

Kansas Food and Farm Coalition

The Kansas Food and Farm Coalition (FFC) is a group of long-standing Kansas nonprofit organizations concerned about our food system - from farm to fork. In recognition of how interwoven food system issues are, these organizations have come together to support policies that grow Kansas communities' local food systems. This includes policies that support small and mid-sized farms, increase production and sales of locally grown foods, increase access to healthy food for all, and improve food security in our communities.

2023 Policy Agenda:

- Immediately eliminate the state sales tax on food.
- Increase SNAP enrollment among eligible individuals and families.
- Support Farm to School efforts in Kansas schools.
- Establish a statewide Food and Farm Council.
- Expand programs for small and mid-sized producers, especially beginning farmers, specialty crop producers, and socially disadvantaged farmers and ranchers.
- Support long term sustainable water management and resilient agricultural practices.

Food and Farm Coalition Partner Organizations:



Composed of over 30 local food, farm and policy councils, the [Kansas Food Action Network](#) is a statewide advocacy network focused on building resilient local and state food systems in Kansas. Contact: Miranda Miller-Klugesherz mklugesherz@kchealthykids.org



[The Kansas Rural Center](#) is led by Kansans who strive to help each other and their communities grow a healthy food and farming system. We envision a future of thriving family farms, revitalized communities, a clean environment, a healthy local and regional food system, and viable livelihoods for farmers, including opportunities for the next generation growing our food. Contact: Tom Buller tom@kansasruralcenter.org



[KC Healthy Kids](#) connects communities to close health gaps. We invest in community education, local and regional advocacy and direct support. Our work addresses systemic obstacles through solutions-based focus areas of youth advocacy, food policy, mental health, local food and active communities for kids and their families. Contact: Rachael McGinnis Millsap rmmillsap@kchealthykids.org



[Harvesters-The Community Food Network](#) is the regional food bank serving a 26-county area in northeast Kansas and northwest Missouri. In FY22, Harvesters provided nearly 70 million pounds of food to more than 760 nonprofit agencies serving the hungry and food insecure. Contact: Karen Siebert ksiebert@harvesters.org

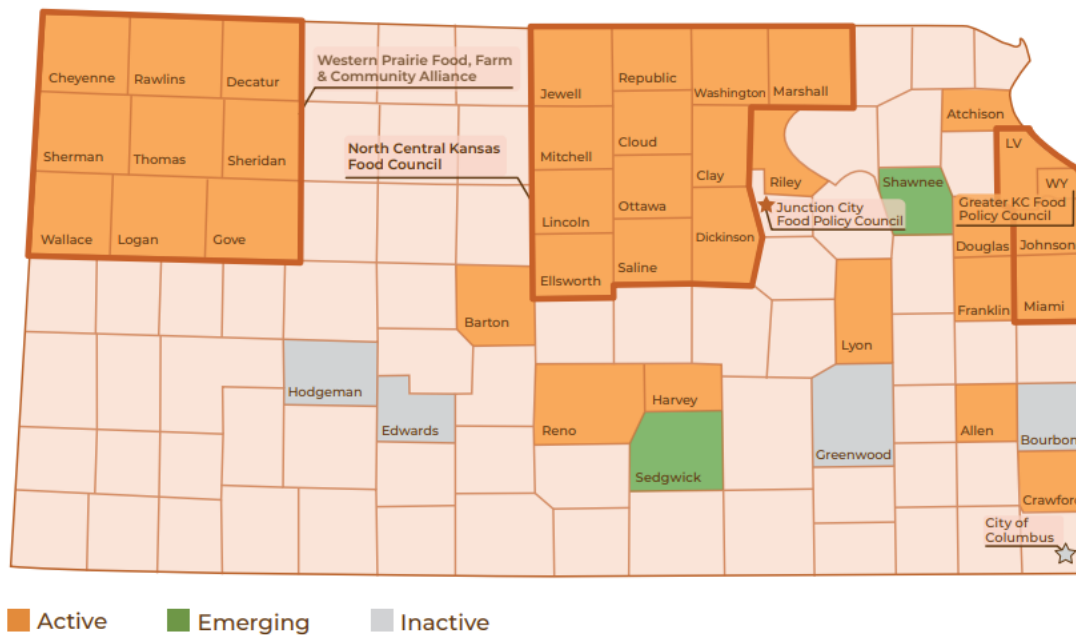
January 25, 2023

Dear Chairman Kerschen and members of the committee:

