



Executive Summary: *Feeding Kansas*

A 2014 Kansas Rural Center report prepared by Cole Cottin

For more information, please visit www.kansasruralcenter.org

INTRODUCTION

Despite Kansas's important role in agricultural production for national and global markets, people with limited access to quality food due to distance and economic factors live in all 105 Kansas counties. A 2010 Healthy Eating Index assessment found that more than 92 percent of Kansans are consuming a nutritionally imbalanced diet (USDA, 2010).

In a state that prides itself on “feeding the world,” we currently struggle to adequately feed and nourish ourselves. Statewide efforts to respond to the global food crisis cannot be sustained unless we address the crisis at home – *feeding the world includes feeding ourselves*. As a leader in global food systems, Kansas's local food system can and should provide a model of well-being and success for others.

Increasing consumption of healthful foods raised by Kansans for Kansans would have significant economic and health impacts. Keeping more Kansas food dollars in Kansas would strengthen the local economy, create jobs, and improve economic access to healthful food (Black, 2009; Martinez, et al., 2010; Bagi & Reeder, 2012; Crossroads Resource Center, 2014). Kansas agriculture disproportionately serves global and national markets, while the majority of the state's food dollars – more than 90 percent in 2012 – are spent on food from outside of Kansas. If every resident purchased just \$5 of food direct from Kansas farms each week, those farms would earn \$750 million in new revenue – according to research conducted by the Crossroads Resource Center (Meter, 2014). At current sales tax rates, that could equate to more than \$46 million in state revenue and up to \$15 million in local and county tax revenue (Tax-Rates.org, 2014).

The more avenues we have for channeling nutritious food to Kansans, the better. Many Kansas farms are located in areas designated as “food deserts” by the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA, 2014). These are areas where physical availability of healthful food is critically limited for a significant portion of the population. Increasing the number of farms raising healthful foods for sale in their communities could help bring those foods to areas where they otherwise are not available.

Strengthening the Kansas food system will help make healthful food the routine, easy choice for all Kansans. *Feeding Kansas* calls for the advancement of a “farm-to-fork” food system that better incorporates Kansas farms into the supply chain that provides healthful foods to Kansans. The report and its recommendations are the product of more than a year spent engaging hundreds of individuals across Kansas in dialogue about current opportunities and barriers in the farm-to-fork food system, with a goal of improving access to and use of healthful foods for all Kansans.

Kansas communities are key to solving Kansas food issues. Every community exists within its own unique context and with unique resources and needs. Therefore, community involvement is critical to identifying and implementing successful solutions. Community engagement created the *Feeding Kansas* report. Now, Kansans from all backgrounds must work together to advance the key identified goals and policy priorities laid out in this report.

Policy solutions are critical, because lasting change occurs at the policy level. When we change our public policy environment, we codify the changes that we make, enabling them to be sustained over the long term. When we engage the broad public in the process of defining and implementing those changes, we ensure those changes, once implemented, will meet the needs of and have support from diverse groups.

We must increase public and policymaker support for policies that enhance the quality of and access to healthful foods for Kansans. *Feeding Kansas* offers a vision, assessment, and roadmap to success for all who are interested in strengthening Kansas's farm-to-fork food system to better meet these needs in Kansas. This report calls on everyday Kansans and policymakers to build more partnerships and take on greater leadership to improve the farm and food environment at the state and local level. Any reader who comes across this report has the power to make a difference, but the greatest potential for change lies in widespread and unified public engagement and support.

Fruits and vegetables are the focus of five of the seven policy priorities recommended in this report. This is because, though nutritionally-adequate diets must include a balance of whole grains and diverse protein sources along with fruits and vegetables, both production and consumption of these "consumer" or "specialty" crops fall significantly short in Kansas.

