



Verity Ulibarri

Chairwoman

USGC



Verity Ulibarri serves as chairwoman of the U.S. Grains Council. In this capacity, Ulibarri serves as a member of the organization's 15-person board of directors.

Ulibarri has a farm located in Melrose, New Mexico, where she grows grain sorghum, wheat and forage crops with her husband and family. She has farmed her whole life. Ulibarri holds a bachelor's degree in business administration and finance, an agricultural lending certificate, a US AgBank appraisal certificate and has completed an executive leadership program.

Ulibarri has served on the Council's board for three years and has been a board member of United Sorghum Checkoff Program for six years, serving as chair for two years and treasurer for two more. She previously worked for Farm Credit of New Mexico for 13 years while serving as a vice president, credit manager and in a product development and training role.



Jamie Zmitko-Somers

Agriculture Development Division Director

Michigan Dept. of Ag & Rural Development



Bureau Director for the Agriculture Development Bureau with the Michigan Department of Agriculture and Rural Development. Jamie leads a team of 60 very talented individuals that work to grow the Michigan food and agriculture industry. In her current role she focuses on strategy development and implementation across the bureau programs. Jamie previously spent over 20 years assisting Michigan companies to export by connecting them with potential buyers by organizing trade missions, buyers missions, and Michigan Pavilions at various trade shows.

Jamie grew up on her family's cash crop farm in Owosso. Her family currently resides on a 2,400-acre farm growing corn and soybeans. She attended Michigan State University and received her B.A. in Business Administration Pre-law in 2000.



Chip Councill

2017 Chairman

USGC

Chip Councill served as chairman of the U.S. Grains Council in 2017.

Chip Councill is a tenth-generation farmer from Maryland's Eastern Shore. He and his family operate a diversified grain and vegetable farm.

Chip is a past Chairman of the U.S. Grains Council and a former Director and President of MAIZALL.





Cary Sifferath

Vice President

USGC



Cary Sifferath serves as the vice president for the U.S. Grains Council. In this capacity, Sifferath is responsible for oversight of the Council's 10 international offices and all worldwide programs.

Sifferath has held various positions within the Council since joining in 1993. From 1993 to 1995, Sifferath was the manager of international operations-Asia at the Council's Washington, D.C., office. He was responsible for managing all programs within the Asia region.

He was promoted in 1995 to assistant director for the Southeast Asia office, based in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, and in 1997 was promoted again to regional director for Southeast Asia. In that capacity, he was responsible for market development activities throughout the Southeast Asia region.

From 2001 to 2008, Sifferath served as the senior director in the Council's Tokyo, Japan, office and carried out market development and trade activities in Japan.

From 2008 to 2010 he was the senior director in the Council's Beijing, China, office. During this time, he managed the Council's market development programs and office operations in China.

From 2010 to 2015 he served as the regional director of Europe, the Middle East and Africa in the Council's regional office in Tunis, Tunisia.

From 2015 to 2022, Sifferath was the senior director of global programs at the Council's headquarters in Washington.

Before joining the Council in 1993, Sifferath was a district sales manager for Kent Feeds, Inc., of Muscatine, Iowa.

For 30 plus years, Sifferath has lived and traveled extensively in and outside of the U.S. collecting information and firsthand knowledge of world grain supply and demand from regular contacts with local feed grain importers, processors, end-users, governments and various agricultural agencies.

Sifferath earned his bachelor's degree at the University of Wisconsin, River Falls, in agricultural economics and animal science.



Alicia Koch

Director of Global Ethanol Export Development

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Alicia Koch serves as the director of global ethanol export development for the U.S. Grains Council. In this capacity, Koch oversees development and execution of the Council's global ethanol program including strategy development, program implementation, public affairs, and strategic partnerships.

Koch previously served as executive director at Pivot Clean Energy Co, a nonprofit biofuels industry coalition and spent nine years across a variety of roles at POET, the world's largest biofuels producer.

She holds a bachelor's degree in biology from Taylor University.



Kurt Shultz

Senior Director of Global Strategies

USGC



Kurt Shultz is the senior director of global strategies for the U.S. Grains Council). In this role, Shultz is responsible for the development of long-term planning in support of the Council's domestic and international operations. He oversees strategic planning, program evaluation and special projects, among other assignments.

Shultz joined the Council in 1999 at the headquarters in Washington, D.C., as the manager of international operations for the offices based in Latin America, Africa and the Mediterranean and the Middle East. In addition, he managed the Council's Latin America marketing program activities upon the closure of the regional office in 2001.

In 2003, Shultz assumed the position of regional director for the Council's office in Africa and the Mediterranean, based in Tunis, Tunisia. Shultz later served as the regional director of the Americas, based in Panama, where he was responsible for carrying out market development and trade activities in the Western Hemisphere on behalf of the feed grains and export community.