My name is Miranda Miller-Klugesherz and I'm the Director of the Kansas Food Action Network. Composed of over 30 local food, farm and policy councils **representing 76% of Kansas residents**, the Kansas Food Action Network is a statewide advocacy network focused on building resilient local and state food systems in Kansas.

Food policy councils bring together community leaders and stakeholders from diverse food-related sectors (i.e. farmers, chefs, grocers, food pantry operators, etc.) to examine how the food system is operating, and to provide local policymakers with recommendations for improvement. Councils across Kansas advocate for policies that address food insecurity in their communities, support small food-based businesses, and encourage school and community gardens. With the **highest number of food policy councils per capita in the nation**, Kansas is frequently looked to as an example of how food system change can start with the community. The map below shows the location of all current Kansas food policy councils:

Kansas Food & Farm Councils 2023



We're currently working with a steering committee of interested stakeholders in the Southwest part of the state to build understanding about the unique food system in SW Kansas. We're hopeful that these conversations lead to the formation of a regional food policy council in those counties.

Most of our Kansas food policy councils are appointed by their County Commissions or City Councils and serve as advisory bodies to those elected officials. They work to increase access to healthy food through increasing enrollment in SNAP, build support for community gardens and school gardens, assist economic development professionals to attract grocery retail to rural communities, collaborate on community food waste reduction programs, and much, much more.

Although each council has their own local policy priorities, the food councils have established a shared state policy agenda that includes policies that support small and mid-sized farms; increase production and sales of locally grown foods; and improve food and nutritional security in Kansas communities.

Specifically, we're very interested in a model we've seen in other states - of a state level food council that works with lawmakers and state agencies to advance state level food systems policies. We would welcome the opportunity to work with members on this committee to establish a state level food council.

Respectfully,

Miranda Miller-Klugesherz
Director, Kansas Food Action Network



KANSAS RURAL CENTER

FOR THE HEALTH OF THE LAND AND ITS PEOPLE

KANSAS RURAL CENTER

PO Box 314

North Newton, KS 67117

866-579-5469

E-mail: tom@kansasruralcenter.org

Website: www.kansasruralcenter.org

Since 1979, the Kansas Rural Center (KRC) has been working to promote the long-term health of the land and its people through research, education and advocacy that advance an economically viable, ecologically sound, and socially just food and farming system. KRC believes that diversified farming systems hold the key to preserving, developing and maintaining a food and farming future that provides healthy food, a healthy environment and social structure, and meaningful livelihoods. In the COVID pandemic as we saw global supply chains shaken, we saw local producers stepping up to meet the needs of their communities. The ability of local food systems to boost our statewide resilience provides Kansas a key opportunity to boost local economies, increase food system stability and support meaningful livelihoods for Kansans.

The Kansas Rural Center took a two-year, in-depth review of the Kansas food system and published our findings in our *Feeding Kansas* report in 2014. This report developed out of a deliberate and wide-ranging process of stakeholder engagement with public meetings that occurred across the state, drawing upon the experience and knowledge of 275 stakeholders from across food system sectors. Participants at these events represented all regions of Kansas and all sectors of the farm-to-fork food system. Events also included health experts, educators, business and economic advisors, and more. Many of our recommendations are the same or very similar to the recommendations that were made in the 2016 KS Local Food and Farm Task Force report. Although years have passed since both of those reports, many of the needs documented still exist and many of the recommendations still ring true.

You can find the full report online (<https://kansasruralcenter.org/feeding-kansas>) for a detailed analysis and discussion, but I would like to share with you the key goals and some of the policy recommendations that were developed at that time:

Goal 1: Increase opportunities to identify and advance community food solutions at the local level.

