



# MAKING A *Difference* ACROSS KANSAS

*K-State Extension Programming Report*  
Annual Report 2024-25

**KANSAS STATE**  
**UNIVERSITY**

Extension

DEAR PARTNERS,

In mid-2025, K-State Extension transitioned from the College of Agriculture to the Office of External Engagement. This strategic move enhances our ability to connect university research with community needs, supporting our vision of becoming a Next-Generation Land-Grant University. It also brings new resources and fosters broader collaboration across campus and the state of Kansas.

Our mission remains unchanged — we continue to help Kansans thrive, now with greater support and reach. In fact, our extension teams made over 25 million educational contacts this year, representing an increase of more than 11 million from 2024.

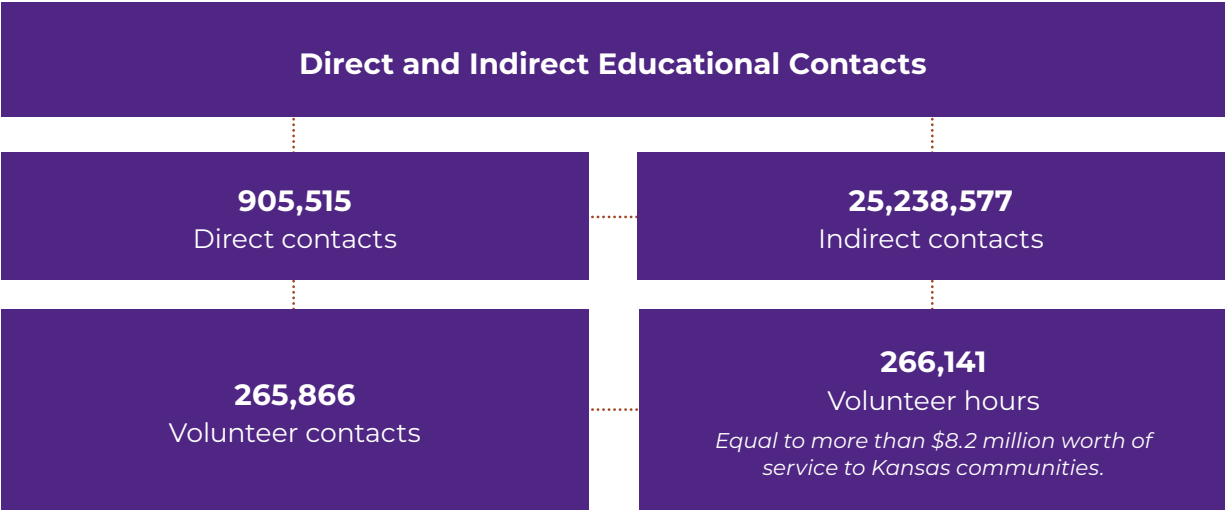
Each contact reflects meaningful engagement — locally, statewide, and beyond — where K-State Extension made a difference. The 2024–2025 Making a Difference Report highlights our impact in areas like food access, community development, agriculture, health, and more.

With Extension’s elevation, we’re excited about the future and the expanded opportunities to serve Kansas residents. I invite you to explore the report and learn more about our work across the state. We look forward to continuing our partnership in the year ahead.

*Gregg Hadley*

GREGG HADLEY

Assistant Vice President and  
Director for Extension





## GLOBAL FOOD SYSTEMS

### Managing wheat mosaic virus

Spring of 2025 brought a devastating outbreak of wheat mosaic virus complex to central and western Kansas. Wheat farmers generated approximately \$1.7 billion in 2024 for the state's economy and produced roughly 24% of the U.S. wheat crop, making this disease a threat not only to Kansas producers but also to national food security.

The disease, carried by a microscopic wind-borne mite, cannot be controlled with current chemical options. Once infected, plants suffer significant stunting and reduced grain production, with no available treatment. However, proactive management can substantially reduce the likelihood of future outbreaks. Conducting outreach, researching resistance, and coordinating regional management efforts are essential to protect the state's wheat industry and economy.

In response, K-State Extension launched an intensive, multi-channel educational campaign, working alongside farmers and agronomy professionals to manage the crisis. Field days, personal field visits, and consultations, as well as wheat sample tests, were implemented across the state. Digital and media outreach also informed producers of the possible threats and signs to look out for. K-State Extension's Wheat Mosaic publications saw 61,849 digital downloads during peak agricultural decision-making periods in the state.

