



13th Annual Mid-South Agricultural & Environmental Law Conference Speaker Biographies

Garrett Couts practices primarily in estate planning, probate, real estate, energy, business formations and transactions, and agricultural law. Garrett began his legal pursuit by working for Saleh Law in Lubbock and Lamesa. During law school, Garrett worked for McCleskey, Harriger, Brazill & Graf, and McWhorter, Cobb, & Johnson and clerked for the statutory Probate Court No 2 of Dallas County for the Honorable Ingrid M. Warren. After law school Garrett became an attorney with McCleskey, Harriger, Brazill & Graf, where he practiced extensively in probate and estates, energy law, real estate, agricultural issues, commercial and personal litigation, and various other areas. Garrett then joined the Brady & Hamilton team in 2019.

Travis Cushman is the Deputy General Counsel, Litigation & Public Policy for the American Farm Bureau Federation. In that role, Travis manages AFBF's nationwide litigation on all issues facing agriculture, including international trade, property rights, access to public lands and crop protection products, and the regulatory regimes of the Clean Water Act, Clean Air Act, Endangered Species Act, and the National Environmental Policy Act. Travis also advises AFBF's public policy staff in the analysis of legislation and regulations, development of recommendations and strategies, drafting rulemaking comments and other policy advocacy communications, and compliance with the federal Lobbying Disclosure Act and other political and lobbying law requirements. Prior to joining AFBF in 2018, Travis spent 10 years in private law practice. Travis earned his law degree from the Washington and Lee University School of Law in Lexington, Virginia, and his undergraduate degree from the University of Virginia in Charlottesville, Virginia. He is admitted to the bars of the District of Columbia and the United States Supreme Court, the United States Court of Appeals for the Ninth Circuit, and several federal district courts.

Brandon Davis is a Partner at the New Orleans office of Phelps Dunbar. Brandon has extensive experience in labor and employment issues focusing on immigration matters facing businesses. Specifically, he represents employers and individuals in a variety of immigration matters including civil and criminal worksite enforcement defense, visa petitions for employees, students, investors/traders, intracompany transfers, and family sponsored petitions. In this capacity, he has successfully represented employers and individuals in H-1B visas. He is a frequent speaker on a variety of employment issues and has been a trusted resource for his clients in the face of increased attention to immigration issues.

Andy Holt was sworn in by Governor Bill Lee as the state's 39th Commissioner of Agriculture in October 2025. Before that, he served as Deputy Commissioner and Assistant Commissioner for the Business Development Division. Prior to his post at the department, Holt was a member of the Tennessee General Assembly for 10 years representing House District 76, which included all of Weakley and portions of Carroll and Obion Counties. During Holt's service in the House of Representatives, he served as the Chairman of the Budget Subcommittee, Vice-Chairman of the House Agriculture and Natural Resources Committee and was granted membership to numerous other committees. Holt had the pleasure of serving as the Chairman of the Ag Day on the Hill Committee for all 10 years of his tenure. His primary goal while serving in the General Assembly was to ensure that the needs and desires of agriculture, forestry, and the rural economy were sufficiently represented. Before his service in the House, Holt worked with Farm Credit Services and the Tennessee Farmers' Cooperative.

Holt earned his Bachelor of Science Degree in Agricultural Economics Business with a minor in Animal Science (2004) from the University of Tennessee at Knoxville, and a Master of Business Administration (2007) from the University of Tennessee at Martin.

Holt and his wife, Ellie, along with their seven children live on their family farm outside of Dresden, Tenn. Although he is a first-generation farmer, Ellie's family has been farming in West Tennessee for four generations. The Holt's operation consists of beef, goat, and swine production, as well as custom straw and hay baling. They also host agritourism activities on their farm each fall.

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.

Dr. Andrew Muhammad is Professor and Blasingame Chair of Excellence in Agricultural Policy, University of Tennessee Institute of Agriculture, Department of Agricultural and Resource Economics. He brings considerable experience and research to the Blasingame Chair position where he focuses on assisting stakeholders in the evaluation of opportunities, policies, and programs on international trade.

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.

Hunt Shipman is the Principal & Director of Cornerstone Government Affairs. With over two decades of experience in Washington, Hunt Shipman has held a variety of positions in government and the private sector. Prior to joining Cornerstone, Hunt was a senior executive for the largest trade association serving the food and beverage industry, where he led the association's government affairs and communications programs. From 2001 to 2003, Hunt was Deputy Under Secretary for Farm and Foreign Agricultural Services and served as the acting Deputy Under Secretary for Marketing and Regulatory Programs at the United States

Department of Agriculture. In this capacity, he led three agencies with over 18,000 employees stationed around the world and administered over \$31 billion in programs. Hunt was the Department of Agriculture's principal negotiator with Congress for the 2002 Farm Bill. Hunt also served as the staff director of the Senate Agriculture Committee, Professional Staff Member at the Senate Appropriations Committee, and on the personal staff of Senator Thad Cochran.

Joel B. Sklar is the leader of the Corporate Law practice group. With extensive experience advising businesses of all sizes, Joel focuses on delivering practical, solutions-oriented guidance tailored to each client's needs and level of complexity. He regularly assists clients with a wide range of transactions, from straightforward business matters to highly sophisticated deals.

Joel has significant experience representing clients in mergers and acquisitions, private securities offerings, venture capital financing, and the formation and structuring of new businesses. His practice also includes secured financings, joint ventures and strategic alliances, and franchise matters for both franchisors and franchisees. A member of the Memphis, Tennessee, Texas, and American Bar Associations, Joel has been recognized in *The Best Lawyers in America 2026* across multiple practice areas and was named the 2020 "Lawyer of the Year" in Memphis for Business Organizations. He is also active in his community, having served on the Alumni Board of Memphis University School and as past president of the Memphis Jewish Federation.

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.

Stephen 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.

Wes Ward is serving as the 3rd Secretary of Agriculture for the State of Arkansas. He was first appointed to the position in 2015 by Governor Asa Hutchinson and reappointed in 2023 by Governor Sarah Huckabee Sanders. He was the 2024-2025 President of the National Association of State Departments of Agriculture, or NASDA.

Wes is from the small town of Lake City in Northeast Arkansas and is a graduate of Riverside High School. He earned a Bachelor of Science degree in Agricultural Business with an emphasis in Agricultural Finance from Arkansas State University. Wes has also earned a law degree (JD), a Master of Laws degree (LL.M.) in Agricultural and Food Law, and a Master of Science degree in Agricultural Economics from the University of Arkansas.

Wes has been serving in the United States Marine Corps for over 24 years and has completed deployments and exercises in Afghanistan, Jordan, Japan, Indonesia, and South Korea. He is currently serving in the Marine Corps Reserves as the Executive Officer of the 1st Civil Affairs Group in Camp Pendleton, California.