



** This news release from K-State Research and Extension is available online at <https://ksre-learn.com/hunger-free-kansas-mini-grants>

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Kansas Health Foundation, K-State team up to reduce hunger in Kansas

State's extension offices to play leading role in community-based projects

By Pat Melgares, K-State Research and Extension news

MANHATTAN, Kan. – The [Kansas Health Foundation](#) has awarded \$300,000 to Kansas State University to distribute grants to several Kansas communities, officially putting into action an initiative they announced last fall to combat hunger in the state.

The [Hunger Free Kansas](#) mini-grants – ranging in value from \$2,500 to \$30,000 – are going to 20 extension units, where local agents will lead programs that “drive meaningful change in food security and anti-hunger initiatives across the state,” according to Rebecca McMahon, administrator of [the Kansas Local Food System program](#).

The awards will impact 33 of the state's 105 counties initially.

“K-State Research and Extension has extension agents who are already embedded in every county in our state,” said Clara Misenhelter, a program manager with K-State's Rural Grocery Initiative. “These agents know their communities and are well-connected to incredible partners who are already doing essential work. This funding is an amazing opportunity to catalyze our network of agents and change makers in pursuit of a common goal to eradicate hunger in Kansas.”

According to Feeding America, 1 in 8 Kansans and 1 in 5 Kansas children are food insecure. Ed O'Malley, the chief executive officer with the Kansas Health Foundation, announced the mini-grant program during K-State's Research and Extension's annual conference last October.

Approximately \$250,000 is funding programs through local extension offices, according to Misenhelter. Those programs are expected to begin in March, and be completed by the end of the year.

The awarded local extension offices and their project titles include:

- Barber County - Barber County Beef & Veggies.
- Central Kansas District - Charting the Path to Food Equity: A Strategic Community Food Assessment for Saline County.
- Central Kansas District - Nourishing Our Seniors: Ensuring County-Wide Meal Support.
- Cowley County - Growing Food is Medicine in Cowley County.
- Cowley County - Improving Food Access through SNAP and Area Food Pantries.
- Extension Nutrition Program - K-State Food Assistance Outreach Program.
- Flint Hills District - Full Plates, Bright Futures.
- Frontier District - Enhancing the Richmond Food Pantry in the Frontier Extension District.
- Hamilton County - Take a Bite Out of Hunger in Hamilton County.
- Harvey County - Increasing SNAP enrollment in Harvey County.
- Lyon County - Nourish Our Neighbors.
- Marais des Cygnes District - My Father's House Kitchen and Cooking Project.
- Marshall County - Supporting Social Service Access in Marshall County.
- Post Rock District - Post Rock District Food Pantry Enrichment.
- Pratt County - Pratt County Farm to Freezer.
- Reno County - Reno County Local Food Advocate.
- Riley County - Stock the Box - Filling a Gap with Community.
- River Valley District - Expanding Local Food Access to Low-Resource Households in Cloud County.
- Sedgwick County - Community Health Worker: The Next Step.
- Shawnee County - Community Garden for SENT's Southside Filling Station food pantry and Farm-to-Food Truck: Inclusive Workforce Development Program.
- Southwind District - Rural Pantry Network Initiative.
- Wildcat District - Increasing Healthy Snacking and Food Literacy in Vulnerable Populations.

"Some impacts will be more immediate than others," Misenhelter said. "It's important to note that one of the funding priorities was to advance policy, systems and environmental change, known as PSE. It can take time for PSE to occur, but we do hope to see an improvement in health and food access in the communities served by our mini-grant recipients."

According to Misenhelter, some of the programs that were proposed include using a Community Health Worker at a food pantry; supporting food pantry upgrades; training volunteers to assist residents enrolling in the SNAP program; partnerships with K-12 schools; leveraging existing programs like community and school gardens and Kitchen ReStore projects in new ways; and more.

"It has been exciting to see the innovative ideas come through in the application process, and we hope that other communities across the state will benefit from the lessons learned in this first round of projects," Misenhelter said. "For the projects that have been awarded funds, this is a unique opportunity to experiment and innovate."

"We hope this effort will serve as a pilot to bring in additional funding in future years to continue this effort to reduce hunger in Kansas," said Gregg Hadley, K-State's director of extension and assistant vice president.

More information on Hunger Free Kansas is available online at <https://hungerfreekansas.org>. Kansas residents also are encouraged to visit their local extension office to learn more about programs available in their area.

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FOR PRINT PUBLICATIONS: Links used in this story
Kansas Health Foundation, <https://kansashealth.org>

Hunger Free Kansas, <https://hungerfreekansas.org>

Kansas Local Food Systems, <https://www.ksre.k-state.edu/kansaslocalfoods>

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

K-State Research and Extension statewide offices, <https://www.ksre.k-state.edu/about/statewide-locations>

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