

A vibrant field of sunflowers stretches towards the horizon under a blue sky with scattered white clouds. The sun is low on the horizon, creating a warm, golden glow that illuminates the scene. The sunflowers in the foreground are in sharp focus, showing their bright yellow petals and dark brown centers. The field extends into the distance, where the sunflowers become smaller and eventually blend into the horizon line.

Annual Report 2026

Elevating **EXTENSION**

KANSAS STATE
UNIVERSITY

Extension



Dear Kansas Legislators:

Mid-year, 2025, K-State announced that Kansas State University Extension was being elevated from the College of Agriculture to the Office of External Engagement.

For those who may be less familiar with this office, our mission is to directly connect K-State's research excellence and academic innovation with the people and communities of Kansas. Through the Office of External Engagement, we work to turn university discoveries into practical solutions while bringing real-world insights back to campus — creating a dynamic, two-way partnership that strengthens both our university and our state.

This realignment of K-State Extension follows an in-depth needs assessment of Kansas residents that began in 2024. Over the past year, K-State hosted 28 focus groups across the Sunflower State and gathered direct and anecdotal feedback during President Richard Linton's regional community visits, which he initiated shortly after joining K-State in 2022. After carefully reviewing what Kansans told us, the university determined that bringing together the Office of External Engagement and Extension is essential to advancing K-State's efforts to positively impact lives through education and programming that help individuals, families and communities thrive. This move also supports our vision to lead as the next-generation land-grant university.

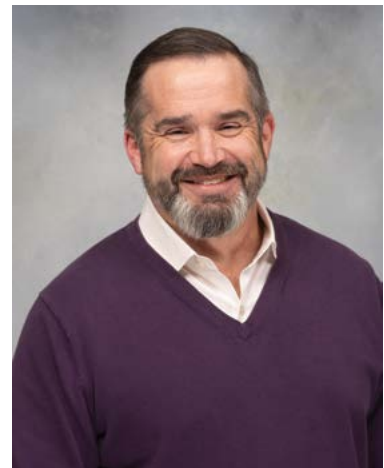
Elevating extension does not change the commitment of our dedicated faculty and staff. We have always served the needs of Kansans. While that work is highly visible in agriculture, our impact extends into health, youth development, community vitality, and many other areas. This alignment simply adds more campus resources and partners to our efforts, enabling us to strengthen and evolve our programming — working across colleges at the university and alongside local, regional and statewide partners.

We are excited to see the new ideas, collaborations and programs that will grow from this work as Kansas State University continues to serve Kansas, now and into the middle of this century and beyond. Thank you for your continued partnership with K-State Extension.



GREGG HADLEY

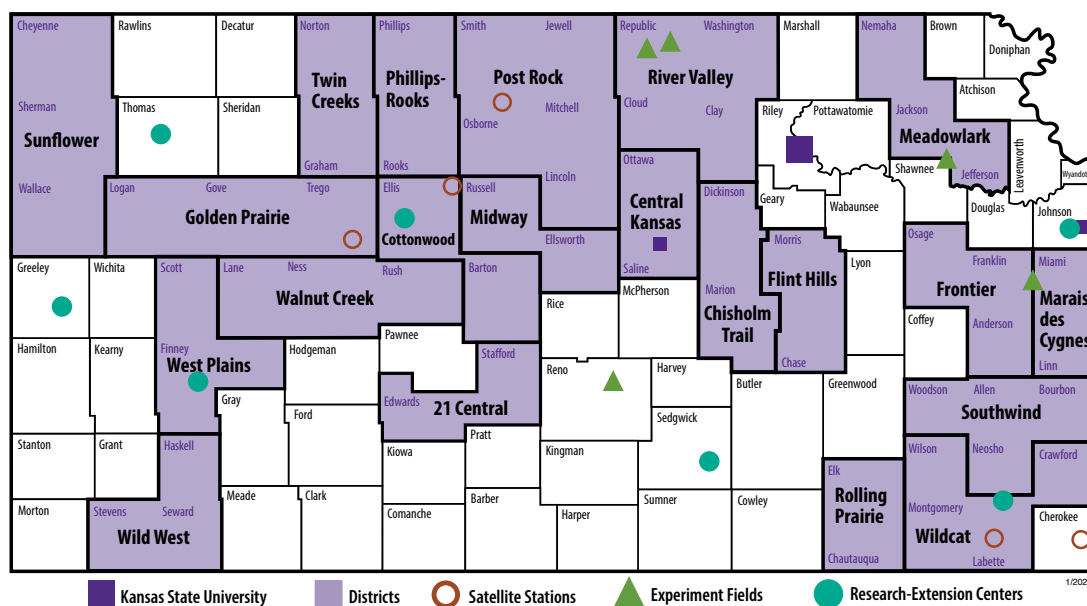
Assistant Vice President and Director,
Kansas State University Extension



