



\*\* This news release from K-State Research and Extension is available online at <https://ksre-learn.com/4h-kansas-entrepreneurship-challenge>

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## **Kansas Entrepreneurship Challenge propagating young business owners**

Competition at K-State open to public and slated for April 17

*By Jacob Klaudt, K-State Research and Extension news service*

MANHATTAN, Kan. — What do a Kansas concession stand, beef cattle artificial insemination service and car air freshener business all have in common?

Youth founded and entered each in the [Kansas Entrepreneurship Challenge](#), a competition for student-led businesses that encourages adolescent entrepreneurship while furthering rural business development. Kansas 4-H special projects administrator Patsy Maddy said the event started during the 2013-2014 school year and has seen significant growth in participation.

“When this started, we had 48 participants at that time,” she said. “In 2023-2024, we had 1,159 participants across the state. That shows how it has grown in popularity.”

Initiated by Network Kansas and run in partnership with K-State Research and Extension and Kansas 4-H, this activity begins locally with individual competitions called Youth Entrepreneurship Challenges in 64 counties and communities across the state.

“This competition is for middle and high school youth,” Maddy said. “While each local event looks a little bit different regarding their components when a participant gets to the state level, they do have to do a presentation, submit a pretty extensive executive summary and have the opportunity to set up a booth at our trade show.”

Once an entrepreneur wins their local event, they qualify for the state challenge, scheduled from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. on April 17 at K-State’s Student Union. For youth just out of winning their local competitions, event organizers allow for 15 wildcard entries from across Kansas.

One featured aspect of the challenge includes the trade show, which provides business owners a prime opportunity to showcase their product or service, said Kansas 4-H youth development program leader Sarah Maass.

“I would encourage everyone to come to the Union early in the afternoon and visit with these kids,” she said. “While they’re not allowed to sell products, they can have them at their table and give you their sales pitch.”

She added: “You can pick up their business cards and ask them questions; it is fun to have those conversations and to see their passion and enthusiasm for their work.”

Competing in this challenge not only helps youth better understand their business models and develop skills like responsibility and public speaking, but Maass said participants also learn the value of taking part in something larger than themselves.

“One of the biggest things that I feel that they learn is that they have a place in their community and that they’re able to fill a void,” she said. “My long-term hope is that whatever they decide to do after high school, they can still see themselves as part of a community in Kansas.”

Judges for the state challenge include other business entrepreneurs, extension professionals, economic developers, bankers and others who know what it takes to start a business. Contestants become eligible to win cash prizes and a people’s choice award at the trade show.

After the challenge, results will be shared online through [Network Kansas](#) and on the Kansas 4-H Facebook page.

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**FOR PRINT PUBLICATIONS:** Links used in this story

Kansas Entrepreneurship Challenge, <https://cba.k-state.edu/academics/departments/center-advancement-entrepreneurship/KEC-competition-info.html>

Network Kansas, <https://networkkansas.com/services/ecommunity-partnership/youth-entrepreneurship-challenge-series/>

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