



## AGRICULTURE

## Wheat ambassador connecting dots between Kansas crop fields, Kenyan refugee camps

Sunflower state's farmers depend on symbiotic relationships with global markets

BY: **TIM CARPENTER** - JUNE 9, 2025 6:38 PM



Justin Gilpin, CEO of the Kansas Wheat Commission for 16 years, is in Washington, D.C., to lobby Congress in support of the idea that international food assistance programs are a tool to fight hunger, build global markets and help Kansas farmers. (Jill Hummels for Kansas Reflector)

TOPEKA – Justin Gilpin visited a remote, windswept camp in northern Kenya serving hundreds of thousands of refugees fleeing conflicts in Somalia, Ethiopia, Uganda and South Sudan.

“To be able to see that and witness that firsthand, it was emotionally exhausting for sure,” said Gilpin, chief executive officer of the Kansas Wheat Commission and Kansas Association of Wheat Growers. “Seeing how many young people – that was probably the thing I wasn’t prepared for.”

Gilpin took part in a food distribution line serving more than 250,000 refugees. Their rations had been cut to 40% of the caloric-intake goal, he said.

He was in Kenya during February, a period that coincided with movement by the administration of President Donald Trump to dismantle operations of the U.S. Agency for International Development. Since 1961, USAID facilitated delivery of food, water and medicine through a humanitarian program that also provided aid to farmers and promoted peace.

On Monday, Gilpin joined about 400 others in Washington, D.C., for the U.S. Global Leadership Coalition's 2025 Impact Forum. Representatives of business, agriculture, faith, nonprofit and national security organizations gathered in advance of Tuesday meetings with members of Congress in a bid to promote U.S. diplomatic and development efforts in the world.

In Gilpin's case, he planned to argue the United States must not lose its grip on initiatives dedicated to international agricultural market development and global food security.

Consider this: Kansas needs to find foreign markets for half its annual wheat crop despite a period of unusually volatile economics.

"At the end of the day, the U.S. and the Kansas wheat farmers want an opportunity to participate in global trade with fair trade," Gilpin said. "We want to be able to address trade barriers that might exist around the world."

In February, U.S. Sen. Jerry Moran and U.S. Rep. Tracey Mann, both Kansas Republicans, introduced legislation to shift Food for Peace from USAID to the U.S. Department of Agriculture.

"How do we maintain the integrity of that meaningful program? Can it fall under USDA?" Gilpin said in an interview.

He said Food for Peace could to be reformulated to provide the Trump administration with confidence it was accountable to taxpayers. The program could be recast to demonstrate it made the United States both stronger and safer, he said.

"As long as it checks the boxes of what this administration wants to see out of foreign policy and foreign assistance ... those are the kind of conversations we want to be a part of," he said.

Gilpin said his personal experience in Kenya offered insight into ways international assistance programs led by major food producing countries could promote societal stability.

"Humanitarian and emergency assistance is to help bring stability to people who have been displaced by things out of their control," he said.


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