This goal was designed to help empower local food policy and food and farm councils and my colleague from the Kansas Food Action Network can provide more information about the progress on this goal.

Goal 2: Improve clarity and coordination of farm-to-fork food system policies, programs, and planning.

This goal was reiterated in the recommendations of the Statewide Food and Farm Task Force, to create a staff position to oversee statewide efforts to support the food system. This need is still unmet. This objective could also be achieved by the development of a statewide food policy council to bring ideas and insights from local communities to state policy leaders.

Goal 3: Provide support to increase production and consumption of fruits and vegetables.

This goal was also echoed in the Food and Farm Task Force report. This provides a compelling opportunity for Kansas agriculture and a win for Kansas communities. While Kansas has an amazingly powerful farm economy, we still import much of the food consumed by Kansans, particularly in the realm of fruits and vegetables. This provides an immense opportunity to diversify our farm production and help our local economies.

Utilizing calculations with numbers from the USDA and other sources, we can estimate that around 8% of the fruits and vegetables that are consumed in Kansas might be produced in the state. In other words, we import at least 92% of the fruits and vegetables that are purchased in Kansas. If we set that alongside the total demand for fruits and vegetables in the state of around \$670,000,000 each year, that leaves Kansas farmers a market opportunity to sell over \$610,000,000 more products. That is based upon existing production and sales data, and we all have probably heard that we need to eat more fruits and vegetables than we do, so demand should go up. Now even though I've met a few people here in Kansas growing wild things like bananas, lemons, or ginger, we are not ever going to cover that total demand for fruits and vegetables. Working to make a dent in that number with the crops we can reasonably grow here could provide immense benefits for farms and communities. Studies show that dollars spent on local foods provide significant multiplier effects on local economies. So, we can help Kansas farmers diversify income streams, help Kansas economy circulate more dollars locally and help our food system become much more resilient in the face of global supply chain challenges by supporting increased fruit and vegetable production in Kansas.

Here are a few ideas on how to do that:

- Immediately remove sales tax from farm products sold at farmers markets. This will simplify business for farmers and help circulate more dollars in the local economy.
- Work on procurement policies should prioritize Kansas grown fruit and vegetable purchasing at state and local government agencies and in public institutions. 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. The Kansas Rural Center is currently working with partners across the state, and at the Kansas Department of Education to support increased purchasing of local farm products by Kansas schools. This includes working with both farmers to teach them how to sell to schools and helping the schools work with farmers. Numerous states provide support for farm to school efforts to build both supply chain connections between local producers and their school districts and also educate students on farming and food systems.

- A statewide local foods agricultural economist position should be created through K-State Research and Extension, with support from county and state public funds. 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.
- Multiple regional fruit and vegetable Extension Specialist positions should be created through K-State Research and Extension Horticulture Program, with support from state public funds. To advance commercial fruit and vegetable production and sales in Kansas, farmers and food business entrepreneurs need significantly more research-based information and high-level technical support than is currently available. Additionally, we would strongly support K-State Research and Extension hiring more people focused on local foods generally.
- Kansas's horticultural research stations should receive stable, public funding. Long-term research is 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. In the years since this recommendation was made, K-State Research and Extension has closed one of three horticulture research stations and threatened the closing of a second due to funding shortfalls. Like with any industry, research is critical to farmers being able to succeed and we should make sure that K-State Research and Extension has the resources needed to support that.
- Kansas Center for Sustainable Agriculture and Alternative Crops (KCSAAC) should receive additional funding to support the expansion of the crops which are currently grown in Kansas. Diversity is key to a more resilient cropping system and the work of KCSAAC should receive additional support to be at the forefront of this effort.

Beyond the opportunities to support the development of local food systems across the state there are many other issues that need to be addressed to support a sustainable food and farming system and provide opportunities for legislative leadership. The Kansas Rural Center has worked for years to provide beginning farmer education and growing the next generation of farmers by supporting beginning farmers through education and efforts to support more equitable land access are key to a sustainable food system in the future. Additionally, the natural resources that agriculture relies upon are critical for the long-term sustainability of the food system and we have to keep soil health and water in this conversation. Hopefully this legislative session will provide opportunities to act and stabilize water usage and enhance soil health for the long term future of Kansas agriculture as well as boost the development of local and regional food and farming systems.



