



** This news release from K-State Research and Extension is available online at <https://ksre-learn.com/rural-grocery-store-transition>

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K-State online course aids efforts to keep rural grocery stores open

Nearly 3 in 4 rural Kansas grocers nearing retirement don't have a transition plan, officials say

By Pat Melgares, K-State Research and Extension news

MANHATTAN, Kan. – An idea spawned at Kansas State University to support rural grocery stores in transition to new ownership has grown into a network of resource providers in 11 states.

Clara Misenhelter, a program manager with [K-State's Rural Grocery Initiative](#), credits an online course for helping to address a growing concern in rural communities.

"In 2021, the Rural Grocery Initiative surveyed rural Kansas grocers and found that nearly 1 in 4 planned to retire within five years," Misenhelter said. "Of those, the vast majority – 73% – did not have a plan for how store ownership would transition after their retirement."

Beginning last year, the Rural Grocery Initiative hosted an online course to train those already working in rural communities with a baseline knowledge around what it takes to successfully transition a rural grocery store.

In 2024, 19 students in 11 states – Kansas included – completed the course, according to Misenhelter.

"Supporting grocery store owners through times of transition is critical to ensuring that rural communities retain access to their local grocery stores," Misenhelter said.

Between 2008 and 2018, 1 in 5 Kansas grocery stores closed, a trend that Misenhelter said is also seen across the United States.

"Rural grocery stores are critical infrastructure in rural communities," Misenhelter said. "Locally owned grocery stores contribute to their community's health, economy and society. Keeping these stores open is critical."

The online course is designed for extension professionals, community economic developers and others who provide resources and support to rural grocery stores across the country.

Misenhelter said classes address such topics as building relationships with grocery store owners and managers; transition planning; business valuation; and other tools to support rural grocery stores.

“The assignments in the course are intentionally designed to have real-world applications,” she said.

More information, including how to sign up for a future course, [is available online](#) from the Rural Grocery Initiative.

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Sidebar

2024 Graduates of Rural Grocery Transition Specialist course span 11 states

Last year, the Rural Grocery Transition Specialist course was offered twice. The Rural Grocery Initiative, based at Kansas State University, has announced the 19 individuals who graduated from the program in 2024.

Graduates receive a microcredential from K-State Global Campus, earn a digital certificate of completion, and join RGI’s network of Rural Grocery Specialists.

The list of course graduates includes:

- Craig Boesch - Nebraska Business Development Center (Lincoln, Nebraska).
- Ethan Bowers - Iowa State University Food, Farm, Enterprise Development (Ames, Iowa).
- Natasha Eagan - Morton County Chamber of Commerce (Elkhart, Kansas).
- Anna Flies - Great Falls Development Alliance (Great Falls, Montana).
- Paola Gutierrez - South Carolina Office of Rural Health (Lexington, South Carolina).
- Diana Hahn - Jim's Super Valu (Park River, North Dakota).
- Cindy Houlden - Nebraska Cooperative Development Center (Kearney, Nebraska).
- Sarah Hultine Massengale - University of Missouri Extension (Salem, Missouri).
- Jimmy Johnson - South Carolina SBDC (Columbia, South Carolina).
- Heather Lazickas - seven roots (East Aurora, New York).
- Bill McKelvey - University of Missouri Extension (Columbia, Missouri).
- Kate Mudge - West Central Initiative* (Ashby, Minnesota).
- Charlotte Narjes - Nebraska Cooperative Development Center (Lincoln, Nebraska).
- Alex Ostenson - Main Street Market (Ashby, Minnesota).
- Amy Schaefer - Community and Economic Development Associates (Chatfield, Minnesota).
- Becca Simmonds - Pinion Global (Wichita, Kansas).
- Deborah Solie - Center for Rural Affairs (Brownville, Nebraska).
- Korita Steverson - Carolina Common Enterprise (Durham, North Carolina).
- Jessica Toon – West Virginia Food and Farm Coalition* (Charleston, West Virginia).

* Listed affiliations are based on when those students participated in this course and may have changed since each student graduated.

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FOR PRINT PUBLICATIONS: Links used in this story

Rural Grocery Initiative, <https://www.ruralgrocery.org>

Rural Grocery Transition Specialists online course, <https://ruralgrocery.org/specialist>

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