Prior to joining the Council, Shultz was a senior environmental health and safety specialist with the University of Florida; a senior agricultural research technician with the University of the Virgin Islands Agricultural Research Station; and a Peace Corps volunteer in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, where he was a freshwater fisheries extension agent. Shultz has a bachelor's degree in animal science and a master's in business administration.



Ryan LeGrand

President & CEO

USGC



Ryan LeGrand serves as the President and Chief Executive Officer for the U.S. Grains Council (USGC).

With full-time presence in 13 key markets and representatives in an additional 15 locations, the Council operates programs in more than 50 countries and the European Union. The Council supports global economic development through partnerships, enabling U.S. agriculture's profitability.

LeGrand brings decades of experience in export grain trading and market development. Fluent in Spanish, LeGrand spent much of his career in Mexico. Before joining the U.S. Grains Council, he began his career as an export trader at Garvey International before going on to lead multinational teams at Hawkeye Gold and Gavilon.

LeGrand also serves as Vice Chair of the Agricultural Policy Advisory Committee, a joint committee of the United States Trade Representative and the U.S. Department of Agriculture and is a member of the Advisory Committee for Trade Policy Negotiations, a presidentially appointed advisory committee to the United States Trade Representative.

LeGrand grew up in Oklahoma and earned a degree in International Business from Oklahoma State University.



Mark Wilson

Vice Chairman

USGC



Mark Wilson serves as vice chairman of the U.S. Grains Council. In this capacity, Wilson serves as member of the organization's 15-person board of directors.

Wilson has a farm located in Toulon, Illinois, where he grows corn and soybeans and has farmed full-time on the farm since 1988. He received a Bachelor of Science degree from Iowa State University.

Wilson has been a Council delegate for 10 years and is a member of the Illinois Corn Marketing Board. He previously served as the corn sector director, Innovation & Sustainability A-Team lead, Asia A-Team lead, Farm Progress Show manager and chairman of the Illinois Corn Marketing Board.



U.S. Senator Debbie Stabenow

Michigan



“Made in Michigan” through and through, U.S. Senator Debbie Stabenow has blazed trails, transformed public policy, and made history as the first woman elected to the U.S. Senate from the State of Michigan. She is widely respected for her unrivaled work ethic, ability to build bipartisan coalitions, and unwavering commitment to public service.

Her work is deeply rooted in her love for Michigan and her understanding of the importance of agriculture to America’s economy, environment, and national security.

As the former Chairwoman of the powerful Senate Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition, and Forestry, Senator Stabenow played a pivotal role in shaping every Farm Bill since 2002. Her leadership helped modernize American agriculture by strengthening crop insurance and risk management tools for farmers, creating new ways to fund critical research, and expanding rural development opportunities. She led efforts to strengthen agriculture’s role in addressing the climate crisis and enhancing conservation practices that safeguard land and water for future generations.

In the 2014 Farm Bill, Senator Stabenow created the “Grow It Here, Make It Here” program to strengthen bio-based manufacturing. Recognizing the importance of bio-based energy, she has been a key leader of biofuels and renewable energy investments that reduce our dependence on foreign oil and support rural economies.

Senator Stabenow has also been a steadfast advocate for expanding global markets for American farmers. She championed robust trade promotion funding in the 2018 Farm Bill and led the development of the new Regional Agricultural Promotion Program. She then led efforts to expand trade promotion funding during the Biden administration. Her strong support for U.S. grains, corn, and value-added products like ethanol has helped position American agriculture as a reliable and innovative partner in international markets.

Senator Stabenow’s work to create the first specialty crop title in Farm Bill history also reflects her broader commitment to building a diverse and resilient food and agriculture system that benefits all producers.

After 50 years of public service as a County Commissioner, State Legislator, Congresswoman, and U.S. Senator, Senator Stabenow proudly passed the torch in 2025 to a new generation of leaders, beginning a new chapter in her life that includes serving the State of Michigan outside of elected office.



Jay O'Neil

Proprietor

HJ O'Neil Commodity Consulting



Jay is the proprietor of HJ O'Neil Commodity Consulting. Previously Jay spent 12 years as the Senior Agricultural Economist at the International Grains Program (IGP) at Kansas State University. Prior to that he worked as a Grain Trader and Trade Group Manager for Continental Grain, The Pillsbury Company, The Ferruzzi Group, Bartlett Grain Co. and as a private consultant to domestic and international grain companies. Jay also publishes a weekly Transportation and Export report for subscribers. Jay has traveled to and worked with Grain Buyers in 46 countries.