BACKGROUND

The Kansas Rural Center (KRC), an organization of farmers and those who serve them, has been a leader in food and farming systems, community engagement, and policy change work in Kansas since its inception in 1979. KRC promotes a farming and food system that is economically viable, ecologically sound, and socially just. In 1982, KRC researched and published its first report about local food production for Kansas consumption, documenting the historical production of fruits and vegetables and making recommendations. Many of the report's findings and recommendations remain relevant today, thirty-two years later (see APPENDIX: Literature Review for details). Subsequent KRC publications and projects have continued to build upon and respond to those early findings.

KRC has helped inspire increased civic engagement and leadership in work that connects health, farm, and food system issues. For example, KRC led the charge in forming a number of food policy councils in Kansas, including the former statewide Kansas Food Policy Council under Governor Sebelius (2005) and the Douglas County Food Policy Council (2009). The Rolling Prairie Farmers Alliance is another example of a multi-stakeholder collaboration that grew from KRC work, providing weekly bags of nutritious food to Kansans through a subscription service.

In 2012, KRC and a number of other Kansas groups received clear direction about next-steps needed for work on these issues from participants in the KRC-hosted statewide Agriculture and Health Summit.

In July 2013, KRC joined four other organizations in a Statewide Partnership aimed at identifying and advocating for public policy solutions that make healthful foods the routine, easy choice for all Kansans. The other partners include: KC Healthy Kids, Kansas Action for Children, Kansas Alliance for Wellness, and Healthy Kansas Hospitals.

Through the Statewide Partnership, KRC launched the "Community Food Solutions for a Healthy Kansas" initiative.

This initiative aims to identify and advance key public policy solutions to better incorporate Kansas farms into the supply chain that provides healthful foods to Kansans.

The Community Food Solutions initiative reflects a growing national and global awareness that the literal roots of our food system, our farms, are key to improving food access and increasing healthful food use. *Feeding Kansas* is one of several farm-to-fork statewide plans nationwide. The methodology for this report is modeled after those with the greatest relevance to the circumstances we face in Kansas. These include Iowa's *Local Food and Farm Plan*, North Carolina's *From Farm to Fork: Building a Sustainable Local Food Economy in North Carolina*, and the Oregon Food Bank's Food, Education, and Agriculture Solutions Together (FEAST) program. These and other food system assessments nationwide and globally have found that the issues of healthful food access and use cannot be adequately solved *without* involving farms (FAO-UN, 2014). In other words, farms are a critical underpinning to the success of the food system as a whole.

The *Feeding Kansas* report captures KRC's findings after more than a year spent engaging with hundreds of community members, farmers, policymakers, and others across Kansas in dialogue about the capacity of the state's farm and food system to more effectively feed and nourish Kansans

SUMMARY OF THE KANSAS FARM & FOOD SYSTEM ASSESSMENT

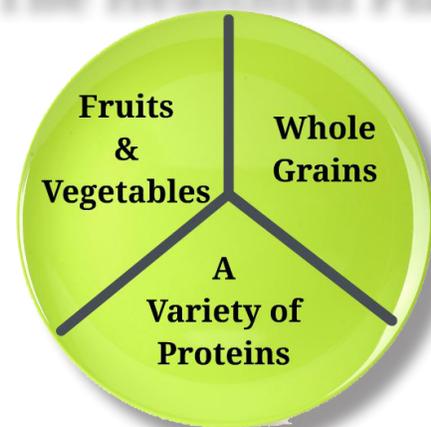
Feeding Kansas points to inadequate access and insufficient consumption of healthful foods as significant issues in Kansas, and highlights key policy solutions to better enable Kansas farms and communities to address these issues. KRC defines "healthful foods" as a balanced diet of fruits, vegetables, whole grains, and a variety of different proteins. The report explains that in order for Kansans to achieve optimal nutritional health, we must simultaneously achieve: physical availability, social and economic access, and regular utilization of each of these healthful foods. Very few in Kansas have achieved all three – less than 8 percent of the population, according to a statewide Healthy Eating Index survey (USDA, 2010).