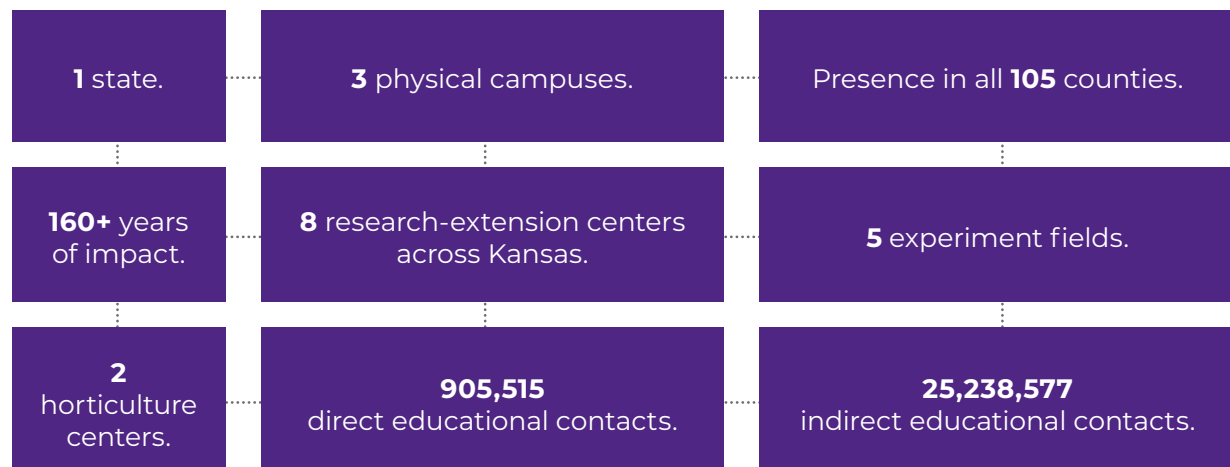
Our promise to Kansas

K-State Extension connects people across the state with the knowledge and science of Kansas State University by offering practical, research-based education.

We improve Kansans' lives, livelihoods and communities through education, research, engagement and leadership. With scientists, educators and volunteers in each of the state's 105 counties, Extension professionals strive to make the university's scientific improvements and discoveries accessible and relevant to every household. What they do, though, is not contained within state borders. Their work with regional, national and international organizations creates positive impacts around the world.



By the numbers:







Extension units continue push to support rural health care

Partnerships are key as local agents provide resources to rural Kansans

The statistics are sobering.

As many as 33 rural hospitals are currently at risk of closure in Kansas, a figure that Cindy Walker – a family and community wellness agent with K-State Extension’s Phillips-Rooks District – says leads the nation.

It’s not a good place to be, but a concerted effort by Kansas State University has begun to make progress in areas where healthcare is sorely needed.

Walker has helped to direct a project in which community members have worked with the Phillips County Health System to align the hospital’s plans with residents’ needs and priorities for the future. Since October 2024, the community has participated in four focus groups and two public meetings facilitated by K-State to help shape the direction of the health system.

The meetings included representatives from the University of Kansas Health System and a consulting firm.

“This project would not have worked if those groups came in on the first meeting, gave the data and then told everyone what they needed to do, which is a more traditional model of delivering expertise,” said Walker, noting that her participation also helped residents view the meetings as locally driven.

“...with a program like this, residents know there are providers and services in their community...”

— Susie Latta

“Instead, the experts came together with the community to develop a problem and opportunity statement, evaluate the data, set goals, and then allow the community members to implement the plan alongside the Phillips County Health System.”

Walker said residents are pursuing other initiatives, including an effort to increase access to health care providers. One example is a walk-in, quick-care clinic that operates each weekday morning to address acute care needs. The health system has also optimized providers’ schedules to accommodate more patient appointments.

K-State also continues to focus on rural health by helping to place and support community health workers in 16 counties: Allen, Bourbon, Clay, Cloud, Crawford, Jackson, Jefferson, Labette, Marshall, Montgomery, Nemaha, Neosho, Republic, Washington, Wilson and Woodson.

“Local extension units participating in the Rural Ag Health Community Health Worker project serve as a gateway to help residents manage chronic conditions, prevent injuries and reduce risk of illness,” said Elaine Johannes, the Kansas Health Foundation distinguished professor in community health, and state extension specialist.

“Extension units are known for providing education to promote and improve health; now, with the addition of community health workers, extension will be a resource and partner for local health systems.”

Susie Latta, a family and consumer sciences agent in K-State Extension’s Marshall County office, said extension agents have been the key to helping people in their communities find the help they need.

“You know, it’s not as easy to go to Kansas City when you’re 80 years old, and not everybody has the support system they need to get transportation to health care services,” Latta said. “But with a program like this, residents know there are providers and services in their community to address their needs, and that’s a relief to many.”