Jay is an emeritus member of the NAEGA (North American Export Grain Assoc.) Contracts and Arbitration Committee and continues to serve as an arbitrator with the North American Export Grain Association (NAEGA)



Kenneth Ramos Smith

Partner

AGON

Ken specializes in international trade and advises clients on aspects related to the implementation of the various Free Trade Agreements (FTAs) to which Mexico is a party. In particular, he focuses on supporting clients to identify export, import, or foreign direct investment opportunities offered by new generation FTAs such as the CPTPP, TLCUEM, and the Mexico-US-Canada Agreement (USMCA).

Likewise, he advises clients who face tariff barriers or technical obstacles to trade, whether in Mexico or abroad, with the aim of developing strategies that allow them to enter the various international markets in which Mexico enjoys preferential access.

Ken Smith Ramos has a long career in the Government of Mexico, with extensive experience in international trade negotiations. He has been an integral part of Mexico's negotiating team from different government institutions and began his career as part of the team that negotiated the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA).

He recently served as head of Mexico's Technical Negotiation for the modernization of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA).

As Representative of the Ministry of Economy at the Mexican Embassy in Washington D.C. (2013-2017) he led efforts to promote and defend Mexican commercial interests in the United States, and served as liaison for the Secretary of Economy with representatives of the US public, academic and private sectors.

Smith Ramos' negotiating experience has been consolidated through almost three decades in public service. Before heading the Representation of the Ministry of Economy in Washington, he was General Coordinator of International Affairs of the Ministry of Agriculture (SAGARPA—2010-2013) where he was responsible for agricultural trade negotiations and international cooperation in agri-food matters. He was General Director for International Affairs and Liaison at the Federal Competition Commission (COFECO—2007-2010), and General Director of North America at the Ministry of Economy where he operated as NAFTA coordinator for Mexico (2002-2007).

Smith Ramos received a BA in International Relations and Economics from Georgetown University, and a MA in International Economics from Johns Hopkins University, School of Advanced International Studies (SAIS).

Working languages: Spanish, English, French



Mark Linscott

Senior Advisor

USISPF

Mark Linscott is a Senior Advisor with the US India Strategic Partnership Forum (USISPF), leading efforts to advance US-India trade.

Previously, Mark was the Assistant U.S. Trade Representative (USTR) for South and Central Asian Affairs from December 2016 to December 2018. He was the U.S. government lead in developing trade policy with the countries in South and Central Asia and led efforts in the bilateral Trade Policy Forum with India and in Trade and Investment Framework Agreements (TIFAs) with Central Asia, Bangladesh, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka.

Mark served as the Assistant U.S. Trade Representative for World Trade Organization (WTO) and Multilateral Affairs from 2012 to 2016 with responsibility for coordinating U.S. trade policies in the WTO. He and his team were responsible for negotiations in the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) and Trans-Atlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP) on customs matters, government procurement, subsidies and trade remedies, and technical barriers to trade. Mark also represented the United States in trade meetings of the Group of Twenty (G-20) and the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD).

Mark was the Assistant U.S. Trade Representative for Environment and Natural Resources from October 2003 to March 2012. In this capacity, he oversaw all trade and environment issues for USTR, including in free trade agreement (FTA) negotiations, such as the TPP, and in the WTO and OECD. During this period, he developed a robust agenda on illegal logging and associated trade through Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) and bilateral agreements with Indonesia and China.

From 1996 to 2002, Mark represented the United States at the US Mission to the WTO in Geneva and was a founding member of the WTO Pension Fund Management Board. Prior to serving in Geneva, he worked in the Office of WTO and Multilateral Affairs in USTR Washington, where he concluded the Uruguay Round Government Procurement Agreement as the lead US negotiator. He started his career at the Department of Commerce, serving from 1985 to 1988 in Import Administration, and from 1988 to 1992 in the Office of Multilateral Affairs. He was awarded a Gold Medal Award, the Commerce Department's highest honor, for his work on the 1986 Canadian softwood lumber investigation.

Mark holds a BA in economics from the University of Virginia and a JD from Georgetown University Law Center. He and his wife, Karen, live in Washington DC, where he tinkers on his café racer motorcycles and paddles on the Potomac.



Chris Markey

SEA & Oceania Deputy Regional Director

USGC



Chris Markey serves as the deputy regional director of Southeast Asia and Oceania for the U.S. Grains Council.

In this capacity, Markey designs and executes market promotion, policy advisory and demand building programs for U.S. coarse grains and ethanol across the Southeast Asia and Oceania region.

Prior to the Council, Markey worked for Vriens & Partners, a Southeast Asia-focused government affairs consulting company, as a senior associate where he managed government affairs strategies and stakeholder relationships for multinational and local companies in Myanmar, Thailand and Cambodia. Markey also has previous experience as a research manager of a leading market research and boutique advisory company in Myanmar.

Markey holds a master's degree in agricultural economics and a bachelor's degree in international studies from Texas A&M University.