# Action Plan:

**Improve Access to High Quality Foods, Especially for Consumers with Limited Resources**

**2011-2012**

## Strategic Opportunities Addressed:

- Ensure an Abundant and Safe Food Supply for All

## Situation:

Kansans with adequate resources possess the assets required to overcome barriers to accessing high quality foods that are encountered by those with fewer key resources. High quality foods include nutrient-dense foods that are of acceptable or better freshness, within optimal "use by" date if processed, and obtained in socially-acceptable ways. While work continues to lessen and eliminate disparities of access, in times of economic instability those barriers are encountered by even more persons, more often, for longer periods, and more deeply.

Although efforts are ongoing to reduce food insecurity and hunger among Kansans, the recent economic downturn has resulted in increasing numbers of Kansans requiring, and seeking, food assistance. The numbers of individuals participating in the Kansas Food Assistance Program (known nationally as the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, or SNAP) are at record highs, but Kansas participation rates among those eligible for the SNAP program rank among the lowest in the U.S. During the 2010-2011 school year, almost one-half (47.4 %) of Kansas students were eligible for free or reduced-price meals, up from 37.5% in 2004-2005. Additionally, for the youngest Kansas consumers, diet quality is significantly challenged for those in families with limited resources. While breastfeeding is universally acknowledged as the nutritionally superior form of infant feeding, only 22% of low-income Kansas mothers breastfeed their infants at 6 months, falling far below the 42% of all Kansas mothers who breastfeed at 6 months.

Research has demonstrated that some Americans lack access to affordable nutritious foods in their neighborhoods. Access includes not only availability of these choices, but also affordability and safety, and skills to procure and prepare high quality foods. This lack of access may be related to overall disparities in health. Access to high quality foods is being addressed locally, through community gardens, CSAs (community supported agriculture) and home gardening, and at the highest level of government. With the release of Healthy People 2020, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services promotes breastfeeding as a prominent part of the new 10-year goals for our nation's health. Similarly, the 2010 Dietary Guidelines for Americans Call to Action includes the principle "ensure that all Americans have access to nutritious foods and opportunities for physical activity." Access to high quality local foods has been determined to positively affect consumers' diets, particularly the intake of fresh fruits and vegetables in young families and seniors with limited resources. Although Kansas enjoys more than 100 farmers markets statewide, only 13 markets support electronic benefit transfers (EBTs), which are required in order for shoppers to use Kansas Food Assistance Program benefits. Kansas does not support the WIC (Women, Infants and Children Nutrition Program) Farmers Market program. High quality foods may be accessible to many, but are less likely to be available to Kansans with limited resources.

## Public Value:

When you support the K-State Research and Extension Improving Access to High Quality Foods, Especially for Consumers with Limited Resources Program, participants will increase their knowledge and skills to access high quality foods, which will lead to an increased number of low-income families that have adequate, high quality, safe foods consistently available to them. This will benefit community members by reducing public cost of health care and health insurance and increasing the number of productive contributing citizens.

## Outcomes:

**Short-Term:**

- Program participants increase awareness and knowledge of strategies that improve their access to high-quality and safe food (e.g., food assistance programs, gardening, home food preservation, low cost meal preparation)

- Program participants, especially those who are pregnant or new mothers, increase awareness and knowledge

and improve attitudes regarding breastfeeding

- Staff and volunteers increase their awareness and knowledge of how to improve access to high-quality, safe food for limited-resource residents in their community

**Evaluation Questions:**

- What awareness or knowledge did program participants gain regarding food assistance programs, gardening, home food preservation or other strategies that improve their access to high-quality and safe food?

- What awareness, knowledge or change in attitudes did program participants gain regarding breastfeeding?

- What awareness or knowledge did program participants gain regarding improving access to high-quality, safe food for limited-resource residents in their community (e.g., promoting private and community gardens, increasing local food production for food insecure persons, donations to food pantries, CSAs, electronic benefit transfer devices at Farmers Markets, SNAP recruitment)?

**Medium-Term:**

- Program participants report using strategies that increase their access to high-quality, abundant and safe food (e.g., food assistance programs, gardening, home food preservation, low cost meal preparation)

- Program participants who are new mothers initiate breastfeeding, still breastfeed at 6 months, and exclusively breastfeed for a longer time

- Staff and volunteers advocate or develop plans for increased access to high-quality, abundant and safe food (e.g., promoting private and community gardens, increasing local food production for food insecure persons, donations to food pantries, CSAs, electronic benefit transfer devices at Farmers Markets, SNAP recruitment)

**Evaluation Questions:**

- Three to six months after a program, what changes do participants report regarding use of food assistance programs, gardening, home food preservation, low cost meal preparation and other strategies that increase their access to high-quality, abundant and safe food?

- Three to six months after a program, do participants who are new mothers report initiating breastfeeding, still breastfeed at 6 months, and exclusively breastfeed for a long time?

- Three to six months after a program, what changes have participants taken to support increased access to high-quality, abundant and safe food (e.g., promoting private and community gardens, increasing local food production for food insecure persons, donations to food pantries, CSAs, electronic benefit transfer devices at Farmers Markets, SNAP recruitment)?

**Long-Term:**

- More Kansans have access to high quality, abundant and safe foods

- More Kansans who qualify for SNAP participate in the program

- Healthy People 2020 Breastfeeding Goals are met in Kansas

- More Kansas communities use strategies that increase their residents' access to high quality, abundant and safe foods

**Evaluation Questions:**

- Do more Kansans have access to high quality, abundant and safe foods?

- Do more Kansans who qualify for SNAP participate in the program?

- Are the Healthy People 2020 Breastfeeding Goals met in Kansas?

- Do more Kansas communities use strategies that increase their residents' access to high quality, abundant and safe foods?

## Outputs:

- Participants will include Kansas consumers of all ages and income levels, including families and individuals; educators; small and large scale food producers, retailers, community stakeholders

- Activities that promote and enable access to high quality food will include: expanding and promoting nutrition education opportunities, Family Nutrition Program (FNP), Expanded Food and Nutrition Education Program (EFNEP), breastfeeding education and promotional activities, and media products (including messages targeted and tested with limited resource audiences) – print, radio, TV and electronic; educational products including displays, eXtension contributions, curricula, printed materials and related programming (such as home food preservation methods, home food preparation and low cost meal preparation)

- Community activities will include: increasing the number and quality of food items donated to pantries; community and private gardening (with efforts made to increase production for food insecure persons through programs such as Plant a Row for the Hungry); and SNAP recruitment and assistance program participation campaigns

## Plan Contacts:

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