Recommendations Explained

As this assessment establishes, and has been determined in fellow farming states, our farms are important links in the food supply chain. As key drivers of the Kansas economy, key potential providers of healthful foods, and key leaders in our communities, farmers can and should take a leading role in making healthful foods the routine, easy choice for Kansans. They cannot do so, however, without increased public engagement at all levels of policy.

Kansas and its communities must contribute to this solution through sound policies and administration to help Kansas farms serve this important role. Accordingly, the Feeding Kansas report recommends the following as a plan for immediate public action to better incorporate local farms into the supply chain that must provide healthful foods to all Kansans.

Though nutritionally-adequate diets include a balance of fruits, vegetables, whole grains, and diverse proteins sources, fruits and vegetables are the focus of five of the following seven policy priorities. This is because production and consumption of these “consumer” or “specialty crops” falls significantly short in Kansas.

The overarching goals of these recommendations are:

1) To increase opportunities to identify and advance community food solutions at the local level;
2) To improve state-level clarity and coordination of farm-to-fork food system policies, programs and planning;
3) To provide key local-, regional-, and state-level supports to increase production and consumption of fruits and vegetables in Kansas.
Implementing the following policies by June 2016 will be a major step toward addressing global food issues at home in Kansas.

GOAL 1) INCREASE OPPORTUNITIES TO IDENTIFY AND ADVANCE COMMUNITY FOOD SOLUTIONS AT THE LOCAL LEVEL.

Recommendation 1 – State and local government agencies should pass resolutions, provide technical assistance and funding, and/or take any further steps needed to support the formation and longevity of local Food Policy Councils and Food & Farm Task Forces across Kansas.

EXPLANATION: Task forces or councils can be powerful tools for governments to receive guidance on the multifaceted issues facing the communities they serve. Community leadership and civil discourse are required to make truly effective policy change and for communities to grow their capacity to handle complex challenges, such as those outlined in this report.

Nationwide, state and local governments have demonstrated the benefits of citizen participation in policymaking through food and farm task forces, or food policy councils. Members of these advisory groups come from diverse backgrounds. They work together to gain a comprehensive understanding of how their local food system operates, and then provide policy recommendations to improve that system over the long term. Thus, governments are better equipped to meet the needs of the public, because members of the broader public are formally engaged and tasked with identifying and prioritizing their needs and designing key solutions.

Local food-focused task forces or councils can address a wide-range of farm and food system issues. Examples of policies could include, but are not limited to: opening up public land for community gardens, securing permanent locations or parking for farmers markets, incorporating stronger healthful-food policies into public institutions, identifying key policies and infrastructure needed to improve local food processing, addressing zoning and codes issues to enable affordable farmworker housing, forming agreements to increase food assistance dollars for use with local farms, et cetera.

Four local-level food policy councils exist within Kansas at the time of this writing. A number of similar groups are organizing, and there is widespread public support to continue to increase the number of these groups serving city and county governments in Kansas (HK2020, 2014). These local-level food policy councils are located in Allen County, Crawford County, Douglas County, and South Hutchinson.

To create a local task force or council:
- A written resolution is voted-upon by government representatives at the city or county level or through a joint resolution between city and/or county governments;
- Governments often allocate funds to support the ongoing coordination of these groups;
- Technical assistance, such as training in leadership and multi-stakeholder coordination or in identifying, understanding, and drafting revised or new policies, may be needed to help these groups get started, or to support their efforts once enacted.

Kansas groups seeking to form councils or task forces may find strong allies within local Resource Conservation and Development (RC&D) organizations and through local Research and Extension offices.
RC&D organizations are 501(c)3 nonprofit entities that work on food issues and may provide a vehicle for council formation. Kansas State University Research and Extension funding supports policy change and systems work for Extension Agents in the Family Nutrition Program, and welcomes these agents’ involvement with food policy councils or similar entities (USDA, 2014).

Key resources for forming or advancing the efforts of local food task forces/policy councils are cited in the Resource Directory, included as an appendix to this report.