The assessment highlights and elaborates on the following four key barriers currently limiting the capacity of Kansas farmers to provide a diverse selection of healthful foods direct to Kansans:

- **Inadequate local- and state-level coordination, planning, and resource allocation** to support and sustain Kansas's farm-to-fork food system;
- **Lack of regulatory clarity** in regards to state-level policies that impact the farm-to-fork food system;
- **Lack of a central location for finding farm-to-fork related policy and program information**, across government and nongovernment sectors;
- **Limited information, resources and protections for the production, handling, and sale of fruit and vegetable crops in Kansas**, with its particular weather and other production challenges.

Feeding Kansas emphasizes that boosting farm-to-fork connections will not only increase the volume of healthful food available to Kansans, it will also help strengthen the state's economy by supporting its most important industry – agriculture – and Kansas farm families, many of whom are low income.

The Healthful Plate



RECOMMENDATIONS AT A GLANCE

The priority policy recommendations outlined below respond directly to the key barriers identified above. They are organized by their goal outcomes, and are intended for enactment by June 2016.

For further detail and explanation, see the “Recommendations Explained” section of this report.

GOAL 1: INCREASE OPPORTUNITIES TO IDENTIFY AND ADVANCE COMMUNITY FOOD SOLUTIONS AT THE LOCAL LEVEL.

***Policy Lever 1:* Local food policy councils and food and farm task forces across Kansas should be supported by state and local government policies and programs.**

Need: Local task forces or councils can be powerful tools for governments to receive guidance on the multifaceted issues facing the communities they serve.

GOAL 2: IMPROVE CLARITY AND COORDINATION OF FARM-TO-FORK FOOD SYSTEM POLICIES, PROGRAMS AND PLANNING.

***Policy Lever 2:* A high-level, independent statewide farm-to-fork food system organizer position should be created.**

Need: A new position is needed to work independently from and across state agencies to lead the process of actively streamlining farm and food system regulatory and other information exchange, and centrally managing the facilitation, enactment and maintenance of a statewide farm-to-fork food system plan over the long term.

GOAL 3: PROVIDE SUPPORTS TO INCREASE PRODUCTION AND CONSUMPTION OF FRUITS AND VEGETABLES IN KANSAS.

***Policy Lever 3.1:* Procurement policies should prioritize Kansas grown fruit and vegetable purchasing at state and local government agencies and in public institutions.**

Need: Adopting such policies across state agencies and institutions would drive growth in production and consumption of Kansas-grown fruits and vegetables in Kansas by influencing distributors to purchase more Kansas-grown foods and providing other economic levers.

***Policy Lever 3.2:* A statewide Fruit and Vegetable Agricultural Economist position should be created through K-State Research and Extension, with support from county and state public funds.**

Need: Kansas leaders and policymakers need clearer data to better understand the economic potential for and impact of different scales and types of fruit and vegetable production in Kansas. Existing and potential farmers, local food processors and distributors also need that information to guide their business planning and operations.

***Policy Lever 3.3:* Multiple Regional Fruit and Vegetable Extension Specialist positions should be created through K-State Research and Extension Horticulture Program, with support from county and state public funds.**

Need: To advance commercial fruit and vegetable production and sales in Kansas, farm and food business entrepreneurs need significantly more research-based information and high-level technical support than is currently available.

***Policy Lever 3.4:* Kansas’s horticultural research stations should receive stable, public funding.**

Need: In order to support the long-term research needed to increase the production and sale of fruits and vegetables in Kansas, horticulture research stations need stable public funding to sustain a baseline budget for maintaining grounds, equipment, perennial plantings, and more.

***Policy Lever 3.5:* An herbicide injury (spray “drift”) task force should be created to gather and share data and information on herbicide injury to sensitive crops in Kansas.**

Need: Despite efforts to reduce the risk of crop injury or loss without compensation, Kansas producers cite herbicide drift as a key barrier to scaling-up their fruit and vegetable operations. A multi-stakeholder task force is needed to collect data and to identify key policy solutions to this complex problem.