

Increasing Access to Locally Produced Fruits and Vegetables (Core)

Situation

We are seeing a shift in our food system and it is consumer-driven. Over the last decade, organic and/or local production for direct-market sales has become one of the fastest-growing segments of U.S. agriculture, with fresh produce being among the most popular organic categories. In Kansas, there are not enough farmers growing fruits and vegetables to meet the demand of the market. At the same time, citizens are promoting healthy, locally-grown produce as a way to address community health disparities, food access, food deserts, social justice, and poverty. Rural communities are using local food systems and produce to address the needs of rural grocery stores and rural economic development. The Covid-19 pandemic has intensified the interest in locally produced fresh fruits and vegetables and that interest has continued.

In many communities around the state, food-producing gardens are playing a role in community vitality, health, and food access. Communities are starting community gardens and schools are incorporating school gardens into their programs. Many families and Millennials are growing some of their own food (often for the first time) in home gardens - whether traditional gardens, raised beds, containers, or vertical gardens.

Local communities are developing food policy councils and other organizational efforts to impact their local food systems and increase access to local produce and other local foods.

There is a great need for technical expertise and education. The addition of small acreage produce growers to the U.S. production system involves, in many cases, first-generation growers who are resource-limited. Data from the 2014 Great Plains Growers Conference, a regional fruit and vegetable growers conference held near Kansas City, indicates that 83.9% of vegetable growers farm 1-10 acres and 53.9% have been growing for less than 5 years. New community, school, and home gardeners need to know best practices for gardening, pest control, fertility, food safety, cooking, and more. A 2017 Kansas Department of Agriculture survey, showed that 80% of farms that grow specialty crops are under 6 acres in size, and only 11% exceed 20 acres. Data from the ARMS survey analyzed by Jablonski et. al. (2018) shows that profitability increases with scale, and risk decreases with scale. So, given this information, our specialty crop farms are high risk, low profit, and yet there is an unmet demand for local food.

However, in many communities, the need is for more than just technical expertise. Those working on local food system issues may need to address adaptive challenges relating to wider community concerns. The work done could involve developing a farmers' market, supporting a food hub, identifying opportunities for improved supply chain linkages, mobilizing volunteers for a garden, facilitating a food policy council, and much more.

Public Value

Increased access to locally grown, nutritious fruits and vegetables through a variety of means increases food security and health for Kansas citizens, reduces environmental impacts, and increases community vitality.

Outcomes

Short-Term (Knowledge)

- Gardeners and farmers learn production, pest management, irrigation, and fertility methods that are appropriate to their scale.
- Gardeners and farmers learn food safety practices that are appropriate to their scale and needs.
- Gardeners and farmers learn how to market their products, as well as various market outlets (e.g., direct-to-consumer, wholesale, donation, and gleaning).
- Commercial farmers learn about tools, software, agricultural mediation services, and other best practices for managing their business operation and/or scaling up their production by leveraging resources offered through KSU's Department of Agricultural Economics.
- Community members, policymakers, and community leaders learn about the opportunities and value of local food systems related to food access, health, and community vitality, including economic development.
- Extension agents learn best practices for supporting Food Policy Councils, when available, to engage in policy-level supports for local and regional food systems.
- Agricultural professionals learn how to better support specialty crop producers through an improved understanding of specialty crop farming systems.
- Commercial farmers have an improved statewide network for peer-to-peer learning and professional supports.
- Community members, policymakers, and community leaders know about local infrastructure needs, resources, and capacity of the local food system.
- Community and school leaders learn best management practices for garden programming and volunteer management.
- Gardeners and Extension volunteers learn about preparing, preserving, and eating healthy, local produce.
- Gardeners, farmers, and Extension volunteers learn how to communicate the importance of local food systems, including the consumption of locally-produced foods.
- Youth and students learn about the importance, opportunities, and value of growing and eating local produce.
- Youth and students learn gardening, cooking, and other life skills that will last a lifetime.