Due to these efforts, producers reported an increased ability to identify signs of the virus, understand disease cycles, recognize infection risk factors, implement proper management practices, comprehend the mite-virus relationship, and utilize a variety of resistance ratings.

**61,849**

wheat mosaic extension publication downloads.

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### Building garden resilience through vegetable variety trials

Extreme weather patterns, such as record-breaking heat and intensified windstorms, as well as soil degradation, have reduced home food production, weakened plant resilience, and strained water resources in Kansas. These shifting conditions underscore the urgent need for research-based, regionally adapted vegetable varieties that can thrive in drought, heat, and variable soil conditions.

To determine which vegetable varieties perform best under challenging weather conditions, Extension Master Gardener volunteers collaborated with Kansas State University horticulture specialists and seed companies to conduct research-based variety trials.

Following standardized research protocols and applying Integrated Pest Management (IPM) strategies, volunteers tested varieties at community, demonstration, school, and home garden sites. Tomato and pepper varieties were monitored throughout the growing season, with data on vigor, yield, and disease resistance. These variety trials translated data-informed research into practical guidance that strengthened gardening success, community food security, and environmental resilience across Kansas.

In total, 24 trial gardens, occupying 281,116 square feet, evaluated 35 vegetable varieties under Kansas' varying weather conditions, such as heat and drought. Results were shared with Kansans through educational programs that engaged 5,000 participants and a comprehensive statewide report. During the growing season, 63,239 pounds of produce were harvested, of which 34,127 were donated to 40 community organizations.

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### Helping agriculturalists transition the farm

Kansas agriculture faces a critical transition point. Over the next 20 years, approximately 70% of U.S. farmland, representing billions of dollars in agricultural assets, is expected to transfer to new ownership. In Kansas, 65% of primary farm operators are age 55 or older, creating an urgent need for structured succession planning.

Failed farm transitions don't just impact individual families; they also have ripple effects throughout rural Kansas. Without proper planning, productive agricultural land is often liquidated rather than transitioned, leading to population declines and reduced economic activity in rural areas.

In partnership with the University of Nebraska-Lincoln and Purdue Extension, K-State Extension delivered a four-session educational series that brought farm transition expertise directly to Kansas families where they live and work. The program addressed the entire spectrum of succession planning — from understanding family motivations and enhancing communication, to navigating the complex financial and legal frameworks that govern farm transfers.

In total, 338 Kansans engaged in the series, contributing to a three-state cohort of 584 farm families across Kansas, Nebraska, and Indiana. The multi-generational nature of attendance was particularly noteworthy, with parents, adult children, and sometimes multiple branches of farm families attending together.

Following the program, 96% of participants found the information valuable, and participants gained concrete knowledge on legal structures, communication strategies, and financial planning tools essential for successful transitions. Of those who responded, 74% of participants committed to taking specific action, including reviewing existing estate plans, adopting formal written succession plans, and/or seeking professional legal or financial guidance.





## COMMUNITY VITALITY

### Assisting rural grocers and educating policymakers

Rural grocery stores serve as economic anchors, helping these communities attract and retain residents, maintain their tax base, and sustain a quality of life. When a rural grocery store closes, residents lose access to affordable, healthy food, local jobs disappear, property values decline, and the community's viability is called into question. Yet, the challenges of operating a locally owned rural grocery store are numerous, and their needs are urgent. Rural grocers face mounting pressures, including credit card processing fees that consume profit margins, technology investments required to accept modern payment systems, chronic labor shortages, and the constant balancing act of staying competitive while serving small customer bases.

To address this, in August 2025, K-State's Rural Grocery Initiative (RGI) hosted the Kansas Rural Grocers Retreat and Rural Grocery Road Trip. This immersive, two-day experience brought together rural grocers and policymakers to discuss the hardships and opportunities facing business owners and rural communities. The retreat was strategically focused on actionable items that grocers could immediately implement, whereas the road trip was designed to influence the policy environment.

Following the event, grocers left with tangible action plans. Each attendee identified specific strategies relevant to their store's situation, and connected with peers facing similar challenges who could serve as accountability partners and resources.

Legislators and funders, however, gained a direct understanding of rural grocery economics and the challenges it presents. As one attendee reflected: "I really appreciate the store owners and store staff for taking the time to share their stores, their stories, and their food with us. They all stood out in unique ways. [This event] renewed my reverence for rural grocers and the communities they serve."

