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ORIGINAL TASTE

TASTE

UPDATE FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

WELCOME TO THE LATEST EDITION OF THE NEBRASKA GROCERY INDUSTRY ASSOCIATION'S MAGAZINE

As the leaves turn and harvest season settles, we are once again reminded of the strength and resilience of our industry, and the steady, local hands helping weather uncertainty.

At the time of this writing, the government shutdown in Washington has delayed funding for essential programs like SNAP. A federal judge has ordered SNAP benefits be fully funded, but millions of federal workers are missing paychecks and families are still waiting on food assistance. Even temporary disruptions ripple quickly through our retail community, creating confusion for customers, concern for families, and added uncertainty for stores.

Additionally, Nebraska stores have been bracing for Jan. 1, 2026, when both the SNAP restrictions waiver, signed by Gov. Jim Pillen in May, and the \$15 minimum wage take effect. The Nebraska Grocery Industry Association (NGIA) is working with the State of Nebraska and our national partners to get a product list, so retailers are able to comply, though still likely at a cost. And the state legislature has committed to a vote in January on establishing a youth wage and slowing the automatic minimum wage increase.

Tariff talk is back in the headlines as international negotiations continue to affect the cost of key goods and packaging materials. From meat and grain exports to imported ingredients, materials, and equipment, Nebraska's food industry depends on a stable global marketplace. While inflation appears to be ticking in the right direction, NGIA has been in direct contact with state and federal policymakers and administrative officials, reminding them that retailers and families need consistency, not chaos, when it comes to food access and public policy.

Despite the noise out of Lincoln and Washington, our members continue to show up for one another and build connections. Our Statewide Industry Summit in August (Page 14) brought retailers, wholesalers, suppliers, and policymakers together for a day of collaboration and candid discussion about workforce, technology, and the future of food access. And in October, we cohosted a webinar featuring the National Grocers Association Foundation (NGAF) to discuss ways NGAF can help grocers modernize and expand their businesses while improving access to fresh and nutritious food.



And thanks in large part to our valued sponsors, events like Tailgates, the Hackers & Snackers golf outing, and our Best Bagger competition (Page 25), were welcome reminders that networking doesn't have to happen in a boardroom.

Speaking of what we couldn't accomplish without the generosity of members and sponsors, see Page 22 for photos from our Husker Football raffle winner, Mike Harimon with Al's Market in Bayard, and Page 18 for a look at all our 2025 scholarship winners. Finally, mark your calendars for Tuesday, Feb. 17, 2026, for our Day at the Capitol and Legislative Dinner in Lincoln.

Once again, we'd like to thank you for being part of NGIA. We hope in this and every issue to provide a brief overview of current events and accomplishments, and to give you an idea of what's on the horizon.

Ashley Fellers

*Executive Director,
Nebraska Grocery Industry Association*

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POLITICS AND POLICY IN 2026



SKILL GAMES, FOOD DESERTS, AND BALLOT INITIATIVES

TIMELINE TO KNOW:

- Primary election: **May 12, 2026**
- General election: **Nov. 3, 2026**
- High profile races include incumbent Sen. Pete Ricketts vs. Dan Osborn, who failed in his bid to defeat Sen. Deb Fischer in 2024, Gov. Jim Pillen running for a second term, and the open congressional seat in Omaha (CD02) where Congressman Don Bacon will not seek re-election.
- Many candidates have announced but haven't filed official paperwork; formal lists will be released in December 2025 by the Secretary of State.

HIGH-PROFILE INITIATIVES ALREADY ACTIVE OR PROPOSED FOR 2026

- **EPIC Option 2.0.** A petition effort seeking to eliminate Nebraska taxes on property, income, inheritances and corporations (a sweeping tax ban). Organizers re-filed a version for 2026. If successful it would radically reshape state/local revenue.
- **Property-tax related petitions.** Separate drives propose measures to halve property taxes or cap annual valuation increases; these have surfaced in 2025 and could appear as 2026 ballot questions depending on signature drives.
- **Election procedures.** There is an initiated amendment effort to require hand-counted paper ballots, which could appear on the 2026 ballot if it clears petition thresholds.

