



Fact Sheet: Kansas Healthy Food Initiative

The Problem – access to healthy food

Every Kansan should have access to healthy and affordable food. Unfortunately, over 15 percent of Kansans lack reliable access to nutritious food to support a healthy lifestyle. And, more than 30 percent of Kansas counties are classified as food deserts – which the USDA describes as not living within a mile of a grocery store in urban areas or within 10 miles of a grocery store in rural areas. This means that more than 800,000 Kansans do not have access to grocery stores or healthy food options in their communities. This problem is compounded for low-income individuals in 51 percent of Kansas counties, which includes more than 253,000 low-income Kansans.

Why is the Kansas Health Foundation involved?

Individuals and families can improve their health when they have better access to healthy food. Food insecurity is associated with obesity, as many face choices of whether to buy affordable, high-calorie food or healthier food choices beyond their budgets. More than 34 percent of adult Kansans are obese, and 86 percent report having fewer than five fruits and vegetables per day.

In addition, local grocery stores strengthen communities through economic benefits. Kansas State University (K-State) reports that every grocery store contributes approximately more than half a million dollars to the local economy and provides jobs.

Our goal is to create a system to support efforts to improve food access – this could include improving food distribution to rural grocers, offering technology or energy-efficient improvements to grocers, or seeking innovative solutions for grocery stores (or food access points) in food deserts.

What is the food desert problem?

K-State research indicates that by December 2016, 45 out of 213 rural grocery stores had closed and not reopened in cities with 2,500 people or less. Fortunately, a number of grocery stores and food access sites have opened in rural areas since then. This June, approximately 190 independently-owned stores were in existence. Many rural grocers are facing challenges as populations decline, low-cost chain outlets come to communities, and stores experience increasing costs with outdated equipment, higher food distribution costs or higher food costs due to low volume.

Some Kansas communities that are working to keep food access for residents include St. John, Cuba, Little River, St. Paul, Moran and Courtland.

How will the program work?

The Kansas Health Foundation (KHF) has recently approved over \$4.2 million in funding for the Kansas Healthy Food Initiative. The goal is to help local grocers or investors leverage funds from KHF with other funding opportunities to sustain or create food access points in high-need areas.

Part of the funding will be directed to K-State's Center for Engagement and Community Development to serve as the Food Access Organization. K-State will work directly with food retail outlets and other organizations to improve food access in high-need areas. KSU has been a leader in this effort, launching the Rural Grocery Initiative in 2007. The Food Trust, a national organization focused on food retail for underserved populations, will assist K-State with best practices and evaluation. Other funding is being provided for a loan/grant pool for food access projects across Kansas. This funding pool will be managed by IFF, a nonprofit Community Development Financial Institution.

What happens next?

K-State is currently developing the application process and criteria for potential grantees or loans. One of the first steps is to develop a Kansas Healthy Food Initiative website to provide information about the program and eligibility. A full launch of the Kansas Healthy Food Initiative program will occur this fall.