Indicators

- Learning of concepts and techniques indicated on pre and post evaluations from programs and workshops.
- Strategic planning outcomes from community meetings and organizations reflect learning about local food system issues.
- Conversations with community partners reflect learning about local food system issues.
- Number of workshops held with farmers
- Number of workshops held with gardeners
- Number of workshops held with agricultural professionals
- Number of Food Policy Council meetings attended
- Number of farmers participating in the Kansas Specialty Crop Growers Association
- Dollar value, staff time, volunteer hours, or other resources leveraged through working with program partners.

Medium-Term (Behavior)

- Gardeners and farmers adopt recommended production, marketing, pest management, food safety, irrigation, and fertility methods that increase their productivity.
- Community members, policymakers, and community leaders adopt policies that facilitate increased access to local produce.
- Community members, policymakers, and community leaders invest in programs and infrastructure that facilitate increased access to local produce.
- Gardeners and farmers actively advocate for increased availability and access to local produce and the infrastructure and resources needed to produce it.
- Community and school leaders implement gardening programs that are well-managed, sustainable, of high quality, and meet school standards.
- Gardeners and farmers grow, sell, and consume more locally produced fruits and vegetables.

- Local citizens start community or school gardens, local food organizations, farms, or related local businesses.

Indicators

- Number of new community gardens
- Number of active community gardens
- Number of new school gardens
- Number of active school gardens
- Number of other youth/community garden programs
- Number of new/beginning gardeners trained
- Number of new/beginning farmers trained
- Number of new farmers markets developed/worked with
- Number of active farmers markets worked with
- Participated in an active food policy / local food committee or organization
- Coordinated a food policy / local food committee or organization
- Policy or community planning changes implemented
- Programs that are started or funded
- Data from follow up surveys/evaluations and post-program evaluations indicating plans to implement practices or actual implementation of practices or actual implementation of practices.
- Learning outcomes from teachers using school gardens.

Long-Term (Change in Condition)

- Farmers growing and selling fruits and vegetables are more productive and profitable.
- Home and community gardeners have more productive gardens, consume more fresh produce, and share the bounty with their communities.
- Improved community vitality through economic benefits, development of human capital, development of infrastructure, or development of social or cultural capital.
- Youth developing healthy eating habits, life skills, and improved educational outcomes through school or community gardening programs.
- Youth pursuing careers in agriculture or horticulture.
- New and beginning farmers and gardeners increase the availability of fresh produce to the community.
- Increase consumption of healthy, local produce due to an increased availability of produce from local farms and gardens.

Indicators

- Farmers indicate higher sales and more yield.
- Community data indicates increased fruit and vegetable consumption.
- Home, community, and school gardeners indicate increased productivity of gardens, increased produce consumption, and improved health.
- Teachers show improved academic outcomes for students.
- Increasing shopper traffic at local farmer's markets, increased participation in CSAs, and increased participation in other local food purchasing opportunities.
- Increase in total acreage of specialty crop farmers measured by baseline and post-data from the Kansas Department of Agriculture's survey of Specialty Crop Growers.
- Increase in profit reported among specialty crop producers as measured by baseline and post-data from the Kansas Department of Agriculture's survey of Specialty Crop Growers.
- Increase in the number of farmers using risk mitigation resources measured by pre-post assessments taken during workshops
- Increase in participation of RMA and FSA programs for specialty crop growers.
- Increase in food donations to food pantries reported by community and school gardens.

Outputs

- Growing Growers programs
- Farmers market workshops
- Produce safety workshops
- Master Gardener training
- Gardening workshops for home and community gardeners
- Demonstration gardens or plots
- Social media efforts, news media efforts
- Newsletters and publications
- Entrepreneurship and business workshops
- Local food promotion programs
- Volunteer management workshops
- Cooking and food preservation classes
- Produce sampling programs
- Farm to school programs
- Farm tours
- One-on-one consultations
- Planned gardening programs with schools, other organizations
- Event booths and displays
- Facilitation and coordination of local food system activities
- Data collection and evaluation of local food system impacts/food system assessments