



## 2026 Agricultural & Food Law Policy Briefing Speaker Biographies

**Ken Barbic** is a leading strategist in food, agriculture, and trade policy, leveraging extensive political and policy expertise to guide executive decision-making. At Invariant, he advises business and association leaders on navigating complex, cross-partisan policy challenges, mitigating risk, and positioning for long-term success, drawing on deep relationships across Capitol Hill and prior administrations. Over the past two decades, Barbic has held senior roles across government, trade associations, and industry, including serving as Assistant Secretary for Congressional Relations at the U.S. Department of Agriculture during the first Trump Administration, as well as positions with Farmer’s Business Network, the Western Growers Association, the Office of the U.S. Trade Representative, and the House Ways and Means Subcommittee on Trade.

**Mikayla Bodey** currently serves as the Policy Director for the U.S. Senate Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition, and Forestry under Ranking Member Amy Klobuchar (D-MN). Mikayla previously led the Committee’s work on rural economic development and energy issues for former Chairwoman Debbie Stabenow (D-MI). Prior to joining the Committee, Mikayla served as the Senior Legislative Assistant for Rep. Angie Craig (D-MN-02) and a Legislative Aide to former Senator Claire McCaskill (D-MO). She earned her Bachelor of Arts in Public Management, Leadership, and Policy from the John Glenn College of Public Affairs at The Ohio State University. Mikayla grew up on her family farm in Champaign County, Ohio and currently resides in Washington, D.C.

**Parish Braden** is the Staff Director of the House Committee on Agriculture for Chairman Glenn Thompson of Pennsylvania, a position he’s held since 2021. Prior to the House Agriculture Committee, Parish served as staff director and deputy staff director on the House Committee on Natural Resources for then-Chairman Rob Bishop of Utah. Parish has served in roles on and off Capitol Hill since 2005, including at the Republican National Committee. He began his career as a legislative assistant for Maryland’s 1<sup>st</sup> Congressional District, which includes the Eastern Shore, where he was born and raised. Parish lives in Arlington, Va. with his wife and two children.

**Fitzhugh Elder IV** serves as Staff Director, United States Senate Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition, and Forestry. Prior to that role, Mr. Elder served as Staff Director for the Senate Committee on Rules and Administration. He has nearly two decades of experience in Senate service, including as Staff Director for the Joint Congressional Committee on Inaugural Ceremonies; Deputy Staff Director for the Senate Committee on Appropriations; Republican clerk for the Senate Committee on Appropriations Subcommittee on Agriculture, Rural Development, Food and Drug Administration, and Related Agencies; and in the office of former Senator Robert Bennett (R-UT).

**Ted McKinney** serves as the Chief Executive Officer of NASDA, the National Association of State Departments of Agriculture, a position to which he was named in September 2021. Prior to NASDA, he was also the first U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) Under Secretary for Trade and Foreign Agricultural Affairs from 2017-2021. In that role, Under Secretary McKinney led the development and implementation of the Department’s trade policy, oversaw and facilitated foreign market access, and promoted opportunities for U.S. agriculture through various trade programs and high-level government negotiations. He also oversaw the U.S. Codex Alimentarius staff and functions. McKinney grew up on a family grain and livestock farm in Tipton, Indiana, and was a 10-year 4-H member and an Indiana State FFA Officer. He graduated from Purdue University with a B.S. degree in Agricultural Economics in 1981, at which time he received the G.A. Ross Award as the outstanding University senior male graduate. In 2002, he was named a Purdue Agriculture Distinguished Alumnus and, in 2004, received an FFA Honorary American degree. He has also received the Sagamore of the Wabash Award from Indiana Governors Pence and Holcomb. He and his wife, Julie, have three children and six grandchildren, and reside in Alexandria, Virginia.