**GOAL 2) IMPROVE STATE-LEVEL CLARITY AND COORDINATION OF FARM-TO-FORK FOOD SYSTEM POLICIES, PROGRAMS AND PLANNING.**

**Recommendation 2 –** A high-level, independent farm-to-fork food system organizer position should be created to oversee statewide food system planning and actively streamline information sharing and coordination efforts across agencies.

**EXPLANATION:** Lack of regulatory and informational clarity and limited coordination across statewide food and farm efforts currently restricts the growth of the Kansas farm-to-fork food system – a system that integrates Kansas farms into the supply chain that provides healthful food to Kansans.

To address these limitations, Kansas would benefit from:
- the active streamlining of farm and food system regulatory and other information exchange, and
- a centrally-managed effort to facilitate the enactment and maintenance of a statewide farm-to-fork food system plan over the long term.

A new, independent state-level position is needed to lead these activities by coordinating, communicating, monitoring, evaluating, and making recommendations. The mandate for this position would be advancement of Kansas’s farm-to-fork food system and its critical role in the goal of health, economic, social, and environmental well-being for all Kansans.

To adequately address the issues outlined in this report, this high-level position needs to be:
- **Independent** from agency jurisdictions;
- **Full-time**, with a dedicated budget to both the farm-to-fork food system organizer position and its mandated role of advancing the Kansas farm-to-fork food system;
- **Tasked with jurisdictional oversight** of the food-related efforts of state agencies and related advisory councils;
- **Tasked with coordination of state agencies** to draft a statewide farm-to-fork food system plan, track progress, and update the plan as needed.

The position would be empowered to:
- **Analyze and monitor the development and implementation of federal, state, and local government laws, rules and regulations, ordinances, and policies** with respect to farm-to-fork activity across the state;
- **Work with state agencies to establish statewide goals and benchmarks for Kansas’s farm-to-fork food system**;
- **Gather and facilitate increased data collection across agencies and councils/task forces**,
including public health and economic impact reports, to ensure measurable progress is made toward those goals, and benchmarks are met within intended timelines;

- **Provide governor and legislature with annual reporting and recommendations** regarding the status and needs for the advancement of Kansas’s farm-to-fork food system;
- **Facilitate increased coordination and strengthened relationships** between and across government agencies, nongovernment agencies, Kansas food and farm businesses, and the general public;
- **Provide a centralized, public point-of-contact and clearinghouse for farm-to-fork food system policy and program information** –
  - ensuring that the clearinghouse is formed and maintained in collaboration and with direct links to various state agencies, and
  - striving to enhance the quality of information provided to various agencies and the public by connecting them to (and not duplicating) information already provided, as well as providing information not easily accessible elsewhere.

**GOAL 3) PROVIDE KEY SUPPORTS TO INCREASE PRODUCTION AND CONSUMPTION OF FRUITS AND VEGETABLES IN KANSAS.**

**Recommendation 3.1 – State and local government agencies should establish goals and policies for their agencies and for Kansas’s public institutions to prioritize procurement of Kansas-grown fruits and vegetables.**

**EXPLANATION:** By establishing formalized goals and policies that prioritize the purchase of Kansas-raised fruits and vegetables, Kansas’s publicly funded agencies and institutions can formalize their commitment to improving the health of Kansans and the economy.

Adopting such policies across local and state agencies and institutions would drive growth in production and consumption of Kansas-grown fruits and vegetables in Kansas. This is because it would provide clear incentive for food distributors serving those agencies and institutions to purchase Kansas foods, offering Kansas producers the stable market necessary to invest in infrastructure for scaling-up production volumes over the long term.

These special local produce purchasing requirements could be enacted through statutes similar to existing Kansas statutes that give priority to in-state bidders and bidders for paper products whose recycled content is highest.

At the state-level, the Department of Administration and Kansas Association of Public Purchasing Professionals (KAPPP) could lead the effort by establishing statewide goals and drafting a statute to prioritize local produce procurement. This statute would apply to all agencies that fall under the Department of Administration’s contracting requirements.

