K-State plans course to train rural grocery specialists

Online modules will train specialists in business transition plans

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

MANHATTAN, Kan. – Kansas State University officials have opened registration for an online course that organizers say will help to keep grocery stores open in rural communities.

Rial Carver, the program leader for K-State Research and Extension’s Rural Grocery Initiative, said the course – the Rural Grocery Transition Specialist Program -- provides training for economic developers, extension professionals and other resource providers to support rural grocers through business transitions.

Registration is available online. The cost is $635 by Nov. 17, or $685 after that date. There will be three offerings in 2024. The first class begins Jan. 15, and participants should expect to spend 15-20 hours to complete the course over a 13-week period.

“Grocery stores are critical businesses in rural communities because they serve as essential sources of healthy food, drive local economies, and provide space for community members to gather and connect,” Carver said.

In 2021, K-State’s Rural Grocery Initiative conducted a survey of rural grocers, finding that 30% are at or above retirement age (66), and 23.9% plan to retire within 1-5 years. Further, more than 72% did not have a business transition plan.

“Business transitions are inevitable, but research consistently shows that business owners struggle to develop these plans,” Carver said. “Without a transition plan in place, businesses are more likely to close altogether, which isn’t good for the business owner or the community they serve.”

The Small Business Development Center notes that it takes up to five years or more to properly prepare a business for transition from one owner to another.
According to Carver, the online courses will prepare specialists throughout the state who can help rural grocers through a transition plan.

“The course is designed for resource providers who work in rural areas, who want to help retain critical amenities in those communities but who haven’t received training on supporting rural grocery or business transition planning,” Carver said.

“Business transitions are complex and all transitions are unique. As such, completing this course demonstrates a higher level of understanding and proficiency to support rural grocers.”

Carver said those who complete the course will become rural grocery transition specialists, receive a microcredential badge through K-State’s Global Campus, and join a national network of rural grocery specialists.

More information is available at https://www.ruralgrocery.org/specialist, or by sending an email to rgi@ksu.edu.

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Rural Grocery Transition Specialist program, https://www.ruralgrocery.org/specialist

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