Johannes noted that K-State Extension is the country’s first extension system to employ community health workers in local units.

**For more information
our community health
worker program, visit
[ksre-learn.com/
community-health-
worker](https://ksre-learn.com/community-health-worker).**





Youth Entrepreneurship Challenge may boost Kansas' rural communities

Program tops 1,100 participants, includes 64 local contests

As impressive as the 24-fold growth of an annual event that encourages youth to pursue innovative business ideas is, Kansas 4-H Youth Development program leader Sarah Maass says it may not be the program's most important outcome.

Instead, the Youth Entrepreneurship Challenge might be offering a way to strengthen rural Kansas by helping youth discover how they can best serve the communities they grew up in.

"One of the things I really appreciate about the Youth Entrepreneurship Challenge is that it provides young people with an opportunity to get to know their community and explore what needs they might be able to meet through an entrepreneurial project," Maass said.

"As some of our rural communities continue to decline in size, my hope is that those who participate in an entrepreneurship contest will see the value they bring to their community and will either return home once they have completed their post-secondary education or stay and continue their entrepreneurial work."

The Youth Entrepreneurship Challenge, open to those in middle school and high school, began in 2013 with 48 participants who had developed a business concept and were given an opportunity to present it to a set of judges and compete for prizes.

Today, the event has grown to 64 local contests involving 1,161 youth who present their ideas for an opportunity to compete at a spring statewide event at Kansas State University.



“Young entrepreneurs are the future of economic prosperity in Kansas, so it’s a natural fit for K-State Extension to support a program that builds on youth development in all 105 counties in Kansas.”

- Gregg Hadley

In 2024, K-State Extension and Kansas 4-H Youth Development announced their commitment to provide \$100,000 per year for three years to fund local and state events. The Youth Entrepreneurship Challenge was founded by Network Kansas, a statewide entrepreneurial organization.

“Kansas 4-H delivers high-quality, positive development programs across all 105 Kansas counties,” Maass said. “Our collaboration with Network Kansas strengthens these efforts by equipping today’s youth with the skills and confidence to meet tomorrow’s challenges head on.”

“The YEC Series,” she added, “offers an exceptional learning experience that empowers young people to think big and take action.”

The Center for the Advancement of Entrepreneurship – located in K-State’s College of Business Administration – and Venture Dash, a web platform for organizing and managing entrepreneurship competitions, also are partners in the project. Local extension agents provide necessary support for creating and organizing local events.

Maass said extension agents and other university professionals have received training to foster innovation and leadership in young people. The curriculum includes developing critical thinking skills and entrepreneurial mindsets, as well as opportunities to drive innovation while strengthening their communities and contributing to a thriving future economy.

“Young entrepreneurs are the future of economic prosperity in Kansas, so it’s a natural fit for K-State Extension to support a program that builds on youth development in all 105 counties in Kansas,” said Gregg Hadley, K-State assistant vice president and director of extension.

**More information
on the Youth
Entrepreneurship
Challenge is
available at
[ksre-learn.com/
YEC-challenge](https://ksre-learn.com/YEC-challenge).**



1,161 Youth Participants

in 64 local contests, presented their ideas for an opportunity to compete at the spring statewide event in 2025.

\$300,000

investment by Kansas 4-H and K-State Extension for local and state YEC events.

Science to Solutions: K-State rallies to stem threat of wheat curl mite

State and local staff update the management strategies to help farmers protect their 2026 wheat crop

The wheat curl mite measures barely 1/100 of an inch, but Kansas farmers were reminded in 2025 that the cigar-shaped pest can be a mighty big problem.

Kansas State University and Kansas Wheat reported that the state's farmers' losses due to a complex of three viruses transmitted by the wheat curl mite – wheat streak mosaic virus, triticum mosaic virus and High Plains wheat mosaic virus -- ranged from 10% to total crop failure in 2025.

Brian Olson, professor and department head of the Western Kansas Research-Extension Centers, based in Hays, said the year's outbreak was due to unusually warm fall temperatures and rainfall immediately following wheat harvest in 2024, which enabled volunteer wheat to thrive and thus provided a perfect habitat for the wheat curl mite.

He said the impact on 2025's wheat crop was at an "extremely high level of infection."

"In some fields," Olson said, "it is estimated that infestations reached up to 500 mites per head, translating to more than 1 billion mites per acre." Because the wheat curl mite is microscopic, researchers can only estimate its presence based on green mottled leaves (marked with spots) seen in many central and western Kansas wheat fields.

The threat to Kansas' wheat producers was not lost on university extension specialists and researchers, who rallied quickly to update management strategies and educational offerings during the 2025 season to help prevent losses in the 2026 wheat crop.

