

GEARY COUNTY FOOD SYSTEM PLAN



ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The Geary County Food System Plan was created from the energy and passion of many members in our community. Particular thanks are extended to the Live Well Geary County (LWGC) Food Policy Council, who initiated this planning process; to the Food System Plan Steering Committee, who provided input throughout; and to Blue Cross Blue Shield of Kansas Pathways to a Healthy Kansas implementation grant, which provided funding for the effort. New Venture Advisors consultants provided structure, facilitation, and strategic direction throughout the process.

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Local food system images in this document were provided by members of the LWGC Food Policy Council.

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FOOD SYSTEM PLAN PROJECT BACKGROUND

The Live Well Geary County (LWGC) Food Policy Council was established in 2016 to identify the opportunities and benefits as well as challenges of cultivating a successful, sustainable local food system. The council was established as an advisory body after community members identified high food insecurity and food waste as key issues plaguing the community.

To support the residents of Geary County, increase access to quality food, address hunger and food insecurity, influence policy and decision making, and ensure an environmentally sustainable and socially just food system, the council:

- Fosters city-community partnerships
- Convenes and engages diverse stakeholders to identify and propose innovative solutions to improve the local food system
- Provides guidance to the city on local food issues
- Serves as a platform for collaborative, coordinated action
- Increases access to healthy, affordable, local foods

Food Policy Council members are appointed by the Junction City Commission by recommendation from Live Well Geary County.

Just as in Geary County, communities across the country are recognizing the critical role that local government plays in shaping our food systems.

While communities have a long history of planning for infrastructure, transportation, land use, and housing, food has not typically been an area that local governments plan for.

But, as the COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted for many of us, when there are disruptions in the food system, local governments are often the entities called upon to address hunger and food insecurity, alleviate supply chain disruptions, and to support small businesses in the food system.

The LWGC Food Policy Council initiated the process of creating a food system plan for the region in 2021. With funding from Blue Cross Blue Shield's *Pathways to a Healthy Kansas* grant program, the LWGC Food Policy Council was able to hire New Venture Advisors (NVA) consultants to provide guidance and strategic direction throughout the process.





What do we mean by “the local food system”?

The “food system” is the process food follows as it moves from the farm to your table. This process includes farmers, manufacturers and processors, distributors, retailers, and all residents as consumers. It also includes the inputs and outputs of each step – right down to the food waste we generate.

For the purposes of this food system plan, when we say “local” food system, we’re referring to the food system in Geary County, Kansas. Clearly, we live in a global food system. Geary County farms export significant quantities of food, and we import what we can’t grow locally. This gives our residents access to a variety of foods from around the globe.

Developing our local food system is not a choice between 100 percent locally produced food or 100 percent imported food. It will always be a balance as we strive to provide healthy food for our population.

What is a food system plan?

A food system plan is defined by the American Planning Association as “A set of interconnected, forward-thinking activities that strengthen a community and regional food system through the creation and implementation of plans and policies.”

Like many community plans, food system plans are long-range planning documents. A food system plan lays out a community’s vision for what it wants its food system to be and how it will accomplish that growth or change. Food system planning at its best is a collaborative process that engages many stakeholders – farmers, retailers, consumers – with local government to strengthen their community’s food system together.

Bringing together food system stakeholders to focus on food system change can generate many positive benefits for communities. Well-designed food system plans can help communities

- » Foster profitable agriculture and food business
- » Support entrepreneurs in agriculture and food
- » Create new jobs and opportunities
- » Increase access to healthy, nutritious foods for all
- » Support skills in gardening and food preparation
- » Protect soil, water, and air quality
- » Reduce food waste
- » Celebrate diversity of food and agriculture in the community
- » Empower all to participate in the food system



Why does Geary County need a food system plan?

