



Kutak Rock Attorneys



David Bracht

David is of counsel with Kutak Rock and has more than 35 years' experience in business, government and law, including senior management experience in private industry and federal and state government agencies. David works with producers and agribusinesses involved in production, processing and sale of agriculture products, biofuels producers and renewable energy developers, along with lenders, insurers and other firms supporting agriculture and food industries. Previously, David was appointed Director of the Nebraska Energy Office by Nebraska Governor Pete Ricketts in January 2015. He also held senior management positions with USDA agriculture credit and crop insurance regulators during the administration of President George H.W. Bush.



Mike Bydalek

Mike is an intellectual property and technology transactions partner with Kutak Rock and heads the Technology Transactions practice. Mike routinely advises clients from a variety of commercial sectors such as financial services, retail and healthcare in all aspects of technology transactions and the use and handling of sensitive personal information.



Rachel Carrigan

Rachel is an attorney with Kutak Rock and advocates for firm clients in complex litigation, arbitrations, mediations and protests against both private and governmental adversaries, with an emphasis in shareholder/constituent disputes, government contract disputes, managed care procurements, challenges to adverse decisions by government agencies, breach of contract disputes, healthcare litigation, and business tort claims.



Jason Caskey

Jason is an intellectual property and technology transactions partner with Kutak Rock and concentrates on intellectual property protection, technology law, commercial transactions, copyrights, IP development and related transactions.



Mike Degan

Mike is a litigation partner with Kutak Rock and handles complex commercial litigation, product liability, financial services and insurance-related disputes for clients in a wide range of industries. Mike also does extensive work in renewable energy representing wind, solar and biomass energy developers and ethanol producers in transactional, regulatory, litigation and policy matters.



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Jeff Makovicka

Jeff is a partner with Kutak Rock and concentrates on banking and lending matters and represents banking and other financial institutions (including nonbank ag lenders) on the strategic, policy and regulatory aspects of lending, mergers and acquisitions, joint ventures, establishing subsidiaries (operating or otherwise), capital raises, restructuring transactions, and investments by and in banking organizations and other financial institutions. He lectures regularly in the ag lending area and has substantial state lender licensing, UCC and Food Security Act experience. Jeff also represents local, regional and national agribusiness clients—grain buyers, input suppliers, feed and fertilizer distributors, agricultural lenders, agronomic data aggregators, ag fintechs, and other ag-related businesses—in all aspects of their operations.



Bart McLeay

Bart is a litigation partner with Kutak Rock and has focused on major commercial litigation, including breach of contract, class action, business torts and intellectual property matters and specialty experience in many different industries, including energy, financial services, construction, agribusiness, telecommunications, healthcare, reinsurance and more.

External Speakers



Charles Baron

Charles Baron is co-founder of Farmers Business Network (FBN), where he has helped guide the development of the breakthrough farmer-to-farmer network since its inception. The FBN network's mission of increasing the prosperity of family farms through information, competition, and digital commerce has earned the support of over 120,000 member farms operating over 170 million acres in the United States and Canada with the backing of class investors such as GV (formerly known as Google Ventures), T. Rowe Price, and Temasek.

Started in 2014, FBN has grown to become ag's leading online provider of inputs, having made over 100,000 deliveries direct-to-farm—with primary product lines in crop protection, fertilizers, seed, livestock and farm supplies. FBN's finance arm, FBN Finance, has extended nearly \$3 billion in financing to producers for farmland, equipment and operating needs. The FBN sustainability platform has certified over 10,000 farms and paid over \$32 million in premiums to growers, and in 2024 was formed into a full joint-venture with Archer Daniel Midlands (ADM) under the Gradable brand. FBN aims to serve farms' full operating needs and reduce their costs as an online marketplace with the most efficient sources of capital, goods and services.

Previously, Mr. Baron was a program manager at Google, where he started and led product, investment and research initiatives in advanced energy technologies. His passion for farming developed after working a corn harvest on his brother-in-law's farm in Arapahoe, Nebraska prior to joining Google. Charles earned his bachelor's degree from Dartmouth and an MBA from Harvard.

Agriculture Innovation Seminar

Speakers



External Speakers



Dr. Andy Benson

Andrew Benson received his Ph.D. in microbiology from the University of Texas Health Science Center at San Antonio in 1992, and he was a postdoctoral fellow in molecular biology at Princeton University from 1992-1996. He began his career at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln as an Assistant Professor in 1996 and is currently a Professor in the Department of Food Science and Technology. During the first half of his career at the University of Nebraska, Andrew's research focused on development and application of novel genome-based strategies for differentiating subpopulations of bacterial pathogens and understanding how their genetic diversity affects physiology, ecology and virulence characteristics. Later in his career, he began to study the human gut microbiome and is known for his work using complex trait analysis to show that species composition of the gut microbiome can be influenced by genetic variation in the host.



Tim Brummels

Tim Brummels has served for the past five years as the Chairman, CEO and President of Synbiotic Health. Tim has an extensive background as an entrepreneur, executive officer, board member and investor for natural health ingredient companies. He was a founder of Prenexus Health, a prebiotic fiber company for which he served as chairman, CEO and president for five years and lead a Series A funding of more than \$20 million. He brings over 30 years of experience having worked with entrepreneurial start-ups to Fortune 500 companies including ConAgra Foods and Berkshire Hathaway Homestate Company, as well as his own consultancy, Edgewater Company. His pragmatic leadership approach has assisted many companies to achieve market success through team building, the implementation of strong measurable strategic planning, capitalization and financing, and market expansion to EBITDA accretion. He has served on corporate and non-profit boards and assisted both types of organizations achieved millions in capital funding and market expansion. Tim received his BSBA from the University of Nebraska.



