.

These individuals of tremendous foresight also wrote, “*That to secure these rights, Governments are instituted among Men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed.*”

Our government is deliberately limited, not authoritative, not overriding and we sought to create a government that is, in the words of President Abraham Lincoln “*of the people, by the people, for the people.*”

At the heart of the American experience is freedom. In the soul of every American is the yearning to be free. It doesn't matter whether politicians believe we have the ability to make decisions on our own.

The signers of the *Declaration of Independence* knew the freedom of the people to determine their own fate was crucial to self-governance.

Every July 4th, we honor the signers of the *Declaration of Independence* and the men and women who, for 245 years, shed the blood of patriots to ensure those very freedoms. Enshrined in our hearts are the sacrifices of so many to preserve a nation unlike any other.

America is a land of innovation, entrepreneurship, and equality of opportunity. It is a land where the poorest among us can exceed beyond their wildest dreams. It is a nation that stills burns as a bright beacon to other nations and people seeking liberty.

No nation or form of government is without its flaws. We stumble. We make mistakes. We disappoint ourselves. We're human.

It is because of that humanity that we turn to our Creator to guide us – not divide us. It is because of that humanity that our founders knew we couldn't do it alone. It is because of that humanity that we have faith in something greater than ourselves.

That faith and our freedoms are the basis of American exceptionalism. It isn't because we're better. It's because we believe in something better for all.

I pray this Independence Day provides you the occasion to recognize the blessings we share, the opportunities we enjoy, and the similarities that make us the United States of America – a constitutional republic in which our leaders are elected democratically and whose power is constitutionally limited.

We the people declared our independence from tyranny and created a nation unparalleled in human history. Let Freedom Ring!



Agritourism – Growing in Popularity

Oklahomans have long enjoyed homemade brew, wine, jams and jelly, and other things our forefathers once required to survive.

The onset of restaurants, grocery stores, liquor stores, and other retail establishments long-ago replaced these DIY skills. Tradition, like farming, has been generational in Oklahoma and is regaining popularity today.

A few decades ago, making your own adult beverages became a nationwide fad and kits, recipes, and restaurants began to spring up offering their own unique blends.

Legislative changes have encouraged breweries and wineries to participate in state commerce and many Oklahomans have entered the marketplace by establishing agritourism businesses to sell their products from at-home storefronts to your local grocer.

Overall, agriculture has always been a mainstay of the state's economy. **Feeding the Economy's 2021 Economic Impact Report** states agriculture in Oklahoma accounts for:

- 536,275 jobs
- \$6.6 billion in taxes
- \$20.7 billion in wages
- \$526.3 million in exports
- \$78.3 billion in output

According to the report, the methodology includes food scientists, grocers, and truck drivers in food manufacturing, processing, and storage facilities.

The taxes are broken down as:

- Federal -- \$4,060,225,500
- State -- \$2,583,216,500

According to the US Bureau of Economic Analysis, Agriculture accounts for 2.2% of Oklahoma's Gross State Product and includes establishments primarily engaged in growing crops, raising animals, harvesting timber, harvesting fish and other animals from a farm, ranch, or their natural habitats.

Like every other industry, COVID negatively impacted the business of agriculture – which includes everything in the farm-to-fork group (crops, beef, pork, poultry, forestry, fishing, hunting, manufacturing, processing, and other agribusinesses) and, while much of the work at the local level never stopped, it took beef, pork, and poultry production facilities a little longer to return to a semblance of pre-COVID normal.



Meanwhile, the entrepreneurial spirit remains alive and well in Oklahoma and Agritourism is benefitting as a result.

In Oklahoma, Agritourism revolves around a wide range of activities including:

- Christmas Trees
- Country Stays
- Farm/Ranch Attractions
- Farm-to-Table
- Farmers Markets
- Fiber
- Guest Ranches
- Horticulture
- Hunting
- Mazes
- Petting Farms
- Pumpkin Picking
- Teachable Moments
- Trail Riding
- U-Pick
- Vineyards/Wineries
- Weddings

Although you don't have to register your agritourism business with the Oklahoma Department of Agriculture, Agritourism Coordinator Micaela Danker says it's a good idea.