**Harrison M. Pittman** is the director of the National Agricultural Law Center. He received his Juris Doctor from the University of Arkansas at Little Rock William H. Bowen School of Law after attending Mississippi State

University and graduating from the University of Arkansas at Little Rock with a Bachelor of Science in Political Science and a minor in history. He then earned an LL.M. in Agricultural Law from the University of Arkansas School of Law's Graduate Program in Agricultural Law. Harrison has worked at the NALC since 2001, serving in roles including graduate assistant, staff attorney, co-director, interim director, and currently director, a position he has held since 2007. He is an active member of the American Agricultural Law Association (AALA) and received the AALA Distinguished Service Award in 2025 and the inaugural AALA Excellence in Agricultural Law Award in 2010. He has taught at the University of Arkansas at Little Rock William H. Bowen School of Law as part of the Ben J. Altheimer Distinguished Professorship for Agricultural Law and has served as a visiting professor at Drake University Law School, as well as teaching Environmental and Natural Resources Law and Introduction to Agricultural Law in the Dale Bumpers College of Agricultural, Food, & Life Sciences, Department of Agricultural Economics and Agribusiness, where he received the 2011–2012 Agricultural Business Club Teaching Award; he has also taught online agricultural law courses through the University of Arkansas William H. Bowen School of Law and Faulkner Law – Thomas Goode Jones School of Law. He is an active member of the Rotary Club of Fayetteville and serves on the Board of Directors for Leading Harvest.

**Brigit Rollins** is a staff attorney at the National Agricultural Law Center. At the NALC, her primary area of research and scholarship is environmental law as it intersects with agriculture. She maintains an interest in promoting sustainability and environmental health through agriculture and resource use. Brigit earned her B.A. in environmental studies with a minor in studio arts from Sonoma State University and her J.D. from Lewis & Clark Law School. She began her work at the NALC as a research fellow during her second year of law school. As a research fellow, Brigit worked on a wide variety of agricultural law topics ranging from liability issues to the new frontier of lab-grown meat. After graduating from Lewis & Clark in 2019, Brigit joined the NALC full-time. She is licensed to practice law in Oregon.

**Elizabeth Rumley** is a senior staff attorney at the National Agricultural Law Center. At the NALC, her primary research and scholarship focus is on legal issues in animal agriculture, and she frequently lectures on those issues and others to audiences nationwide. She has co-taught a course titled "Animals and Agricultural Production, Law and Policy" several times at the University of Nebraska College of Law and the University of Oklahoma College of Law and has developed and teaches a graduate/undergraduate course discussing legal issues in animal agriculture at the University of Arkansas. Additionally, she teaches Environmental Law through the Dale Bumpers College of Agricultural, Food and Life Sciences at the University of Arkansas. She is licensed to practice law in Michigan, Ohio, and Oklahoma. She earned her B.A. from Michigan State University, her J.D. cum laude from the University of Toledo College of Law, and her L.L.M. in Agricultural Law from the University of Arkansas School of Law.

**Rusty Rumley** was born and raised on a family farm in Cogar, Oklahoma. He graduated magna cum laude from Oklahoma State University in 2004 with a B.S. in Agribusiness and in 2007 earned his *juris doctor* from the University of Oklahoma. After law school, Rusty earned his LL.M in Agricultural Law at the University of Arkansas. He is licensed to practice law in the states of Oklahoma and Michigan. Rusty has published law review articles discussing the future application of special use valuation for inherited farmland, "right to farm" statutes, and the enforcement of animal cruelty statutes by private organizations. He has also written on landowner liability, agritourism, food labeling, local food production, business organizations, crop insurance, estate planning, leasing, and other land use topics in his work at the Center. Further, Rusty presents around the country to producers, consumer, extension, industry and legal groups on an array of topics.

**Jessica Schulken** serves as Chief Advocacy and External Affairs Officer at The Russell Group, bringing nearly two decades of congressional experience with deep expertise in federal appropriations and agriculture policy. She spent 18 years on the Senate Appropriations Subcommittee on Agriculture, Rural Development, Food and Drug Administration, and Related Agencies, where she helped develop more than two dozen appropriations bills and served as a key negotiator on complex funding and policy issues impacting USDA and FDA. At The Russell Group, she advises clients on navigating the appropriations process, advancing priorities such as the Farm Bill, and engaging with federal agencies and policymakers, with particular expertise in nutrition programs, food safety, and agricultural research funding. Her recent work includes securing research funding, strengthening enforcement against illegal tobacco products, and supporting agricultural export promotion

programs. She serves on the board of the Food Research and Action Center and lives in Falls Church, Virginia with her family.

**Tara Smith** serves as Executive Vice President at Torrey Advisory Group, where she leads a team of advocacy professionals and advises clients on strategic engagement in the policy arena. With more than 25 years of experience across the public and private sectors, she has held roles with Monsanto, the American Farm Bureau Federation, and the U.S. Senate Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition, and Forestry during a pivotal period of farm safety net reform. Raised on a farm in Illinois, Smith brings a personal connection to agriculture and a deep understanding of the challenges facing farmers, ranchers, and rural communities, which informs her work developing policy solutions and strategic partnerships to support a resilient rural economy. She holds a Bachelor of Arts in political science from Davidson College and an MBA from the University of Michigan and resides in Washington, D.C.

