

MAKING A *Difference*

ACROSS KANSAS

K-State Research and Extension Programming Report

Annual Report 2023-24

K-STATE
Research and Extension

FROM THE ASSISTANT VICE PRESIDENT AND DIRECTOR FOR EXTENSION

In 2024, K-State Research and Extension significantly impacted the lives of Kansans and our communities. Throughout the year, our extension specialists, agents, and field staff made more than 15 million educational contacts, an increase of more than 6 million compared to 2023. Each contact indicates an interaction, whether regional, statewide, national, or international, with our resources.

In the 2023-2024 Making a Difference Report, you will learn of some of our contributions to local communities, including initiatives in food access, community development, agricultural research, health and well-being, and more. We also launched a new initiative in collaboration with the K-State Office of Engagement and K-State 105 titled "Delivering on the Promise." During approximately 80 meetings with community partners across the state, we identified eight key issues to address to support vibrant Kansas communities. These issues range from water access to rural broadband, childcare, and housing. In addition to our traditional programs, such as 4-H, we are dedicated to supporting Kansans as communities adapt to the challenges of the 21st century.

We are optimistic about the future. Our professionals and volunteers are committed to overcoming challenges to create stronger and healthier communities. I invite you to explore this report about K-State Research and Extension — our work and achievements will inspire you.



GREGG HADLEY

Assistant Vice President and
Director for Extension



Direct and Indirect Educational Contacts

630,353

Direct contacts

14,240,276

Indirect contacts

224,486

Volunteer contacts

353,338

Volunteer hours

*Equal to more than \$10,400,000 worth of
service to Kansas communities.*



GLOBAL FOOD SYSTEMS

Connecting producers to sorghum resources

Kansas is ranked #1 for sorghum production in the United States. Sorghum is unique from other crops due to its heat resiliency and water-smart attributes. However, sorghum is susceptible to plant diseases like stalk rot, which account for at least five percent of yield loss to Kansas sorghum annually. Currently, there are no in-season management options for stalk rot disease.

To better understand the disease and how to mitigate it, K-State Research and Extension partnered with the Kansas Grain Sorghum Commission and private industry to conduct field trials. During the trials, agronomic practices like row spacing, plant population, and variety selection were evaluated. Fungicide application and timing was also considered. To share these findings with producers, Sorghum Connection Field Days were hosted. During these field days, researchers used trial fields to provide hands-on learning opportunities. Field day attendees learned about stalk rot management, hybrid selection, value added hybrids, sorghum fertility management, and other practices to improve sorghum productivity and profitability. They also received updates from the K-State sorghum breeding program.

The field days were attended by producers from 23 sorghum-producing counties in Kansas and Oklahoma. Eighty-two percent of event attendees rated the experience as valuable/very valuable to attend.

Supporting local food systems

To understand local food issues and how to support them, K-State Research and Extension hosted Community Local Food Roundtables throughout the state. These conversations revealed better connection, collaboration, and communication were critical needs for food system stakeholders in Kansas. Participants also expressed interest in learning from each other and experts about what is and isn't working to help make their work in local food systems more effective.

To bring together stakeholders, the extension Local Food Systems team organized the inaugural Kansas Local Food Summit in conjunction with external partners in Wichita, Kansas. The summit hosted 160 attendees, representing different regions of the state. Attendees left with new knowledge after engaging in interactive learning circles, networking opportunities, and keynotes by food system experts.

Upon completion, 98 percent of summit attendees indicated they gained new knowledge or ideas about how to make progress in their local food system.

"The information from the breakout session on food waste was impactful. I hope to make connections with local restaurants and share this with others in the community."

– Summit attendee

Educational Contacts by Grand Challenge

107,056
Health

101,142
Global Food Systems

96,773
Community
Vitality

249,014
Developing Tomorrow's Leaders

76,368 Water and Natural Resources





COMMUNITY VITALITY

Facilitating engaged dialogues

Facilitated dialogue can help community groups come together, discuss opportunities, and reach important goals. Facilitation can make a difference, especially in situations where there are differing points of view, conflicting interests, and uncertainties. Because of their proximity to Kansas communities, K-State Research and Extension professionals are well positioned to convene community groups and facilitate difficult conversations, helping to achieve community priorities.

This year, the Facilitation Initiative team experienced growth in membership and engaged communities across the state in thoughtful conversations around Kansas' most critical issues. Overall, trained extension facilitators engaged more than 2,000 Kansans in dialogue surrounding issues like water conservation, local food systems, community health planning, and more. As a result, stakeholders in every Kansas county participated in at least one facilitated discussion or event in the programmatic year (October 2023 – October 2024).

