K-State local foods program to offer fellowships for Kansas communities

Paid positions will add jobs, help increase food security

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

MANHATTAN, Kan. – A Kansas State University program that aims to improve the health of Kansans by increasing access to locally grown foods is giving the effort a big boost this fall.

Over the next two years, the K-State Research and Extension Local Food Systems team will offer 34 paid fellowships to Kansas communities interested in helping to build the state’s local food network. Program coordinator Amanda Lindahl said the 320-hour paid positions not only provide jobs for local residents, but also dedicated time and energy for a local foods system project.

“We hope that this elevates the capacity of the system, facilitating access to resources, to move progress forward toward a more resilient and sustainable Kansas local food system,” Lindahl said.

Lindahl said more than 90% of the Kansans’ food dollars are spent on food shipped from outside of the state.

“If every Kansan spent just $5 per week on local food, it would generate $750 million in revenue for small and mid-sized Kansas farms,” she said, citing data from the Crossroads Resource Center. “Kansas residents are not only unaware of the physical benefits of purchasing more food locally, but also the economic benefits.”

In 2014, the Kansas legislature established the Local Food and Farm Task Force. Since then, Lindahl said considerable momentum has been built in Kansas for local food policy coalitions, or groups of people who work on making healthy, local and sustainable food available for people in their area. In 2021, the Kansas Alliance for Wellness reported that more than 76% of Kansans are represented by a local food policy council.

Still, the challenge remains to further bolster local food systems.
“Assessments show that we need more capacity and people to support the development of our local food system,” Lindahl said. “There is momentum (in Kansas), but many participants involved in the local food system are volunteers, and we hope that by putting paid fellow positions into local communities, some additional momentum will elevate the work.”

“This leads to more available locally produced food that allows people to access healthy foods, (and) creates stronger and healthier Kansas communities.”

K-State’s Local Food Systems team has formed a food systems collaborative with several Kansas organizations to work toward a statewide Farm and Food Council. Lindahl said the group’s goals include leveraging resources and establishing policies that support the development of local and regional food systems.

The fellowships now available to communities are part of that. All Kansas communities are eligible to apply for one of 17 local foods fellowships now available, for projects taking place next spring or summer. An additional 17 fellowship sites will be available in the spring and summer, 2025. More information, including deadlines for applications, is available online.

“Fellows will be working on site specific projects that will be determined by the fellow host organizations or businesses,” Lindahl said, adding that some examples might include executing a marketing campaign for a local farmers’ market; coordinating a summer engagement series for a local school or community garden; organizing a list of county or regional local food sellers; or many other ideas.

“When we fill every fellowship that we have funding for, we will provide 34 positions across Kansas over the next two years,” Lindahl said. “That will contribute approximately $185,000 toward elevating the capacity for local food systems in Kansas communities. We’d like a lot more funding related to coordinating local food systems, but this is a great start.”

More information also is available by contacting Lindahl at 913-730-6689, or alindahl@ksu.edu.

FOR PRINT PUBLICATIONS: Links used in this story
Kansas Local Foods, https://www.ksre.k-state.edu/kansaslocalfoods/get-involved/fellows.html

K-State Research and Extension is a short name for the Kansas State University Agricultural Experiment Station and Cooperative Extension Service, a program designed to generate and distribute useful knowledge for the wellbeing of Kansans. Supported by county, state, federal and private funds, the program has county extension offices, experiment fields, area extension offices and regional research centers statewide. Its headquarters is on the K-State campus in Manhattan. For more information, visit www.ksre.ksu.edu. K-State Research and Extension is an equal opportunity provider and employer.

Story by:
Pat Melgares
melgares@ksu.edu

For more information:
Amanda Lindahl
913-730-6689
alindahl@ksu.edu