LR 218 – INTERIM STUDY RELATED TO SKILLED GAMING

- LR 218 is a study resolution introduced by Sen. Spivey from Omaha, to examine the “public-health and community impact” of skilled gaming machines. The study focuses on social impacts, enforcement, and whether further state action is needed.
- Sen. Spivey has been openly critical of skilled games, while those of us with impacted members try to explain that most of the perceived issues are promulgated and inflated by the likes of the casino gaming industry, in an effort to get legislators to tax and/or regulate the skilled gaming industry out of business.
- While this is a study, many times these are precursors to bills we might see in the 2026 session. The skilled gaming industry is already highly regulated and now monitored and taxed via a “central server” which is going to enhance collections and enforcement.

LR224/LR374 – INTERIM STUDIES RELATED TO FOOD DESERTS

- Multiple interim studies looked at the availability of healthy, affordable food in Nebraska communities and the effectiveness of programs designed to advance food access.
- In addition to sharing a University of Nebraska-Lincoln report cofounded by the Nebraska Grocery Industry Association, we testified that the loss of fresh food access multifold and getting it back will require local interest and creativity backed by smarter public policy at all levels of government.
- While we have policy ideas, the first step is to stop increasing the cost of doing business.
- Interim studies like this often feed into budget requests. Due to federal changes, we will be working in 2026 to find \$17 million in new state funds to pay for SNAP administration.

LR 206 – INTERIM STUDY RELATED TO BALLOT INITIATIVES

- On Oct. 24, the Legislature’s Government Committee heard two separate studies related to ballot initiatives: Sen. Hardin’s study to create a new county-level initiative petition process, and Sen. Strommen’s study to look at how other states are going about making changes to requirements surrounding the initiative process, whether individuals in low-population areas are fairly represented, and who’s funding the measures.
- This hearing was important to further examine the Legislature’s role in balancing citizen-initiated laws and highlight out-of-state interests and spending in the process
- On Nov. 5, Nebraska Attorney General Mike Hilgers sued a Swiss national and six other entities for illegally contributing foreign funds to six Nebraska ballot question committees.

2026 LEGISLATURE: WHAT TO EXPECT

- In 2026, the Nebraska legislature will be tasked with closing a projected \$450 million budget deficit, while the Governor has signaled he’ll continue his push to reduce property taxes. NGIA and our partners will be working with appropriators to find \$17 million for administration of the SNAP program, and the Speaker of the Legislature has assured supporters of minimum wage reform the bill will be taken up shortly after the body convenes in January. Stay tuned.



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“EVERY PART OF THE DAY WAS FOCUSED ON HELPING RURAL GROCERY BUSINESSES THRIVE.”

**ANSLEY FELLERS,
NGIA EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR**

GROCERY INDUSTRY SUMMIT HIGHLIGHTS

EVENT BRINGS NEW CONNECTIONS, ENERGY FOR RURAL GROCERY BUSINESSES

A successful third-annual Grocery Industry Summit on Aug. 21 brought together industry professionals and supporters for a collaborative day of panel discussions, legislative updates, and networking. The event was hosted by the Nebraska Industry Grocery Association (NGIA), the Nebraska Cooperative Development Center and the Center for Rural Affairs.

“There was great energy again this year,” said Ansley Fellers, NGIA executive director. “Every part of the day was focused on helping rural grocery businesses thrive by connecting to new ideas, resources, their communities, and one another.”

The summit featured a keynote address on “communicating your story” from Jenny Osner, owner of Hired Man’s Grocery & Grill in Conway Springs, Kansas. Osner provided insights from her store ownership experience on how to think proactively and share success stories. Hired Man’s offers Double Up Food Bucks Program in store and was the first in Kansas to launch the Add Milk Program and offers Double Up Food Bucks Program in store.