KC Healthy Kids connects communities to close health gaps. We invest in community education, local and regional advocacy and direct support. Our work addresses systemic obstacles through solutions-based focus areas:

- **Local Food:** Kids and their communities need a strong local food system. We help farmers grow thriving businesses and teach kids & families the value of growing their own food and purchasing locally-grown food.
- **Good Food Policy:** Kids and their communities need it to be easier to get healthy food. We engage advocates and decision makers to promote policies that put healthy food within reach.
- **Mental Health:** Kids need to grow up feeling supported and accepted, especially if they have experienced trauma. We address trauma and help community partners create environments that support good mental health practices.
- **Youth Advocates:** Kids need to see themselves as advocates who lead adults. We teach kids how their surroundings shape their health, and how to speak out for change.
- **Active Communities:** Kids need to grow up in communities where physical activity can be a natural part of their day. We rally advocates to support policies and plans that make it easier and safer to walk, bike and play throughout our region.

Kansas' Food Sales Tax

Since 2014, KC Healthy Kids has advocated for the elimination of the state sales tax on food in Kansas. It's good food policy for consumers, grocery workers and small, rural grocers.

- **State sales tax takes food off the table.** In 2020, 9.7% of Kansans were food insecure.¹ The rate is much higher among kids and Black and Hispanic households. When the budget is tight, consumers make tough choices. Eliminating the state food sales tax would put hundreds of dollars back into Kansans pockets every year to buy more food at the grocery store and farmers market.
- **Taxing groceries is bad for business.** The state food sales tax has a negative impact on rural grocers' profit and their employees' compensation. It also drives consumers across state lines to save money on groceries. Forty of Kansas' counties share a border with neighboring states, which exempt food purchases or tax food at a lower rate.
- **The state can cover the bill.** In 2021, the state passed legislation to gradually eliminate the state food sales tax by 2025. Why wait? The state has the revenue to cover the bill without harming the budget. Food is one thing we all buy, and every Kansan gets a bite of this tax break.

¹ Feeding America. Map the Meal Gap.



3801 Topping Avenue
Kansas City, MO 64129

215 SE Quincy Street
Topeka, KS 66603

Toll-Free 877.353.6639
www.harvesters.org

January 25, 2023

Karen Siebert
Advocacy & Public Policy Advisor
Harvesters—The Community Food Network
Briefing by the Kansas Food & Farm Coalition
Senate Committee on Agriculture & Natural Resources

Chairman Kerschen and Members of the Committee:

I am Karen Siebert, advocacy and public policy advisor for Harvesters—The Community Food Network, which has warehouses in Kansas City, Missouri, and here in Topeka. While Harvesters is the Feeding America food bank for northeast Kansas, you may be more familiar with the other food banks that serve your home districts—the Kansas Food Bank in Wichita and Second Harvest Community Food Bank in St. Joseph. Together our three food banks serve the food insecure in every county in the state. Last year, our networks of charitable food pantries distributed more than 44 million pounds of food to those in need in Kansas, from our smallest rural communities to major metropolitan areas.

While many people think of us as food pantries, our three food banks are actually large food collection and distribution facilities, providing food to a vast network of nonprofit food pantries, kitchens and shelters located in churches, community centers and other faith-based organizations across the state. Because our food banks focus on finding and transporting those food resources, our member pantries can focus on what they do best, which is helping clients.

I want to talk a bit about how our food banks intersect with all parts of the food system and then where our primary work occurs on this continuum.

Production

- We don't produce food for consumption (with the exception of a demonstration garden), but we do encourage our food insecure neighbors to grow their own food at home or in community gardens. Many people are not aware that you can purchase seeds and edible plants with SNAP benefits.
- Many of our member pantries have gardens and provide that food to their neighbors in need through their pantries.

