



Action Plan: Strengthening Local Food Systems



2011-2012

Strategic Opportunities Addressed:

- Ensure an Abundant and Safe Food Supply for All
- Enhance Effective Decision-Making Regarding Environmental Stewardship
- Assist Communities in Becoming Sustainable and Resilient to the Uncertainties of Economics, Weather, Health, and Security

Situation:

Over the past several years there has been an increasing interest in where our food comes from and how it is produced. Many Americans are interested in purchasing locally grown foods or growing their own food. This has resulted in a larger consumer demand for local produce based on the perception that locally grown produce tastes better, has better quality, and is perceived as safer and healthier.

However, local fruit and vegetable production, while increasing in some areas, is not equipped to meet the increasing demand for produce. Local producers need basic market gardening/farming knowledge, business and marketing knowledge, and a stronger understanding of food safety. Many people have also turned to home food gardening in their search for local, fresh food. A survey report, *The Impact of Home and Community Gardening in America* by the National Gardening Association, highlights the increased interest in home fruit and vegetable gardening.

- 43 million households plan to participate in food gardening in 2009, a 19% increase from 2008. 2008 saw a 10% increase from 2007.
- 20% of food gardeners in 2009 are new to gardening, and 59% claim less than 5 years experience gardening.
- The median food garden size is 96 sq. ft., and the average size is 600 sq. ft.
- The estimated value of garden produce is \$21 billion, with an investment of \$2.5 billion.
- Reasons cited for growing produce include: better tasting food, saving money on food bills, better quality food, and safer food.
- Of the 36 million households growing produce in 2008, 23% grew vegetables, 10% grew fruit trees, 6% grew berries, and 12% grew herbs.

Another National Gardening Association survey looks at organic or all-natural gardening. The number of households using all-natural fertilizer, insect, and weed controls increased from 5 million in 2004 to 12 million in 2008. 17% of U.S. households with a yard or garden say they definitely will start using all-natural gardening methods in the future, and 22% said the probably will. Home food gardeners, especially new gardeners, need education about best gardening practices for Kansas. There is also need for a focus on best environmentally friendly practices. As the value of U.S. food gardening is \$21 billion, increasing the productivity of gardeners will also help increase food security and healthy eating in a frugal way.

Outcomes:

Short-Term:

- Home Gardening

- Home and community gardeners learn best gardening practices that result in successful gardens.
 - Home gardeners learn to identify and manage insects and diseases using best cultural and chemical controls.
 - Home gardeners learn to plan and plant food gardens at the correct time and in the best location.
 - Home gardeners learn to build healthy garden soils through soil testing and composting.
- Urban populations gain awareness of local food systems and the importance of agriculture.
- Commercial Production
 - Current and potential fruit and vegetable growers learn information and skills that enable more productive horticultural and agricultural enterprises.
 - Growers learn about technologies that are appropriate for their scale of production.
 - Growers learn about fruit and vegetable varieties and production systems that are well adapted to Kansas.
 - Growers learn about direct marketing strategies that will increase their sales.
 - Growers learn about sustainable pest management strategies.
 - Current and potential fruit and vegetable growers learn the basics of food safety as it pertains to their growing practices.
 - Growers gain awareness about what food safety hazards are and how to prevent them.
 - Growers gain awareness that food safety is a concern for the small grower.
 - Growers learn how to develop a food safety plan.

Evaluation Questions:

What knowledge do home gardener participants gain about best gardening practices?

Do urban populations gain awareness about local food systems and the importance of agriculture?

What knowledge do grower participants gain about horticultural and agricultural technologies, production systems, marketing, and/or sustainable pest management?

What knowledge and awareness do grower participants gain about food safety?

Medium-Term:

- Home Gardening
 - Home gardener participants develop or contribute to the development of sustainable community gardens, especially in areas accessible to minority populations. Home gardener participants apply best gardening practices to grow edible plants.
- Commercial Production
 - Part-time and full-time produce grower participants sell their products to local markets more often. Local produce growers adopt sustainable techniques and use technology appropriate to their production scale.
 - Local produce growers develop farm food safety plans and use Good Agricultural Practices, Good Handling Practices, and sustainable production techniques to supply high quality, safe food to the local populations.
 - Local produce growers use marketing techniques and agri-tourism to connect with urban audiences and educating those audiences about agriculture.

Evaluation Questions:

Have home gardener participants developed or contributed to the development of community gardens,

especially in areas accessible to minority populations?

Do home gardener participants apply best gardening practices to grow edible plants?

Do grower participants sell to local markets more often than before their participation?

What plan, practices, techniques and technology do grower participants use to ensure sustainability, supply high quality and safe food, and/or market their products to local and urban populations?

Long-Term:

Consumers of all socioeconomic backgrounds have access to abundant, fresh, safe local foods, especially fruits and vegetables. Local farms and horticulture enterprises have increased economic viability. Local populations consume more fresh, unprocessed fruits and vegetables. Consumers, especially urban consumers, experience greater connections and stronger support for local agriculture. Vibrant community gardens strengthen local economies and communities.

Evaluation Questions:

How many consumers have access to abundant, fresh, safe local foods, especially fruits and vegetables?

Do local farms and horticulture enterprises experience increased economic viability?

Do local populations consume more fresh, unprocessed fruits and vegetables?

Do consumers, especially urban consumers, experience greater connections and support for local agriculture?

How many communities sustain vibrant community gardens?

Outputs:

Participants

- Home Gardening
- Home gardeners
- Community members
- Urban populations, especially 25-45 yr age group
- Commercial Production
 - Local fruit, vegetable, & herb growers
 - Potential fruit, vegetable, & herb growers

Activities

- **Home Gardening**
 - Gardening workshops
 - Coordinating with community leaders to start community gardens
 - Local media opportunities
- **Commercial Production:**
 - Classes, workshops, tours, demonstrations, and field days devoted to topics about fruit & vegetable production.
 - Assisting local farmers' markets as needed
 - Increase networking opportunities for fruit & vegetable growers in different regions of the

- state and Kansas as a whole.
- Assistance for new producers.

Products

- Home Gardening
 - Newsletters
 - Demonstration gardens
 - Websites, blogs, etc.
- Commercial Production
 - Newsletters and email updates
 - Demonstration plots

Plan Contacts:

- Boyer, Cheryl - Assistant Professor , Horticulture, Forestry, and Recreation Resources
- McMahon, Rebecca - County Extension Agent , Sedgwick County Extension
- Rivard, Cary - Assistant Professor , Horticulture, Forestry, and Recreation Resources