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Governor's Column: Rural Kansas faces challenges, opportunities

The following is a column by Governor Kathleen Sebelius:

This week I had the privilege of taking part in Stand Up for Rural America Day, a gathering of rural advocates, community representatives and business leaders who are all working to improve the quality of life in rural America.

There's no question that small communities and rural areas face real challenges, and we're dealing with many of those challenges in Kansas every day. But there are also new opportunities opening up that can help restore vitality to America's heartland.

One of the most exciting areas is in the emerging renewable energy industry, which has the potential to create jobs and increase prosperity in our state.

Our nation is looking for new sources of energy, and we're finding those sources in the grains and grasses that have been grown on the land for generations, and in the wind that blows across our fields and prairies.

New energy sources like ethanol, biodiesel and wind power are creating outstanding opportunities to bring jobs and investment to our rural communities. Wind turbines are sprouting up throughout Kansas, and our ethanol production has nearly doubled in the past four years.

We're also seeing entrepreneurs taking advantage of the low cost of doing business in small town Kansas. By using the Internet and global overnight delivery, these businesses can set up shop anywhere, and they have the potential to bring more jobs to and opportunity to our state.

Communities and businesses will continue to drive job creation, but my administration is working hard to help. Through incentive efforts like the Rural Business Development Tax Credit Program and the Rural Life Task Force, we're forming partnerships with communities and businesses to bring new jobs and expanded opportunity to rural areas.

These partnerships, and the strong work ethic present throughout our state, will help us meet these new challenges and restore vitality to rural Kansas.

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