Harvesters' mission is to feed hungry people today and work to end hunger tomorrow.



- And we also encourage our supporters to participate in the Plant A Row program, which asks people to plant an extra row in their gardens to give to their local food pantry.

Processing

- In a sense, our volunteer corps is our processing arm. We often receive donations that need to be packaged (such as large totes of loose apples or potatoes) or repackaged (such as 50-pound bags of pasta or rice for commercial use). Our volunteers repack the bulk items in family-sized bags, put nutrition information on them and ready them for distribution to our member food pantries.
- We also receive donations directly from processors, who may have overages or production or packaging errors. They donate those edible items to our food banks, receiving a tax donation and saving on landfill tipping fees.

Distribution

- As food banks, we move food from where there is excess to where there is need, so distribution and logistics are a big part of what we do. Someone once said that food banking is where Mother Teresa meets the Teamsters.

Purchasing

- While most of the food we distribute is donated, we do purchase some food. Our Essential Purchase Products are those foods that our agencies request, but don't get donated on a consistent basis or in large enough quantities (like canned vegetables and peanut butter).
- We also purchase items for our backpack programs, which provide a backpack full of food to children who rely on school breakfast and lunch during the week and may not have enough food at home on the weekend. We have strict nutritional and packaging requirements for this program so we can't rely on donations.
- And since the advent of the pandemic, we've had to purchase more food because our food donations decreased significantly, but I'll talk more about that later.

Consumption

- This is where our work with the federal nutrition programs comes in. The most important and broad-ranging program responding to food insecurity is the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), or as it's known in Kansas, Food Assistance. To give you an idea of the importance of SNAP, for every one meal that a food bank provides, SNAP provides nine. So when people say that cuts to SNAP can be absorbed by the charitable sector, they simply can't. There are not enough donations and there is simply not the infrastructure to make up that difference. SNAP is incredibly important for the economy of our state not only for the essential nutrition it provides to low-income families, seniors, children and the disabled, but also for the economic boost it provides to our state. SNAP brings in more than \$300 million in federal funds every year that low-income families use to purchase the food they need in local grocery stores.
- And we work with policy makers at the federal and state level to ensure the federal nutrition programs like SNAP, WIC, School Breakfast and Lunch, the Farmers Market Nutrition Program and summer feeding programs, among others, are protected and managed at the state level equitably so that our low-income families have access to the



3801 Topping Avenue
Kansas City, MO 64129

215 SE Quincy Street
Topeka, KS 66603

Toll-Free 877.353.6639
www.harvesters.org

nutrition they need to live healthy, productive lives. Our focus in Congress this year will be the Farm Bill, which includes the SNAP, CSFP and TEFAP programs in the Nutrition Title.

Recovery

- This is where the bulk of the food banking enterprise occurs. This is the portion of the food system where people often talk about food waste. I prefer the term “excess food” because we do not feed our hungry neighbors waste. But it is the term used by the USDA and the EPA and has been adopted in the popular lexicon so I will use it here.
- Food banks are a business solution for retailers like grocery stores who have product that is nearing the end of its shelf life. Rather than send it to the landfill and pay tipping fees, they can donate it to the food banks and get a tax deduction.
- Similarly, farmers who have leftover food at the end of the day at the farmer’s market or have produce left in their fields can donate it to us and take a tax donation that can help cover some of their costs.

The Impact of COVID

I want to share a bit about the impact of COVID on our operations. When the shutdowns began, our food banks immediately experienced increases of 40-50% in the number of people turning to us for help. At the same time we were seeing long lines and worried faces, we were seeing a dramatic decrease in food donations. The grocery store overages that we rely on dried up. With closed businesses and cancelled events, we didn’t have the food drives we relied on to restock our shelves. Our communities came through, though, with financial donations that allowed us to purchase food to meet the incredible need. However, the food purchase model is simply not sustainable for our nonprofit food banks for the long term and we have had to scale back those purchases. While donations have normalized to some extent, they still are not as significant as they used to be and the need is still above pre-pandemic levels. And with food inflation at historic highs, we have been impacted on both the donation and need side of the equation.

