Russell County Economic Development and CVB:
Rural Revival

Industrial Hemp Advocacy

Kansas Rural Center Conference – November 2018

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Cultivating Knowledge, Cultivating Community, Cultivating Change

Institutional Memory – Honoring the Beginning

- 5 years ago, 2013, Russell County Economic Development along with additional Economic Development partners in Ellsworth County, Norton County, Smith County, Thomas County, and partners in Western Kansas Rural Economic Development Alliance (Wkreda) identified value added ag as a sector to develop and expand to diversify the existing ag community and allow for innovative entrepreneurship to develop that would aide in retaining local youth. (FFA/4-H/Family Farm Youth, etc.). Extensive research was done to identify existing value added ag projects already in Western Kansas and identify key gaps where product development could occur.

- At that same time on the local front, Russell County Economic Development started to cultivate the value added ag sector throughout Russell County. (Education, Awareness, Promotion, R&D, Connecting to Resources, etc.). In 2017, we started public education and networking through a series called "Farm Talk".

Key Products Considered: Industrial Hemp; Lavender; Sunflower; Saphflower; Vegetables, Eggs, Pumpkins, etc.

Additional Products to Promote – Farmers Markets; Farm to Table – garden products, beef, chicken, wild game, and pork.

Grassroots Advocacy

▶ **Local Advocacy**

Developed a task force of multi-experienced business and community leaders to advocate with policy makers.

Provided updates to interested ag producers and business leaders as to how they could assist in advocacy.

▶ **Under the Dome Advocacy**

Met with law makers, industry experts, lobbying firms, and commerce related contacts.

Testified at committee hearings.

Reach Out – Emails, Phone Calls, and Mailers.

Partnered with like minded people and organizations that also had the same goal.

Institutional Memory – Honoring the Beginning

▶ Year 2015 advocacy efforts through Economic Development alliances began to advocate for value added ag attention as a business developer for rural Kansas. Industrial Hemp took the focus and remained the focus due to the need for legislation that would legalize the industry.

▶ Several bills were introduced and worked, with the research bill SB 263 passing in 2018.

▶ Since 2015, Russell County Economic Development either testified and/or met with senate and house leadership to provide support, education, and advocacy of the industrial hemp industry as a rural revival tool in business development and sustainment in the ag, processing and manufacturing sectors.

"Don't Complain About It If You're Not Going To Make it Better "

Sen. Blanche Lincoln

Community Leaders, State Leaders, Leaders in general hear complaints every day. Rarely do they hear solutions or have people that want to get involved in solution making. Key Reminder: Solution making isn't casting blame or discrediting towards leadership, it is naming the problem, suggesting a solution, and willingness to be part of the development of that solution with the understanding that in policy development, that solution is going to change and evolve several times due to laws, statutes and additional policy that could be challenged due to a new policy being enacted.

Rural Revival – Believe in it!

▶ Keep Learning - It's a new industry!

▶ Keep Moving Forward – Not everyone will finish with you that started with you.

▶ Continue to Collaborate/Partner and Understand Business Development– Understand the non-disclosure expectations of business development, in this case processors and manufacturers. For those sectors to develop in Kansas, work with your economic development team and understand confidentiality and trade secrets.

▶ Patience for the Process.

Rural Revival

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