Beyond the keynote, the event included a variety of panel discussions covering next-gen owners, rural grocery owners, and cooperative partnerships. Attendees also benefited from presentations on walk-out technology and local products. 🚫



keynote speaker
Jenny Osner, Owner
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SCAN TO LEARN MORE

NGIA AWARDS SCHOLARSHIPS TO HIGH SCHOOL & COLLEGE STUDENTS

2026 APPLICATION PERIOD OPENS JANUARY 1

The Nebraska Grocery Industry Association (NGIA) awarded nine \$1,500 scholarships in 2025.

The scholarship program recognizes and aids deserving students who are related to Nebraska's food industry by

virtue of their parents' employment or their own part-time employment by businesses which are dues paying members of the association. It was established as an expression of appreciation to the members of NGIA and as a service to our members.

Funds that are raised from the silent auction held during the Legislative Dinner each year and money raised from raffles and mulligans during association golf outings are used to fund the scholarships.

Seeking Applications for 2026 Awards

NGIA members are asked to help promote the scholarship program to eligible high school seniors, undergraduate college students and non-traditional students.

Apply before May 15, 2026.



Complete eligibility details and application forms can be found at nebgrocery.com/membership/member-programs/scholarship-program.



Meet the 2025 NGIA Scholarship Winners



TRINITY ELLIOTT-PIERSEE

Trinity Elliott-Piersee is a graduate of Sutton Public Schools, where she earned a spot on the Honor Roll and received the Presidential Scholarship from Emporia State University. During her time in school, Trinity was actively involved in travel softball, student council, FCCLA, and the school musical. She also volunteered at the Bread Box. Trinity will attend Emporia State University in Emporia, Kansas, where she plans to study elementary education and special education. Additionally, she is employed at Brown's Thrift Store in Sutton, Nebraska.



OLIVIA GARDNER

Olivia Gardner is currently enrolled at the University of Iowa, located in Iowa City, Iowa. She is pursuing a major in nursing and a minor in human relations. In 2024, Olivia was honored on the Dean's List and received the Iowa Scholars Award for the 2024-2025 academic year. She attended Iowa Western Community College in 2023, 2024, and 2025, and also studied at the College of Saint Mary in 2023. Olivia is a returning NGIA scholarship recipient. She is the daughter of Anthony Lynn Gardner, who works for D&D, a subsidiary of Hy-Vee.



MAYA MAXLEY

Maya Maxley is a graduate of Kearney Catholic High School in Kearney, Nebraska. She served as the captain of both the cross country and track and field teams, as well as a concert band section leader and an active member of the Oratory Christian Youth Group. She achieved All-Honor Roll status with a 4.0 GPA and earned the distinction of Academic All-State in Cross Country. Maya will attend the University of Nebraska at Kearney, where she plans to major in psychobiology and follow a pre-physician assistant track. She is currently employed at Hy-Vee in Kearney, Nebraska.



XANDER MCCOMB

Xander McComb graduated from Twin River Public School where he participated in and lettered for football, Future Business Leaders of America (FBLA), and speech competitions. He was a member of the National Honor Society and served as the president of FBLA. Xander will attend Western Nebraska Community College to study aviation mechanics. He is currently employed at Grains Family Market in Genoa, Nebraska.



ABIGAIL ROSS

Abigail Ross is currently a student at Georgia Southern University in Statesboro, Georgia, where she is majoring in psychology. She has achieved significant academic recognition, appearing on the President's List, and is a member of the Phi Eta Sigma National Honor Society. Abigail maintains an impressive 3.90 GPA. She is the daughter of Lauren Ross, who works at R.J. Reynolds.



EMILLIA TOELLE

Emillia Toelle graduated from Bellevue West High School in Bellevue, Nebraska. She participated in volleyball, club volleyball, tennis, and the Fellowship of Christian Athletes. Emillia is a recipient of the National Honor Society Golden Feather Award. She will attend the University of Nebraska Lincoln to study pre-physical therapy. She is employed at Hy-Vee in Plattsmouth, Nebraska.

NGIA WISHES THE 2025 SCHOLARSHIP AWARD WINNERS ALL THE BEST IN THEIR ACADEMIC ENDEAVORS!