"We are constantly adding new farms and ranches into the program," Danker said. "There are now 60 breweries and we'll soon be launching the Oklahoma Craft Beer Trail. Be on the lookout for the map and directory of all breweries in the state and follow agritourism on Facebook."

Along with the soon-to-be-announced Craft Beer Trail, visitors to the [Oklahoma Agritourism](#) website can also find a map to Oklahoma Wine Trails and delicious Jelly-Making Trails.



The type of wine you prefer may well determine which part of the state you visit.

To the Northeast, you'll find a selection of fine, delicious white wines all featuring Oklahoma grapes. A *Rosé* is found among six wineries in Oklahoma and Seminole counties.

If your palate likes a variety, perhaps a journey down Route 66 to Stroud to enjoy a tasting in the historic Catholic Church overlooking the Stable Ridge vineyards or visit Sparks Vineyard & Winery with its 80 acres of grapes and eight different varieties of wine.

You'll find more than 30 wineries in the state, many with onsite vineyards, overnight lodging, a gift shop, and restaurant. One might make an ideal location for your wedding.

The Oklahoma Jelly Making Trails provide a hands-on experience for the more adventurous. Whether you stroll through orchards to pick fruit direct from the tree or try your hand in thickets of bushes for sweet and wild berries, you'll find just what you need to make your own delicious jams and jellies.

If you prefer to skip the initial work, you'll find already picked, delicious produce to make your favorite jam or jelly.

The Oklahoma Agritourism site provides a jelly making guide as well as a map with six Jelly-Making Trails to get the produce to make a sticky sweet jar of rich Oklahoma jelly for your family or friends.



It really isn't possible to mention every agritourism business in this one article so be sure to visit the Oklahoma Agritourism website for more information on restful, educational, and entertaining venues designed to connect Oklahomans with our state's natural resources for a daytrip or weekend getaway.

Meet Agriculture Secretary Blayne Arthur



A native Oklahoman, Governor Kevin Stitt's choice for Secretary of Agriculture grew up in Chickasha working with her family raising horses, cattle, wheat, alfalfa, and soybeans as part of the rural fabric of Grady County. It's easy to see that agriculture formed an early foundation from which Blayne Arthur would never really stray.

Secretary Arthur graduated from Oklahoma State University in 2004 with a bachelor's degree in Agricultural Economics and traveled the state on behalf of Rural Enterprises performing an integral role for small-business financing.

She previously served under two state Secretaries of Agriculture joining the Oklahoma Department of Agriculture, Food and Forestry in 2009 working for Secretary Terry Peach.

She would serve as Deputy Commissioner of Agriculture for Secretary Jim Reese until 2016 when she left to become Executive Director for the Oklahoma 4-H Foundation until being sworn in on January 14, 2019 as the state's first female Secretary of Agriculture.

Among her roles as Secretary is serving as chief advisor to Governor Stitt on policy development and implementation related to agricultural, forestry and food issues.

In an article for [Metro Family Magazine](#), Arthur discussed her vision to create new income opportunities for agriculture producers and rural Oklahomans. She addressed the positive impact of finding new markets to help level out the often-extreme uncertainties farmers and ranchers face from weather to commodity prices, population decline, and trade issues and is realistic that it will take time to realize her vision.



“State government is a big boat that is hard to turn,” Arthur told Metro Family. “There are reasons we have a lot of checks and balances in state government, but you see this end goal you want to get to and the hurdles are a little more difficult to navigate than you hoped they would be.”

The online magazine shared that Arthur remains hopeful in the momentum behind positioning Oklahoma as a top 10 state in agriculture and notes she's grateful to have a front row seat.

Arthur and her husband Jarrod have two children who, like their parents, begin each day taking care of the livestock and tending to their needs. It's this type of devotion to “stay with it until the job is done” that Arthur says is one of her favorite lessons.

Arthur sits on the State Board of Agriculture and currently serves as the Animal Ag Committee Chair for the National Association of State Departments of Agriculture and Secretary/Treasurer for Food Export Midwest.

She now resides in Payne County where the family raises show cattle for 4-H and FFA and her children enjoy showing both cattle and horses.