**Brian Sowyrda** joins the House Agriculture Committee Democrats after serving as the Director of External Affairs at USDA. Prior to that he served as Chief of Staff for Rep. Yadira Caraveo (CO-08), and before that for Rep. Xochitl Torres-Small (NM-02). As a campaign official, he worked in a leadership role at the Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee (DCCC) and has managed multiple federal, state, and local campaigns where he has advised congressional members and candidates. Sowyrda holds a Master of Science in International Relations from Trinity College Dublin and a bachelor's degree in political science from Susquehanna University in Selinsgrove, PA.

**Emily Stone** is a staff attorney at the National Agricultural Law Center. At the NALC, her primary area of research and scholarship is food law as it intersects with agriculture. Emily graduated cum laude with a Juris Doctor from the University of Arkansas School of Law in 2022 and earned an LL.M. in Agricultural and Food Law from the University of Arkansas School of Law in 2023. During her years at Arkansas Law, Emily served in various roles for the Arkansas Journal of Food Law & Policy including as Staff Editor, Editor-in-Chief, and Graduate Assistant. Additionally, Emily worked for four years as a Graduate Manager with the two-time SEC Championship winning Arkansas Razorbacks softball team. While earning her J.D., Emily worked for the Alabama Attorney General's Office, Montgomery, AL-based firm Gilpin Givhan, PC, and Tyson Foods' Law Department. During the LL.M. program, Emily worked in the USDA's Office of the General Counsel.

**Morgan Ulmer** is the Principal at Cornerstone Government Affairs, focusing on federal budget and appropriations practice. She previously served as Staff Director for the Senate Appropriations Subcommittee on Agriculture, Rural Development, FDA and Related Agencies. In this role, she oversaw all budget development, execution and oversight for agencies, managing over \$205 billion in annual mandatory and discretionary funding. Ulmer played a central role in negotiating bill text, report language, amendments and funding decisions among the Senate, House and Executive Branch. In addition, Ulmer has secured more than \$50 billion in disaster assistance for agricultural communities since 2020 and drafted, negotiated and oversaw over \$150 billion in COVID-19 and disaster supplemental funding. Her bipartisan negotiation work was instrumental in enacting multiple Agriculture Appropriations bills. Before joining the Senate Appropriations Committee, Ulmer served as Legislative Director for former-Senator Richard Shelby (R-AL), where she developed and advanced the Senator's legislative agenda and collaborated closely with Appropriations leadership to secure major wins across federal spending bills. Her prior roles with Sen. Shelby's office included Legislative Assistant, Legislative Correspondent and Staff Assistant.

**Stephen Alexander Vaden** was appointed as the Deputy Secretary of the U.S. Department of Agriculture on July 7, 2025. Judge Vaden served as a judge on the United States Court of International Trade following his confirmation by the United States Senate on November 18, 2020, and appointment by President Donald J. Trump on December 21, 2020. Before joining the court, Judge Vaden served as General Counsel of the United States Department of Agriculture. Judge Vaden supervised more than 250 legal professionals in thirteen offices across the United States who handled all legal matters on behalf of a department with more than 100,000 employees and an annual budget approaching \$150 billion. During his nearly four-year tenure as head of the Office of General Counsel, the Department won two cases before the United States Supreme Court, relocated and reorganized the agencies that comprise the Department to better serve rural America, engaged in substantial regulatory reform, developed new regulations to allow for the legal sale of hemp and

the labeling of bioengineered products, and implemented the 2018 Farm Bill. The Department averaged more than 5,000 matters in litigation before federal legal and administrative tribunals at any one time. Judge Vaden also served as a Member of the Board of the Commodity Credit Corporation, a government corporation devoted to helping American agricultural producers. During his tenure from 2017-2020, the Board developed programs to assist American producers affected by foreign trade barriers. In the private sector, Judge Vaden worked for two law firms – Jones Day and Patton Boggs. At both, Judge Vaden served as an appellate litigator and as part of the firm’s political law practices. In this role, he counseled political candidates, donors, and others involved in the political process on compliance with the litany of federal and state laws that govern seeking and holding elective office.