As you well know, there was a significant amount of food waste at the beginning of the pandemic. It was painful to see milk being poured down the drain and pigs being euthanized at the same time we had lines and lines of cars at food pantries.

As you no doubt also know, though, it wasn’t that we didn’t have enough food, but rather that it was in the wrong places and people didn’t have access to it. It’s much like what we

Harvesters’ mission is to feed hungry people today and work to end hunger tomorrow.



see in food banking every day. We needed to move the food from where there was excess to where there was need.

But the challenge was that approximately 40% of the food we ate before the pandemic was consumed in restaurants, corporate cafeterias and at events. That outlet disappeared overnight and we began eating nearly 100% of our food at home. But distributors couldn't take the 20-pound bag of greens destined for Panera and sell it at Dillons. It wasn't the right size, it wasn't labeled. And the food banks struggled because our normal processes (using volunteers to repackage food) were shut down as well. It was a difficult time.

A Resilient Food System for the Future

While things are not yet back to normal, we do have a unique opportunity now to examine our food system and make it more flexible and resilient.

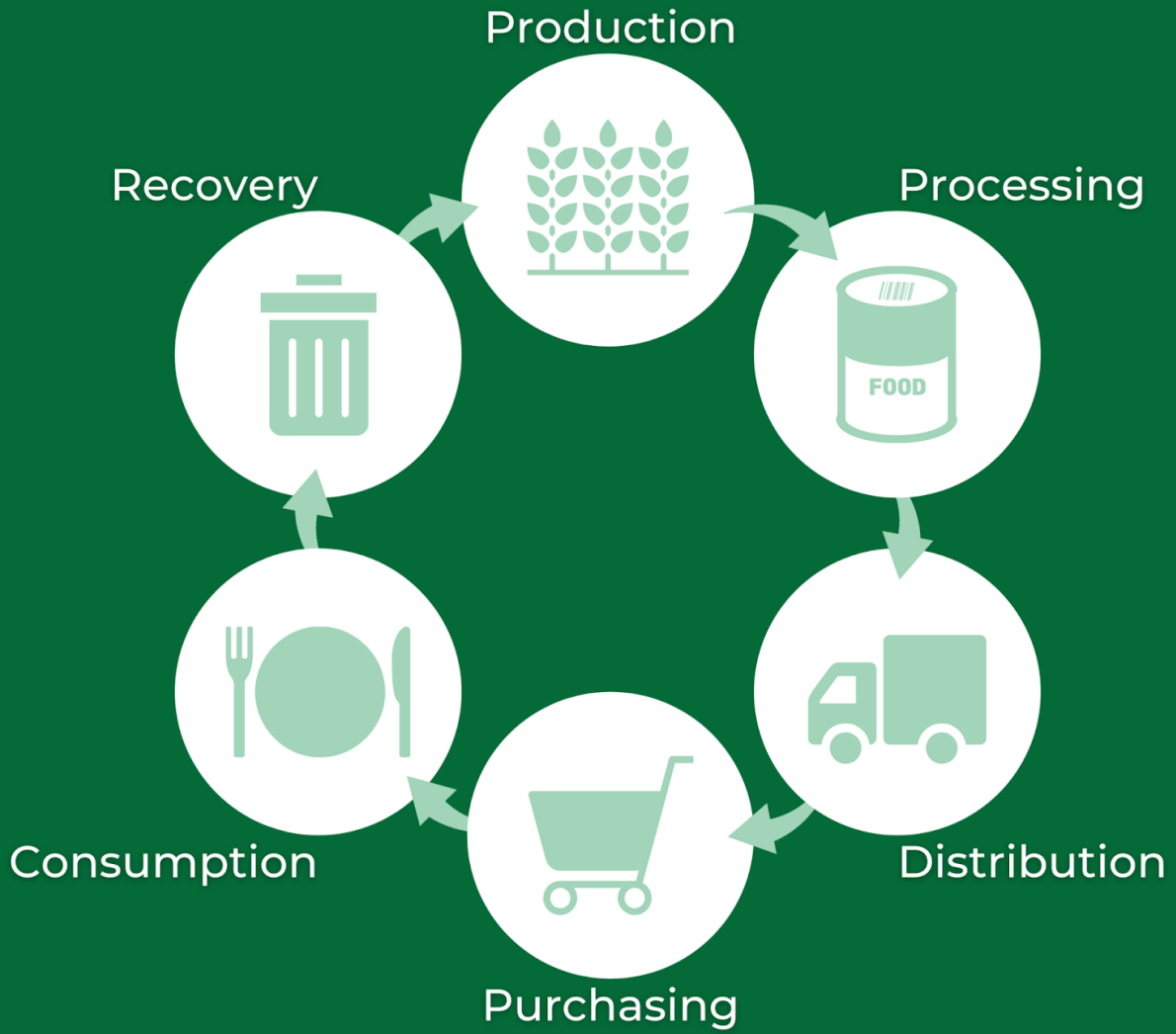
You may have heard from the Kansas Department of Agriculture already this session about the grant KDA received from the USDA for the new Local Food Purchase Assistance Cooperative Agreement Program (LFPA). The USDA is providing funds through the LFPA program for the purchase of local foods for distribution to underserved communities. Local farmers interested in participating register with KDA and the food banks will then purchase food—produce, dairy, meat, processed items--from those producers and distribute it through our network of food pantries. We are excited about this statewide partnership between KDA and our three food banks.