Those agencies with independent purchasing power that do not fall under the Department of Administration’s contracting requirements could join in the statewide effort by establishing internal procurement policies to align with the Department of Administration’s local produce procurement goals and priorities. These independent agencies would include the Department of Corrections, Kansas Unified
School Districts, Kansas State Educational Institutions, and public universities. The Kansas Department of Agriculture (KDA) could be a key partner in supporting the pursuit of this priority statewide. KDA’s From the Land of Kansas™ program actively works to help facilitate farm-to-institution connections like these, and the online hub they host for those purposes could be useful in this process. KDA also has an internal practice of purchasing Kansas-grown food whenever possible. The formalization of KDA’s goals into agency-wide procurement policy could serve as a model for implementation in other state, and local, agencies.

Recommendation 3.2 – Public funds should support the designation of a statewide Fruit and Vegetable Agricultural Economist, with an emphasis on local food systems, through Kansas State University Research and Extension.

EXPLANATION: Kansas leaders and policymakers need clearer data to better understand the economic potential for and impact of different scales and types of fruit and vegetable production in Kansas, and existing and potential farmers, local food processors, and distributors also need that information to guide their business planning and operations.

There is currently no statewide position to address this need. A number of agricultural economists are employed through Kansas State University Research and Extension, but their focus is not fruits and vegetables or local markets.

This position would conduct an applied research and outreach program focusing on the economics of producing, processing, selling, and distributing a wide range of fruits and vegetables to diverse markets on a local and regional scale, while also addressing the potential for Kansas farmers to respond to these needs on a national and global scale.

The position should:
- Assist government agents and decision-makers in quantifying and evaluating the current status of and economic potential for the fruit and vegetable sector in Kansas;
- Research and quantify models of processing and distributing Kansas grown fruits and vegetables;
- Develop and deliver extension and research programming to assist Kansas growers and farmers;
- Develop collaborative programs/projects with other faculty, units, and departments at Kansas State University and with allied industry organizations, government agencies, and other stakeholders – including related advisory councils and task forces at the state and local level;
- Attract grant funds to support research/extension programs;
- Support new and ongoing research and scholarship initiatives related to fruit and vegetable agricultural issues;
- Contribute to the Department of Agricultural Economics’ extension website (www.agmanager.info).

Work outputs should include, but not be limited to:
- Conducting economic impact evaluations of Kansas fruit and vegetable production, processing, distribution, and sales;
- Researching and documenting the potential gross and net value per acre of various types of fruit and vegetable crops – at different scales of production and marketing;
- Researching, developing, and maintaining regionally relevant enterprise budgets for various scales
and types of fruit and vegetable crop production, processing, and distribution – including for Kansas-based markets;
- Creating model business plans for different scales and types of fruit and vegetable operations;
- Providing quantitative economic analyses to local decision-makers in the identification and selection of cost-effective agricultural best management practices (BMPs) for these types of operations;
- Compiling financial and cost data, researching results regarding factors related to the implementation of key identified agricultural BMPs in the fruit and vegetable sector;
- Developing and instituting a standardized methodology for calculating water use reductions, pollinator population enhancements, soil health improvement, and other outcomes resulting from the implementation of key identified BMPs.

Recommendation 3.3 – Public funds should support the designation of multiple Regional Fruit and Vegetable Extension Specialist positions across Kansas, through Kansas State University Research and Extension Horticulture Program.

EXPLANATION: To advance commercial fruit and vegetable production and sales in Kansas, farm and food business entrepreneurs need significantly more research-based information and high-level technical support than is currently available.

Kansas State University Research and Extension (KSRE) fills this role in other agricultural sectors and, with adequate support, could expand its services to the fruit and vegetable sector. This would increase Kansas producers’ access to specialized information they need to address challenges associated with beginning or scaling-up fruit and vegetable operations, and to address the unique production and marketing challenges of these food crops.

Demand for the type of services regional Extension Specialists could provide for the fruit and vegetable sector is unmet and increasing across Kansas. Current county agents are often taxed by tremendous demand for a broad range of services, and could benefit from additional specialized support in this sector – as is the case with existing Specialist positions in other specialty areas, such as turfgrass, beef, swine, or wheat (KSRE).