Meet the 2025 NGIA Scholarship Winners



SAMUEL VERDONI

Samuel Verdoni is a returning NGIA scholarship recipient currently enrolled at Benedictine College in Atchison, Kansas. He is majoring in accounting and theology, with a minor in mathematics. Samuel has achieved a place on the Dean's List and is part of the Honors Program with Program Distinction, as well as the John Paul II Fellows Program of Distinction. Additionally, he is employed at Hy-Vee in Papillion, Nebraska.



ANDREW WIEST

Andrew Wiest graduated from Chase County High School located in Imperial, Nebraska. He was active in cross country, track, speech, and one act/play production. Andrew was a seven-time NSAA NCPA Academic-All State Recipient, National Honor Society Honor Roll, and 2024 Central Nebraska Science & Engineering Fair Senior Finalist (fourth place). Andrew is employed by Hill's Family Foods in Imperial, Nebraska, and will attend the University of Nebraska-Lincoln and plans to major in secondary education with a focus in business marketing and information technology.



PAIGE WILLCOXON

Paige Willcoxon is a student at Hastings College in Hastings, Nebraska, where she is majoring in psychology and Spanish with a focus on pre-occupational therapy. She has been recognized on the Dean's List for the Fall 2022, Fall 2023, Spring 2024, and Fall 2024 semesters. Additionally, Paige was a member of the Women's Tennis Team from 2023 to 2025 and earned the title of Daktronics-NAIA Scholar-Athlete. She is currently employed at Hy-Vee in Omaha, Nebraska.

SAVE THE DATE

NGIA DAY AT THE CAPITOL AND LEGISLATIVE DINNER

Tuesday, Feb. 17, 2026

JOIN US AT:

Day at the Capitol – Nebraska State Capitol
Legislative Dinner – Scottish Rite Lincoln

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GROCERY FOUNDATION HUSKER FOOTBALL RAFFLE

CONGRATULATIONS TO MIKE HARIMON

with Al's Market in Bayard, for being the lucky Husker Football raffle winner! Mike and his guests enjoyed the Nebraska vs. USC game on Nov. 1 in style.


The funds raised through the raffle benefit the Nebraska Grocery Industry Foundation Scholarship program. Thank you to all who purchased a ticket and to Nebraska Grocery Industry Association Bronze Sponsor Land O' Frost, Inc. for donating the ticket package.



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Austin Kollasch with Fareway Stores took home first place in the Nebraska Grocery Industry Association (NGIA) Best Bagger Competition held at Tiburon Golf Club on Tuesday, Oct. 7. This is a back-to-back victory for Austin, who represented Nebraska in the national competition earlier this year.

First, second, and third place competitors went home with cash prizes. Coming in second was Jozlyn Bartunek with Fareway Stores, and third place went to Truett McCord from Ideal Market in Superior, Nebraska. Also competing were Dylan Hartshorn from Russ's Market in Lincoln and Hayden Hendrickson with Hy-Vee in Omaha. Contestants are judged by speed of bagging, proper bag-building technique, weight distribution between bags, as well as style and attitude.

Austin will go on to compete at the National Grocers Association (NGA) Best Bagger Championship at the NGA annual convention in Las Vegas in February. In addition to taking home "bagging rights," the national winner will be awarded a \$10,000 grand prize. The competition is sponsored by PepsiCo and is the culmination of yearlong contests across the nation.



↑ Austin Kollasch, Fort Street Fareway Stores in Omaha, won first place in the Nebraska contest.

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CELEBRATING FAMILY MEALS MONTH

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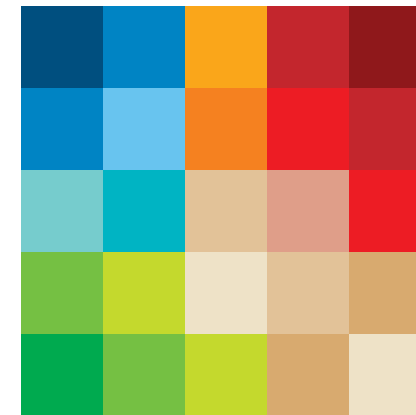
The Nebraska Grocery Industry Association (NGIA) joined Gov. Jim Pillen in declaring September “Family Meals Month” in Nebraska. The proclamation is a commitment to encouraging family health and stability across the state.

