

Situation

The number of farmers' markets has increased by almost 30% since 2010. Many beginning farmers are interested in the production of specialty fruit, vegetable, or herb crops. These beginning farmers often come from a non-agriculture background and need lots of technical assistance. A large number of these farmers are also strongly interested in organic production methods. Data from the 2012 Great Plains Growers Conference, a regional grower's conference held near Kansas City, indicates that 49.2% of vegetable growers farm 1-10 acres and 50.7% have been growing for less than 5 years. Meanwhile 49.4% of growers in the region are growing organically and 56% of these producers are using high tunnels. As the number of produce growers increases, the need for marketing outlets such as farmers markets, food hubs, etc. also increases. Assistance is needed to establish best practices for management, food safety, and produce quality. Local production supports local communities by growing jobs and economic revenue. In Kansas, more than 11% of rural counties exist as "food deserts" (USDA Food Desert Map) where people have little access to fresh food and live under sub-optimum financial conditions.

Public Value

Access to locally grown produce enhances quality of food available to Kansas citizens, reduces environmental impacts and protects local economies.

Outcomes

Short-Term (Knowledge)

- Producers learn about fertilizers, managing soil fertility, cover crops, and soil health.
- Producers learn to identify and manage weeds, insects, and diseases that impact their crops.
- Producers learn about different marketing opportunities and techniques to help them sell their produce.
- Producers learn business management and profit tracking skills.
- Producers learn effective methods for planning and scheduling their crop plantings.
- Producers learn about new methods and technologies for harvesting at their scale of production.
- Producers learn how to effectively handle their crops after harvest to ensure quality and food safety.
- Local government officials learn about the value and economic potential of local specialty crops.
- Producers learn about possible food safety hazards in their production systems and understand that they need to make every effort to avoid contamination.
- Producers learn about efficient methods and technologies for irrigating their crops.
- Producers learn effective techniques for extending their growing season and protecting their crops from weather extremes.
- Producers learn about the requirements of organic certification and labeling. Producers that wish to pursue certification have the information they need.
- Producers learn about potential new specialty crops and improved varieties.
- Producers learn about new production systems and technologies appropriate to their scale of production.
- Extension agents learn information and gain skills that allow them to work more effectively with producers.
- Commercial growers become aware of opportunities through KSRE including collaborative on-farm research, grower training opportunities, and educational materials.
- Staff and volunteers advocate or develop plans for increased access to high-quality, abundant and safe food (e.g., increasing local food production for food insecure persons, donations to food pantries, CSAs, electronic benefit transfer devices at Farmers Markets)

Indicators

- Did you learn new techniques for managing soil fertility and health?
- Did you learn how to identify and manage weeds, insects and diseases?
- Did you learn about a new marketing opportunity or technique?
- Did you learn new business management skills?
- Did you learn new methods for planning and scheduling your crop plantings?
- Have you learned about new methods and technologies for production, harvest, or postharvest that are appropriate for your scale of production?
- Have you learned about identifying and managing potential food safety hazards?

- Did you learn about new potential crops or improved varieties for your farm?
- Did you learn about opportunities through KSRE to collaborate and gain more knowledge for your farm or business?
- Did you learn techniques to minimize the effects of weather extremes on your production systems?

Medium-Term (Behavior)

- Producers implement best management practices related to soil fertility and health.
- Producers correctly identify pest problems and manage them in efficient and safe ways when the problem reaches an economic threshold.
- Consumers purchase more locally produced specialty crops.
- Producers implement marketing, business management, and finance skills to increase their productivity.
- Producers implement effective crop planning and plant an appropriate variety of crops at the appropriate time of year.
- Producers implement harvesting, postharvest, and food safety practices that ensure crop quality.
- Local government officials enact policies that encourage local specialty crop production.
- Producers adopt GAPs and other practices to minimize the potential for contamination with microorganisms that cause foodborne illness.
- Producers use efficient and effective methods for irrigating their crops.
- Producers implement season extension techniques on their farms.
- Producers successfully complete organic certification if desire. Producers use the "organic" label appropriately.
- Producers plant new crops or improved varieties when appropriate.
- Producers implement new production systems and technologies appropriate to their scale of production.
- Extension agents work with and teach producers effectively.
- Producers interact with KSRE by conducting on-farm research and farmer training programs and providing knowledge to other growers.

Indicators

- Have you identified insect and disease problems and managed them in a timely fashion?
- Have you actively worked to improve the organic matter and fertility levels of your soil? What have you done?
- Have you experienced increased sales in direct marketing outlets? How much? Other marketing outlets?
- Have you implemented a new business management technique that has increased your productivity and efficiency?
- Are you implementing harvest/postharvest and food safety practices to ensure crop quality? Which practices?
- Have you planted new crops or new varieties? Which ones?
- Have you implemented new production systems, techniques, or technologies? How have these changes increased your productivity and yield?
- Have you shared your learning with other growers?

Long-Term (Change in Condition)

- Increased access to abundant, fresh, safe local foods, especially fruits and vegetables.
- Increase economic viability of local farms and horticulture enterprises through direct marketing that strengthens the local economy.
- Greater connection of consumers, especially urban consumers, with local agriculture results in stronger support for the needs of agriculture.
- Increased profitability of local specialty crop farms.
- Increased number of specialty crop farms and successful new farmers.
- Increased local jobs on local specialty crop farms.
- Farmers markets and other produce marketing options that meet the needs of both farmers and consumers.
- Development of infrastructure supporting local specialty crop producers increases the profitability of those producers and creates new local jobs.
- Increased safety of locally produced specialty crops.
- Community water resources are used wisely.

Indicators

- Have you increased the volume of produce that is available for sale from your farm?
- Have you increased your margins or otherwise seen an increase in profit?
- Have you developed relationships with your consumers?
- How many new specialty crop farms are there in the county?
- How many new jobs are available on specialty crop farms?
- Is locally grown produce available to consumers in a variety of locations and through different marketing channels? Has there been an increase in availability?

Outputs

Activities:

- Newsletters
- Social media
- Individual farm visits & consultations
- On-farm trials
- Research plots
- Workshops & meetings
- Field days and tours
- Training for county extension agents
- Online videos
- Webinars & online classes
- Growing Growers program

Participants:

- New or beginning fruit, vegetable, honey, or herb producers
- Established fruit, vegetable, honey, or herb producers
- New and established farmers markets
- New and established food hubs
- Local government officials
- Organic farmers
- Conventional farmers
- Growing Growers apprentices and farmer mentors