Along with hosting facilitated dialogues, the initiative welcomed new members. The team developed the Facilitation Initiative Intensive Training (FIIT), which was used to onboard 20 new facilitators, including an extension board member, plus state and local extension staff. The initiative also launched an online micro-credential course and awarded 52 completion badges to participants.



HEALTH

Building a healthier Kansas

According to America's Health Rankings, Kansas is ranked 31st in the nation for overall health. The state ranks last in addiction rates among youth and has high rates of mental health challenges among adults. Despite access to reputable health information, pervasive misinformation makes it difficult for communities to build health literacy. To tackle these complex issues, K-State Research and Extension partnered with local, state, and national partners to implement Policy, Systems, and Environmental (PSE) change initiatives.

Extension agents played a central role in these efforts, each completing the University of Minnesota Extension's *Systems Approaches for Healthy Communities* training, equipping them with advanced skills in community health assessment, stakeholder engagement, and sustainable PSE intervention strategies. Upon completion, each agent received a \$10,000 cooperative agreement to support innovative, needs-based PSE projects in their local communities.

Some of those projects included grant writing support, resulting in upgraded recreational spaces and expanded access to fresh foods through local markets and gardens. In one community, support for bilingual health workers helped bridge language barriers, enhancing community health services for underserved populations. In another, a collaborative health needs assessment laid the groundwork for a Community Health Improvement Plan.

Gardening for well-being

Kansas, like many states, is dealing with an aging population. By 2064, it's estimated that 200,000 Kansans will be aged 85 years and older. Participation in plant-based activities or therapeutic horticulture has been shown to improve social and psychological well-being, and nutritional and physical health among aging adults.

Recognizing an opportunity to enrich the quality of life of Kansas seniors, Extension Master Gardener (EMG) volunteers collaborated with long-term care and independent living facilities to create gardening programs. Through regular interaction in the garden with each other and EMG volunteers, residents developed meaningful connections that alleviated social isolation and loneliness. These accessible gardening experiences also promoted physical activity, fostered independence, engaged memories, and built self-esteem.

Volunteers also maintained demonstration gardens across the state, showcasing features that make gardening accessible and safe for older adults. These gardens incorporate raised beds, container gardens, wide pathways, comfortable seating, low-maintenance plant selections, and ergonomic tools, all designed to enhance physical accessibility and ensure that older adults can continue to enjoy the benefits of gardening.



These efforts engaged 721 older adults spread throughout 10 counties in therapeutic gardening activities. EMG volunteers delivered 1,515 hours of gardening training and support.

Improving mobility and strength in aging populations

Many adults experience a decline in muscle mass and strength, leading to decreased mobility, increased risk of falls, and a lower quality of life. However, regular physical activity and muscle-strengthening exercises can significantly improve physical health. To keep Kansans active and healthy, K-State Research and Extension agents taught older adults how to strengthen their muscles through an eight-week workout program called Stay Strong, Stay Healthy.

The program helps participants improve strength, balance, and overall well-being. Through 16, hour-long classes, agents certified to deliver Stay Strong, Stay Healthy programming taught 358 participants exercises to help improve mobility and strength.



DEVELOPING TOMORROW'S LEADERS

Creating opportunities for Kansas youth

This year, K-State Research and Extension and Kansas 4-H partnered with NetWork Kansas to deliver the Kansas Entrepreneurship Challenge (KEC). This partnership also extended to local Youth Entrepreneurship Challenges (YEC). Through this collaboration, local extension units engaged their communities and provided Kansas youth an opportunity to learn about business. Since the Youth Entrepreneurship Challenge's inception in 2013, participation has grown from 48 to 1,159 youth statewide.

Marking the inaugural year of the partnership, extension professionals were encouraged to participate as judges for the KEC event held in April in Manhattan. This resulted in an increase in extension professionals' involvement, with extension-affiliated judges rising from one in 2023 to 18 in 2024. The number of 4-H youth competing in the event also increased from 14 in 2023 to 27 in 2024.

Additional programming to promote the partnership and youth's involvement in YEC was facilitated throughout the year, including presentations during 4-H Discovery Days, participation in the YEC Summit and kick-off meeting, and NetWork Kansas Community Conversations during the K-State Research and Extension Annual Conference.

"I have a muscle disorder that is like living with weakness and fatigue 24/7. I started with no weights and low belief that I would add weights. I was able to get to 3-pound ankle weights, 5 pounds on shoulder press, and 3 pounds for biceps and seated row. This boosted my confidence to trust my muscles again."

– Stay Strong, Stay Healthy participant

Additional information on our programming areas is available at ksre-learn.com/program-areas.

SCAN ME



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

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Kansas State University Agricultural Experiment Station and Cooperative Extension Service

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