Together, the team promoted:

- Aggressive control of volunteer wheat to disrupt the 'green bridge' that allows mites to survive between seasons.
- Use of resistant wheat varieties with clear communication about their limitations.
- Volunteer wheat-free periods across the state to reduce early-season mite pressure.
- Accurate diagnosis of mosaic virus infections through county extension offices and the K-State Plant Diagnostic Lab.



“This team exemplifies the mission of extension, which is translating science into solutions,” Olson said. “Their swift, coordinated response and commitment to producer education undoubtedly made a measurable impact on Kansas agriculture.”

Team members included plant pathologist Kelsey Anderson Onofre; agronomists Romulo Lollato, Jeanne Falk Jones, Logan Simon, Lucas Haag and Tina Sullivan; extension agents Craig Dinkel and Sandra Wick; entomologist Anthony Zukoff; weed scientist Sarah Lancaster; agronomy communications assistant Kathy Gehl; and plant diagnosticians Judy O’Mara and Chandler Day.

In preliminary results of a survey of Kansas wheat producers, Falk Jones reported that 83% of respondents indicated they applied at least two management practices they learned from K-State to help reduce the risk of infections in the 2026 wheat crop.

Accurate figures on losses due to the viruses' spread are not yet available for 2025. Still, Olson said he thinks K-State's rapid response has provided the tools and knowledge to help producers decrease losses in 2026.

“It’s very common for K-State agents and specialists to work together to form teams that address diseases, natural disasters or pest problems to crops and livestock,” he said. “Farmers, ranchers and the public can appreciate the quick response of these teams to address emerging threats to agriculture.”

More information and help with various agricultural topics are available at local extension offices throughout Kansas.



K-State Extension teams with Kansas Health Foundation to reduce hunger in the state

Hunger-free mini-grants impact 33 Kansas counties in 2025

When the Kansas Health Foundation announced in late 2024 that it was forming a partnership with K-State Extension to offer \$300,000 in grants to help the state's communities combat hunger, Lora Horton saw a great opportunity.

Horton, director of K-State Extension's Hamilton County office, was aware of the level of food insecurity in her county, located near the southwest border with Colorado.

"At the time," she said, "Hamilton County had one food pantry, with which we were able to begin a partnership. That pantry had limited capacity and restrictive policies that created barriers for low-resource families, especially the migrant population."

The local school district reported that 62.45% of students were eligible for free lunch, and another 6.43% for reduced lunch. The district's four-day school week exacerbated food insecurity among children, Horton said.

The money provided by the Kansas Health Foundation established Hunger-Free mini-grants — ranging in value from \$2,500 to \$30,000 — that went to 20 Kansas State University Extension offices, where in 2025 local agents led programs that "drive meaningful change in food security and anti-hunger initiatives across the state," said Rebecca McMahon, administrator of the Kansas Local Food System program established by K-State.

According to Feeding America, one in eight Kansans and one in five Kansas children are food insecure. The Kansas Health Foundation's initial awards helped 33 of the state's 105 counties.

Clara Misenhelter, a program manager with K-State's Rural Grocery Initiative, said the Kansas Health Foundation's funding was used to help many projects, including placing a community health worker at a food pantry, supporting a project known as Food is Medicine, and leveraging existing programs such as community and school gardens.

"This funding was an amazing opportunity to catalyze our network of agents and change-makers in pursuit of a common goal to eradicate hunger in Kansas," Misenhelter said. "K-State Extension has agents who are already embedded in every county in our state. These agents know their communities and are well-connected to incredible partners who are already doing essential work."

Horton said the grant received by her office enabled her team to hire a bilingual staff member, who helped gain acceptance into the Kansas Food Bank Network and assisted residents in applying for safety net programs offered by the Department for Children and Families.

The result? Horton said Hamilton County residents have strengthened partnerships and improved access to food. Applications for food assistance have increased by 18%. The county's food pantry has become eligible for food from the Emergency Food Assistance Program, and the county is now part of the Kansas Food Bank Network.

Gregg Hadley, K-State assistant vice president and director of extension, said Hamilton County's experience serves as an example of the value of funding anti-hunger initiatives.

"We hope this will serve to bring in additional funding in future years to continue this effort to reduce hunger in Kansas," Hadley said.



More information on
Hunger Free Kansas
is available online at
hungerfreekansas.org.



SUPPORTING

*Kansas
communities*

Our Funding Sources

Fiscal Year 2026

K-STATE EXTENSION (Cooperative Extension Service)	
State Appropriation	\$23,033,997
Federal Appropriation (3(b)and(c), Special Needs)	6,000,000
Grants, Contracts, Other Funds	20,116,462
County/District Appropriation	26,900,000
TOTAL K-STATE EXTENSION	\$76,050,459



**Providing Kansans with research-based
educational opportunities to improve
their lives, livelihoods and communities.**

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