K-State lands $1.15M award to support local food systems

University to champion effort to bolster Kansas local food entrepreneurs

By Pat Melgares, K-State Research and Extension news service

MANHATTAN, Kan. – Kansas State University will receive $1.15 million as part of a five-state project that aims to help underserved populations in rural communities gain access to local and healthy foods.

Rial Carver, a co-leader of K-State Research and Extension’s Local Foods Transdisciplinary Team, said the program will be part of one of 12 regional food business centers supported by the U.S. Department of Agriculture.

She said K-State received a sub-award from the Heartland Regional Food Business Center, which is managed by the University of Nebraska program, Rural Prosperity Nebraska. The USDA awarded $25 million to UNL for this project.

The projects includes supporting small and mid-sized food producers in Kansas by helping them:

- Access technical and financial assistance.
- Reach new markets.
- Overcome barriers to market access.

“The Regional Food Business Center funding program came at an opportune time for K-State Research and Extension,” said Carver, who is also an extension specialist with K-State’s Rural Grocery Initiative. “Participation in this program will allow K-State Research and Extension to provide another layer of support to local and regional food businesses.”

K-State is one of 32 partners in the Heartland Food Business Center, which is based in Lincoln, Nebraska. Partners include extension offices in Nebraska, Missouri, Kansas, Oklahoma and Iowa; non-profit organizations; tribal and indigenous groups; and others.
The USDA funded 11 other regional projects, covering the United States. K-State will receive $1.15 million over four years.

Carver said K-State Research and Extension's Local Foods Transdisciplinary Team has been building capacity for local food systems across Kansas, including a recently awarded USDA Regional Food Systems Partnership grant.

Team member Marlin Bates, also a principal investigator in the project and director of K-State’s extension office in Douglas County, said “the groundwork laid by the Local Foods Transdisciplinary Team over the past few years has positioned K-State Research and Extension well” to be part of the Heartland Regional Food Business Center.

The Kansas Rural Center and KC Healthy Kids will also be partners in the Heartland Regional Food Business Center. Carver said she anticipates partnerships with other groups, including the Kansas Department of Agriculture, Shop Kansas Farms and the Kansas Small Business Development Center.

“In our experience, local and regional food systems work requires strong partnerships,” said Londa Nwadike, a principal investigator on the project and team member who holds dual extension appointments in Kansas and Missouri. “We are happy to incorporate partners from across the state to participate in this project.”

Officials with the Heartland Regional Food Business Center said they plan to build an interactive platform where food buyers, sellers, producers, processors and market managers can communicate and collaborate on the local level.

Carver said the Kansas team will begin its work within the next few months.

FOR PRINT PUBLICATIONS: Links used in this story
Rural Prosperity Nebraska, https://ruralprosperityne.unl.edu
Rural Grocery Initiative, https://www.ruralgrocery.org
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