Dawn Caldwell

Dawn Caldwell is the Executive Director of Renewable Fuels Nebraska. Renewable Fuels Nebraska (RFN) is the statewide trade association representing Nebraska's ethanol industry. The association serves as the unified voice for its members, working alongside the Nebraska Legislature, Governor Pillen, and state leadership to promote and protect the state's 2.2-billion-gallon-per-year ethanol production. With strong expertise in association management, communications, and public policy, RFN is uniquely positioned to turn member priorities into meaningful legislative and regulatory outcomes that strengthen and grow our industry.

Dawn was born and raised on a diversified farm near Guide Rock, Nebraska and earned a B.S. in Animal Science from the University of Nebraska, Lincoln in 1994. After a few years working in the University of Nebraska Extension system, she began a career in livestock nutrition, first with Deshler Grain and Feed and then Aurora Cooperative. While at Aurora Cooperative, Dawn spent 10 years as a livestock specialist, five years as Corporate Communications Manager, and six years as Head of Government Affairs before moving on to be the Executive Director at Renewable Fuels Nebraska. Dawn has served on a number of state and national boards and enjoys promoting all aspects of Nebraska Agriculture while serving as the Executive Director of Renewable Fuels Nebraska. Dawn and her husband, Matt, ranch and farm in North Central Kansas and South Central Nebraska; they have two grown children and three grandchildren.



External Speakers



Shannon Coleman

Shannon has extensive experience counseling natural gas and liquid pipelines companies on regulatory compliance issues in connection with growth initiatives and day to day operations, with a focus on drafting commercial energy contracts and managing regulatory compliance and regulatory proceedings. She has extensive experience supporting the commercialization and development of carbon dioxide pipeline and sequestration projects. She also provides commercial contracting support to Tallgrass' unregulated business lines and supports new infrastructure projects with general permitting issues. Lastly, she has significant utility acquisition experience both in obtaining regulatory approval as well as closing and transition related matters. Shannon is a vice president, associate general counsel and Chief FERC Compliance Officer for Tallgrass. Previously, she worked at Colonial Pipeline Company, an oil products pipeline company, and Liberty Utilities, a Canada-based utility holding company that owns natural gas, electric, water and wastewater utilities throughout the United States. Shannon began her career in Washington D.C. working briefly at the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission and then as an associate at Husch Blackwell, LLP. Education: B.A., Syracuse University; J.D., Georgetown Law School.



Joe Luck, Ph.D., P.E.

Dr. Joe Luck is an Associate Professor and Extension Specialist for Precision Agriculture at the University of Nebraska, Institute of Agriculture and Natural Resources. Dr. Luck also serves as Associate Director of the Eastern Nebraska Research, Extension and Education Center (ENREEC). His responsibilities include developing extension and research programs regarding the application of precision agriculture technologies in crop production as well as teaching in this area. His current research and extension efforts are focused on demonstrating agricultural data management strategies and technology applications for improving crop production efficiency. He works closely with interdisciplinary teams to evaluate technologies including crop canopy sensors for nitrogen application, advanced pesticide application systems, multi-hybrid planters, and grain harvest systems. Since 2015 he has served as a board member of the Agricultural Data Cooperative, a group focused on improving agricultural data, privacy, access, and utilization for producers.



Prestin Read

Prestin Read serves as CEO of Mid America Bio Energy & Commodities, where he leads the company's strategic direction, including operational excellence and commitment to sustainable innovation in renewable fuels. With nearly two decades of leadership at the company—including 17 years as Chief Financial Officer—Prestin has been instrumental in driving Mid America's growth and resilience in an evolving energy landscape. Prestin holds both an M.B.A. from the University of Colorado Boulder and a Chartered Financial Analyst (CFA) designation, and is a graduate of Princeton University, where he earned a degree in Economics.



Anthony Schutz, J.D.

Professor Schutz has been with the University of Nebraska College of Law for nearly all of the last 20 years. He is currently serving as the Associate Dean for Faculty, which he began in 2020, and has taught courses in agricultural law, environmental law, water law, land use regulation, state and local government law, and contracts. The product of a farm family in Elwood, Nebraska, Professor Schutz's research interests include the often-intertwined subjects of agricultural law, environmental and natural resources law, and state and local government, all of which have significant impacts on rural landscapes and populations. Professor Schutz has served as the chair of the AALS Section on Agricultural Law, is active in the American Agricultural Law Association and the Foundation for Natural Resources and Energy Law and is a frequent lecturer on agricultural and water law issues regionally and nationally. He serves as a director of the Lower Platte South Natural Resources District, and he directs the Rural Law Opportunities Program at the College of Law. Professor Schutz graduated in 2003 from the Nebraska College of Law with the highest distinction and was editor-in-chief of the *Nebraska Law Review*. He then clerked for the Honorable C. Arlen Beam of the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Eighth Circuit until 2005.