This is a federal program modeled after some state programs that state legislatures have invested in. They provide funds annually for the purchase of locally grown foods that are distributed by the food banks. Much like the federal commodity programs such as The Emergency Food Assistance Program (TEFAP) and the Commodity Supplemental Food Program (CSFP senior food boxes), this program helps build the capacity of our local farmers and provides some market stabilization while providing healthy food for families, children and seniors in need.

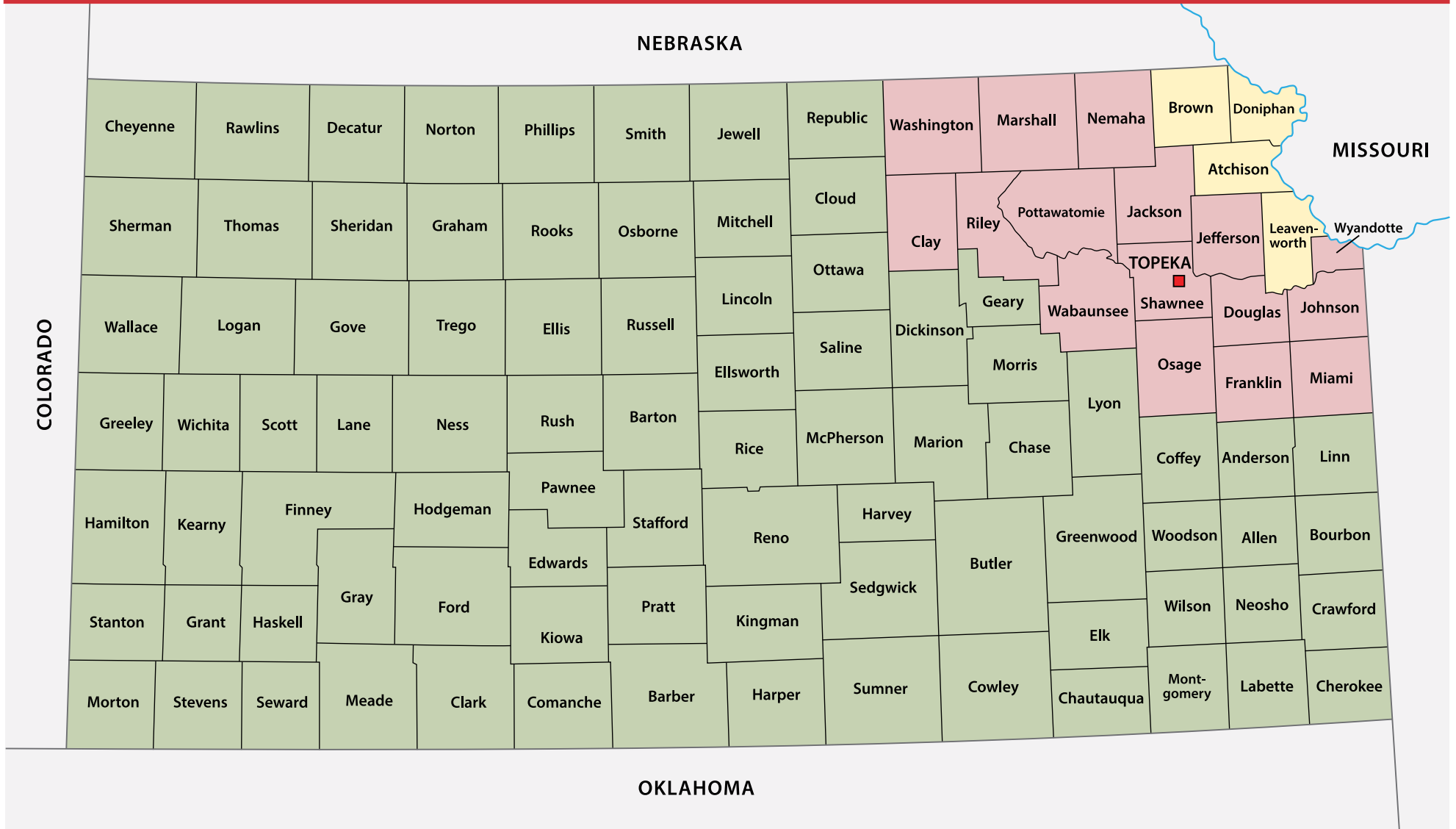
Another model is called Farm to Food Bank and while there are several states that have already implemented this program on their own with funding from their state legislatures, there is a federal pilot funded through the 2018 Farm Bill as well. In this model, farmers donate their excess product for the tax donation and then the state provides funds to cover the cost of harvesting, processing and transportation/distribution. For example, a farmer may have green beans he is unable to sell that he plans to leave in the field. The food banks can use state funds to pay for the labor to harvest the remaining green beans, package them and transport them to the food pantries. Or the funds could be used to purchase eggs cartons for excess eggs, or to process excess milk into cheese that can be distributed to pantries.