KSRE presently assists farmers with addressing pest, disease, and other issues associated with the production of Kansas’s current top commodity crops – wheat, corn, soybeans, and sorghum – much of which are sold to national and international markets. However, fruit and vegetable operations may produce upwards of 30 different crops, each with its own unique pest and disease challenges, harvest and post-harvest handling requirements, and diverse market niches.

KSRE funds presently support the part-time employment of one Extension specialist that serves all fruit and vegetable crops. Located in Northeast Kansas, this position is intended to serve the entire state. Only one county-level horticulture agent specializes in fruit and vegetable crops. There are no regional Extension Specialists in Kansas with specialized knowledge in fruit and vegetable production and marketing, though historically this was not the case.

Public funds should be appropriated to employ regional Extension Specialists with graduate-level education to support county agents in meeting the research and service needs of growers across all
regions of Kansas. To begin, a regional Extension Specialist in fruit and vegetables could be stationed in Western Kansas, since Kansas’s only current fruit and vegetable Extension Specialist is in Eastern Kansas. Subsequently, further specialist positions could be established in other key regions. The ultimate goal would be to increase access to region-specific research-based information and high-level technical support for fruit and vegetable producers statewide. The activities of these regional Specialists would be managed by Kansas’s state-level Fruit and Vegetable Extension Specialist (a position that already exists).

**Recommendation 3.4** – Public funds should be allocated toward Kansas State University Research and Extension’s horticultural research stations.

**EXPLANATION:** Agricultural research stations are “required to keep our basic and applied agricultural research comprehensive and relevant,” wrote John D. Floros, the Dean at KSU College of Agriculture and Director of K-State Research and Extension, in an open letter to Faculty Senate he submitted June 2013. In order to support the long-term research needed to increase the production and sale of fruits and vegetables in Kansas, horticulture research stations should be added as a regular line item for consideration in government and Extension budget negotiations. Kansas houses several Agricultural Experiment Stations through K-State Research and Extension, and these are a regular line item on the state budget; however, Kansas’s horticulture research stations do not currently receive state funding.

Kansas’s horticulture research stations need stable funding, just as its Experiment Stations do, in order to sustain a baseline budget for maintaining grounds, equipment, and perennial plantings. Without this baseline budget, research stations risk losing valuable investments, the loss of a former vineyard at Haysville station being a case in point.

KSRE has a history of excellence in this type of horticultural research, and stable funding will better enable leadership in the fruit and vegetable sector. For example, in the 1950s and 1960s, KSRE specialists used research station grounds for several years to develop a now nationally-renowned variety of watermelons called “Crimson Sweet” that is resistant to anthracnose and fusarium wilt, both of which are problems in Kansas. Providing stable funds to support the maintenance of facilities for research of this kind would enable Kansas to better achieve regional recognition for new varieties of fruits and vegetables.

Employing a number of regional fruit and vegetable Extension Specialists would also support the functionality of these research stations (see recommendation 3.3, above).

**Recommendation 3.5** – The Kansas Legislature should establish a multi-stakeholder Task Force to gather and share data and information on herbicide injury (“drift”) to sensitive crops in Kansas. This group should work in coordination with the state-level food system organizer, once that position is created.

**EXPLANATION:** Drift and co-existence are sensitive topics in a state whose agricultural economy is currently driven by crops that are sprayed with chemicals that can damage other types of crops and their pollinators. Therefore, we recommend the creation of a task force with membership representing all sides of this conversation, to work with the shared mission of collecting clear data to guide policy recommendations that better protect sensitive crops in Kansas.
Many fruits and vegetables – and the pollinators they rely on – are sensitive to damage from spray drift. Much is being done in Kansas to provide education on best practices for application and to help both growers and applicators prevent damage to sensitive crops. However, despite these efforts to reduce the risk of crop injury or loss without compensation, Kansas producers cite drift as a key barrier to scaling-up their fruit and vegetable operations.

Education programs have not proven to be enough to protect sensitive crops in Kansas. More research is needed to identify key policy solutions to this complex problem.