NGIA members and industry partners from B&R Stores, Inc. and Hy-Vee, Inc. joined for the proclamation signing event.

Grocery stores and increasingly c-stores statewide offer a variety of products and meal solutions to help families prepare and enjoy meals together. Meals at home have been shown to have countless nutritional, emotional, and social benefits. 🍴



Leaders from B&R Stores, Inc. and Hy-Vee, Inc. alongside the Governor for the proclamation signing.



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HACKERS & SNACKERS GOLF OUTING 2025

The Nebraska Industry Association hosted its annual Hackers & Snackers golf extravaganza at the Tiburon Golf Club in Omaha on Oct. 7. More than 100 members and grocery industry professionals enjoyed a fun day of networking on the course.

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SPONSOR SPOTLIGHT SHAZAM

GET TO KNOW NEBRASKA GROCERY INDUSTRY ASSOCIATION (NGIA) SPONSOR SHAZAM IN THIS Q&A WITH **DAN KRAMER, EVP, GOVERNMENT AND COMMUNITY AFFAIRS.**

Q: WHAT DO YOU FIND MOST VALUABLE ABOUT BEING PART OF THE NGIA?

A: As a proud member of NGIA, we cherish the opportunity to collaborate with community-centric professionals to educate them about what's happening in the payments industry. Community financial institutions and local grocers are equally invested in supporting their community. And they both need each other to ensure transactions are seamless, secure, and reliable for their mutual customers.

Q: WHAT SETS YOUR PRODUCT/SERVICE APART?

A: SHAZAM is one of the industry's preferred debit networks driving payment innovation on real-time debit rails. Our payment network merchant fees are lower, meaning you can hold down costs for your business and your customers.

But those savings only happen if you take advantage of your routing choice. Our specialists can help you determine the order of your network routing preferences based on the networks available anytime your customers pay with their debit cards.

Q: CAN YOU GIVE READERS A LITTLE HISTORY OF YOUR BRAND/ORGANIZATION?

A: SHAZAM® implemented and operated the first debit card transaction to buy groceries in the U.S. in 1981 at a Dahl's food store in Des Moines, Iowa. Our trend of industry leadership continued in 1986 with the introduction of fuel pump terminals, allowing cardholders to purchase fuel with their ATM cards at the fuel pump or at a point-of-sale device inside the store. Three years later, SHAZAM partnered with the state of Iowa and piloted the first Electronic Benefit Transfer program in the country to successfully integrate with a public-sector EFT system.

Today, SHAZAM enables numerous industries to create connected payments experiences to move money efficiently and securely – from the cardholder initiating the transaction at the checkout lane to the final settlement of funds.


Q: WHERE CAN CUSTOMERS FIND YOUR PRODUCTS/SERVICES?

A: NGIA members have access to SHAZAM if a cardholder has the SHAZAM Payments Network on their issued debit card. Card-issuing financial institutions are required to enable at least two unaffiliated networks for each debit card transaction, allowing for the option for merchants to choose the most economical debit network to route the transaction. Make sure your payments processor is taking full advantage of routing choices available to you via the SHAZAM Payments Network for a variety of card present, card-not-present, contactless and tokenization transactions.

Q: WHAT EXCITES YOU MOST ABOUT THE INDUSTRY THIS YEAR?

A: Stablecoins aren't just for crypto enthusiasts anymore. They're increasingly being used for payments. And that's likely to become more commonplace now that the GENUIS Act is law. It's a moment of change in the financial services industry, but also a moment of opportunity. SHAZAM is leaning in to collaboratively assess the regulatory, economic, and competitive impacts as regulators begin implementing the GENIUS Act's policy framework.

Q: WHO SHOULD GROCERS CONTACT IF THEY'RE INTERESTED IN USING YOUR PRODUCTS AND SERVICES?

