



Making a Difference

2015 – 2016

Horticulture Program Focus Team

Promoting Economic Viability for Specialty Food Crop Producers in Kansas

Grand Challenges

K-State Research and Extension: providing education you can trust to help people, businesses, and communities solve problems, develop skills, and build a better future.

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Situation

A regional study recently identified a gap in local food system development that has placed an undue burden onto local farmers. Where efforts to train new and transitioning farmers are successful, so too must be efforts to develop either new markets or new local food customers – or both. In some areas of Kansas, farmers are beginning to compete to satisfy a stable base of customers. This leads to declining sales volumes at existing outlets such as farmers markets or community supported agriculture (CSA) subscriptions. A survey of existing farmers recently identified a high level of interest in selling into larger markets.

What We Did

K-State Research and Extension led the conversation in scaling up local food systems in Kansas by coordinating numerous grower-education programs that focus on the business aspects of this scale of specialty-crop farming. Resources have been deployed to assist groups of farmers interested in satisfying larger markets in meeting their goals of cooperation. We worked closely with the few wholesale-scale specialty crop producers in Kansas to ensure educational efforts are in line with the experiences of these producers.

Outcomes

Numerous hurdles to the development of wholesale-scale fruit and vegetable farms have been cleared due to K-State Research and Extension involvement. The limited availability of sizable, secure, well-paying markets for locally grown fruits and vegetables has been cited as a critical reason for farmers' reluctance to increase the size of their operations. By identifying existing reliable outlets and helping farmers create their own aggregation/distribution entities, we have worked to make wholesale-scale production of fresh fruits and vegetables more approachable for Kansas farmers. The availability of sufficient labor and appropriate equipment have been cited as barriers to entrance. Though both of these still exist, we have worked with producers to help them overcome these and other barriers.

Success Story

Through our work in convening producers interested in solving scale-related challenges, Fresh Farm HQ, a regional food hub, was established and began operations. This agricultural cooperative is dedicated to expanding opportunities in the delivery and demand of local, nutritious food. It will aggregate and distribute locally produced vegetables, fruits, and proteins from small- and medium-sized producers within a 250-mile radius of Kansas City and sell to wholesale outlets including institutions, grocers, and restaurants.