At least two chemicals currently used in agriculture – 2,4-D and Dicamba – continue to damage specialty crops even when best practices are implemented. This is because, even days after application, the esters from these chemicals may volatilize (convert from liquid to gas) and travel miles in the air during conditions of low humidity and high temperatures (Proost & Boerboom, 2004; Nice, Johnson, & Bauman, 2004). Dicamba and 2,4-D are likely to be used more often by farms in the near future, because biotechnology companies are introducing crops genetically modified to resist those chemicals (Swayne, 2014).

This type of drift is not only difficult to prevent, it is also difficult to determine when and from where the drift occurred. In cases when Department of Agriculture investigators are unable to confirm the source of drift, uninsured Kansas growers experiencing crop injury from drift are left un-compensated for their loss and some have reported closing down as a result. (Kansas growers have limited options, if any, for crop insurance to cover such loss.)

One Kansas grape grower reported that in his experience, with 40 years of farming and near-annual loss from drift on his farm, the problem of drift will prevent specialty crops like fruits and vegetables from being a viable industry in Kansas.

**Task force members should include:**

- A number of producers of different types of sensitive crops from across diverse regions of Kansas (including small and large fruits, vegetables, honey, nuts, cotton, and more);
- Small and large scale agricultural spray applicators;
- State and local government pesticide distributors, regulators, applicators, and damage inspectors;
- Representatives of multiple government agencies including the DriftWatch program that serves as Kansas’s Specialty Crop Map;
- Representatives of public and private educational institutions, nonprofits, and other community based efforts related to food access, conservation, public health and nutrition, and diverse forms of agriculture; and
- Multiple researchers with technical skills to support the tasks below.

**Task force objectives should include:**

- **Conducting research** and publishing findings to guide drift-related policy decisions. Including, but not limited to:
  - Obtaining clarity from KDA pesticide and fertilizer investigation reports, to:
    - Quantify and identify patterns in the outcomes of investigations over years or decades,
    - Identify what percent of reported drift cases lead to compensation for damage/loss,
    - Identify which herbicides are most often responsible for reported drift cases.
  - Conducting a statewide survey in order to:
• Determine rate of reporting/non-reporting among respondents who have experienced damage/loss from drift,
• Assess the economic impact of drift, including the estimated loss of revenue for specialty crops and cotton, and the extent to which threat of drift prohibits scaling-up of sensitive crop operations.

• **Making policy recommendations based on research findings.**
• **Helping spread information related to why and how Kansas farmers should report herbicide injury and how applicators can avoid risks of drift.**

### Closing Comments

These recommendations for public action, based upon the deep assessment of Kansas’s farm and food system’s fundamental needs, come from more than a year of intensive work by a broad cross-section of Kansas leaders, farmers, and community members.

Such reports are too often discovered years later on dusty shelves. Therefore, in order to ensure public action as a result of this report, the Kansas Rural Center and its growing network of partners now embark on a two-year plan for mobilization aimed at helping bring these recommendations to fruition through policy implementation. It is our hope that the majority, if not all, of these recommendations will be taken up by public servants for careful consideration, improvement, and implementation by July 2016 – the conclusion of this portion of the Community Food Solutions Initiative.

First, this report will be provided to the statewide Farm-to-Fork Task Force enacted by the Kansas State Legislature in 2014 and tasked with providing recommendations to the legislature by January 2016 for policies to advance Kansas's farm-to-fork food system.

Second, KRC will conduct grassroots training, assisting Kansans who participated in the research portion of this project to become more active participants in their local and state policy environments to effect the change they seek.

KRC will continue to work, as we always have, with state agency personnel and colleagues who every day are seeking to advance the farm-to-fork system. And, as farmers ourselves, we will continue to identify and provide the education and information that farmers need to strengthen their own farm businesses.

Ultimately, the Kansas Rural Center Community Food Solutions Initiative brings Kansas communities together with their farmers to chart the course forward for a robust, bright future for the farm-to-fork food system – a system that will go a long way toward making healthful foods the routine, easy choice for all Kansans.