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*– Rural Grocery Initiative retreat participant*



## HEALTH

### Reducing fall risks among older Kansans

Kansas ranks 33rd out of 50 states in key health indicators for fall prevention, with nearly 30% of Kansans aged 65 and older reporting a fall in the past year. Falls are the leading cause of fatal and nonfatal injuries among older adults, resulting in over three million emergency department visits and 800,000 hospitalizations annually nationwide.

To address this issue, K-State Extension collaboratively facilitated three evidence-based programs aimed at improving strength, flexibility, and balance among older Kansans. Programs were delivered in group settings, fostering social connection and peer support, and included pre- and post-assessments to measure progress.

Between October 2024 and September 2025, 567 older adults across 38 Kansas counties participated in the programs. Participants reported a reduced fear of falling, an increased commitment to physical activity, greater confidence in discussing fall risks, and improved knowledge in areas such as how to get up after a fall properly and how to minimize fall risks at home. Other benefits included improvements in health, physical movement, and social engagement.

This program also delivers measurable returns for Kansans, preventing an estimated 119 falls over a three-year period. This prevention generates \$1,521,891 in direct healthcare cost savings (based on an average fall cost of \$12,789 and a 21% research-proven reduction rate). Preventing falls also helps avoid medical costs and expenses, delays nursing home placement (saving over \$93,075 annually per person), reduces emergency department utilization, and allows family caregivers to continue working due to the prevention of fall-related injuries and resulting needs.



## Helping older adults save money through Medicare counseling

Medicare's complexity creates significant barriers for older Kansans and individuals with disabilities. Beneficiaries must navigate multiple coverage parts, including multiple enrollment windows, annual plan changes, provider networks, formularies, and income-based premium adjustments. Without expert guidance, beneficiaries may make uninformed or misinformed decisions that can have costly consequences, including permanent late enrollment penalties, gaps in coverage, unexpected out-of-pocket costs, and limited access to preferred providers or medications.

K-State Extension addresses this challenge through the Senior Health Insurance Counseling for Kansas (SHICK) program. SHICK provides trusted, unbiased Medicare counseling to help Kansans make informed healthcare decisions, avoid costly mistakes, and access benefits that meet their needs. Services include enrollment assistance within proper timelines, health and drug plan comparisons, identification of financial assistance for premiums and prescriptions, and connections to community resources such as food and utility assistance programs.

Through a partnership with the Kansas Department of Aging and Disability Services (KDADS), extension professionals deliver one-on-one Medicare counseling and community-based education. During the programmatic year (October 2024 – October 2025) extension agents in 65 counties provided drug plan comparison assistance to 6,815 medical beneficiaries, and 4,351 switched to a better-suited plan. These changes resulted in an estimated savings of \$7,282,389, averaging \$1,674 per person.

K-State Extension also better prepares Medicare beneficiaries to take control of their healthcare and finances. Among participants surveyed, 97% reported a better understanding of how to choose a health or drug plan and estimate annual costs, while 90% gained a better understanding of available assistance programs to help pay premiums, co-pays, and co-insurance.

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statewide savings through  
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Additional information on our  
programming areas is available at  
[ksre-learn.com/program-areas](https://ksre-learn.com/program-areas).



## DEVELOPING TOMORROW'S LEADERS

### Training volunteers to foster positive youth development in Kansas

Kansas 4-H relies on caring, well-equipped volunteers to create positive youth development experiences that help young people thrive. Across Kansas, over 15,000 youth are enrolled in 4-H community clubs and supported by nearly 3,000 registered and approved volunteers.

The 4-H Thriving Model is a research-based framework that demonstrates how youth thrive when they experience belonging, purpose, and caring relationships that challenge their growth. Volunteers who understand and apply this model help youth develop essential skills for lifelong success.

Forty extension professionals were trained on how to use the 4-H Thriving Model. After this training, they equipped 725 volunteers across 22 counties with practical tools to recognize and nurture what motivates each young person, create environments where youth feel safe and valued, and build authentic relationships that inspire growth. Volunteers also completed reflective self-assessments based on the model to identify their strengths and set goals, becoming more intentional and confident in their roles.

As a result of this program, volunteers demonstrated measurable growth in behaviors that directly support the development of thriving youth. The most significant increase was observed in volunteers who help young people envision their future possibilities and challenge them with new experiences. These findings highlight volunteers' growing ability to foster optimism, curiosity, and resilience in the youth they work with.

The impact of volunteer development is evident in the voices of youth. One hundred percent of youth engaged in the program strongly agreed that the adults treated them fairly, helped them, listened to them, and cared about them — proof that stronger volunteer training supports the positive relationships youth need to succeed.



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



Extension

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