A: Grocers can email me at dkramer@shazam.net, to learn more about the payments industry. They can also visit www.shazam.net to learn more about picking the best routing choices to reduce payment acceptance costs. 

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GOVERNOR'S TAILGATES

NGIA HOSTED FIVE HUSKER FOOTBALL AND VOLLEYBALL TAILGATES THIS FALL



Thank you to all who made the Nebraska Grocery Industry Association Governor's Tailgates a success this season!

A special thank you to LinPepCo and Mars, Inc. for the product donations that helped make the series possible.



Tailgate Sponsors

Sept. 20 Nebraska vs. Michigan sponsored by B&R Stores, Inc.

Sept. 24 Nebraska vs. Michigan (volleyball) sponsored by Hy-Vee, Inc.

Oct. 4 Nebraska vs. Michigan State sponsored by AWG, Cubby's

Oct. 25 Nebraska vs. Stanford (volleyball) sponsored by Hy-Vee

Sept. 20 Nebraska vs. Northwestern sponsored by SpartanNash

Nov. 1 Nebraska vs. USC sponsored by Fareway Stores, Inc. 



PRIORITIZE EMPLOYEE TRAINING FOR AGE-RESTRICTED PRODUCTS

WE CARD PROGRAM BUILDS AWARENESS OF "RESPONSIBLE RETAILING"

Governors of 25 states have issued proclamations or letters of support, including Nebraska Gov. Jim Pillen who issued a proclamation in support of "We Card Awareness Month" in September.

We Card is shining a light on "responsible retailing" of age-restricted products by encouraging retailers to make employee training a top priority. This focus encourages retailers to re-invigorate training of frontline store employees to boost compliance with federal, state, and local laws.



We Card and the Nebraska Grocery Industry Association strongly encourage retailers to take steps to help ensure age-restricted compliance. Visit our website for resources or wecard.org.



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NGIA MEMBER NEWS



Baker's Breaks Ground in Elkhorn

SEPT. 19, 2025

Baker's held a groundbreaking ceremony for its new Baker's Marketplace at the northwest corner of 204th and Q Street near Elkhorn. The event highlighted the company's commitment to transforming the grocery shopping experience in the region. The 123,000-square-foot store is expected to create over 300 jobs, supporting local economic growth.

Read more at [dcpostgazette.com](https://www.dcpostgazette.com)

C&S Wholesale Completes Acquisition of SpartanNash

SEPT. 22, 2025

C&S Wholesale Grocers, LLC announced the completion of its acquisition of SpartanNash Company. The combined company employs more than 30,000 team members and operates almost 60 complementary distribution centers covering the U.S. and serves close to 10,000 independent retail locations, as well as military commissaries and exchanges, with more than 200 corporate-run grocery stores.

Read more at corporate.spartannash.com.

Members Step Up to Feed Families in Need

NGIA members rallied to provide product donations and community support for Nebraskans experiencing delays in SNAP benefits and missed paychecks caused by the government shutdown. Thank you to the many retailers, food manufacturers and industry partners who are making a difference in uncertain times.

- DoorDash committed to 1 million free meals, waiving fees for 300,000 SNAP customers, and donating food from DashMart to local food banks.
- Fareway Stores launched a month-long donation program across 142 stores, matching customer contributions to support local food banks.
- Hy-Vee responded to the government shutdown by offering free meals to children, \$3 meals for others, and donating \$125,000 to food banks and DoorDash.
- Ideal Market launched a "Neighbors Feeding Neighbors" donation to offering no-cost meal bags for anyone in need.
- Russ's Market and Super Saver announced they will match donations to Food Bank of Lincoln's Holiday Food Drive Up to \$20,000.
- Many other grocers rounded up for local food banks, donated meals, and offered free or discounted products for customers. THANK YOU!



NGA Executive Conference

OCT. 20, 2025

Shannon McCord with Ideal Market in Superior, NE, and NGIA board chair, attended the National Grocers Association Executive Conference in Washington, D.C. to meet with industry partners as well as the Nebraska delegation and their staff to lobby pressing issues including SNAP funding, credit card fees, and fair competition. 🇺🇸

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