Both of these models—purchasing Kansas-produced food for food banks, or facilitating the donation of excess foods to food banks—are models Kansas may want to pursue in the future when the federal LFPA program concludes. They would support both farmers and those in need in our Kansas communities.

The Food System



State of Kansas Food Bank Service Areas



Kansas Food Bank
1,492,136 residents*

Harvesters-The Community Food Network
1,330,497 residents*

Second Harvest of Greater St. Joseph
115,247 residents*

* Based on 2020 Census.

Kansas Food Banks

By the Numbers

Service Areas: 105 counties Food insecurity rate: 9.7%*

Food insecure residents: 281,250*

Agency partners: 626 CY2022 distribution: 44,085,644 lbs



Service Area: 85 KS counties

Service Area Population: 1,492,136**

Food insecure residents: 147,370*

Agency partners: 205

CY2022 distribution: 15,502,060 lbs



Service Area: 16 KS counties (10 in MO)

KS Service Area Population: 1,330,497**

Food insecure residents in KS: 122,300*

Agency partners in KS: 410

CY2022 distribution in KS: 27,215,508 lbs
(64,898,257 lbs overall)



Service Area: 4 KS counties (15 in MO)

KS Service Area Population: 115,247**

Food insecure residents in KS: 11,580*

Agency partners in KS: 11

CY2022 distribution in KS: 1,368,076 lbs
(6,684,307 lbs overall)

* Hake, M., Engelhard, E., & Dewey, A. (2022). *Map the Meal Gap 2022: An Analysis of County and Congressional District Food Insecurity and County Food Cost in the United States in 2020.*

** 2020 US Census.