Junction City and Geary County are unique among Kansas communities. While many communities of similar size across the state have struggled to maintain population growth, Junction City has grown as a vibrant city. In recent years, Geary County has experienced rapid growth due to Fort Riley, its proximity to the I-70 corridor, access to natural resources and recreation amenities, and increasing racial and ethnic diversity.¹

Geary County also boasts a rich agriculture sector, with 60 percent of the county's total acreage in farmland. The 213 farm operations in the county are primarily engaged in row crop and cattle production, and in 2017 reported \$31.8 million in farm sales.² Given Geary County's location in the Flint Hills region, the majority of land within the county is used for cattle grazing, with production occurring in the floodplains and western upland areas.

Despite these assets, national data reveal some concerning trends in the county's food system:



Food insecurity is increasing, and residents lack access to healthy food sources:

- The 2021 projected overall food insecurity rate for Geary County is 15 percent³
- The 2021 projected food insecurity rate for children is 23.2 percent, one of the highest child food insecurity rates in the state⁴
- 34.1 percent of people in Geary County have low access to a store; this is a 9.4 percent increase from 2010 to 2015. This includes
 - » 16.1 percent of children
 - » 33.1 percent of seniors
 - » 11.8 percent of low-income people
 - » 47.30 percent of Black, Indigenous, People of Color (BIPOC)⁵
- Six of the eight census tracts (31,326 residents) in Geary County qualify as both low income and low access and low access to food (formerly referred to as "food deserts")⁶

¹"Junction City and Geary County 2017 Comprehensive Plan," May 2017, <https://www.gearycounty.org/DocumentCenter/View/130/Junction-CityGeary-County-2017-Comprehensive-Plan-PDF>.

²National Agricultural Statistics Service (NASS), U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), "County Profile, Geary County, Kansas," 2017 Census of Agriculture, last modified February 13, 2019, https://www.nass.usda.gov/Publications/AgCensus/2017/Online_Resources/County_Profiles/Kansas/cp20061.pdf.

³Feeding America, "State-by-State Resource: The Impact of Coronavirus on Food Insecurity," accessed April 15, 2022, feedingamericaaction.org/resources/state-by-state-resource-the-impact-of-coronavirus-on-food-insecurity/.

⁴Ibid.

⁵Economic Research Service (ERS), U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), Food Access Research Atlas, last updated March 14, 2022, <https://www.ers.usda.gov/data-products/food-access-research-atlas/>.

⁶Ibid



The local food economy in Geary County is underdeveloped. Significant opportunity exists to grow this sector of the economy to benefit farmers, food chain workers, and food entrepreneurs:

- The current local food system in Geary County has only one farmers market, one small meat processing facility, and three value-added producers; only 3 percent of farms currently sell direct-to-consumer⁷
- The county currently has a significant unmet demand for local foods in almost all food categories: dairy, fruits and vegetables, poultry, and eggs; in fact, of the 155,153 acres in agricultural production in the county, fewer than 10 acres are utilized for fruits and vegetable⁸
- The county’s livestock producers could meet the local demand for meat if some of the supply was redirected to local markets;⁹ currently, almost all meat is sold out of the county
- There are no locally owned grocery stores in Geary County; grocery stores are all regional or national chains
- 74 producers qualify as new and beginning farmers according to the USDA definition, which represents an opportunity to grow the next generation of producers¹⁰
- In Geary County, 40 percent of consumer food dollars are spent on foods prepared away from home¹¹

⁷NASS, USDA, “County Profile, Geary County, Kansas.”

⁸Ibid

⁹This estimate comes from the NVA MarketSizer tool, which can be accessed at www.newventureadvisors.net/tools/.

¹⁰NASS, USDA, “County Profile, Geary County, Kansas.”

¹¹Economic Research Service (ERS), U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), “Food Away from Home,” last updated February 4, 2022, <https://www.ers.usda.gov/topics/food-choices-health/food-consumption-demand/food-away-from-home.aspx>.

¹²ERS, USDA, Food Access Research Atlas.

¹³Economic Research Service (ERS), U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), Food Environment Atlas, last updated December 18, 2020, <https://www.ers.usda.gov/data-products/food-environment-atlas/>.

¹⁴Kansas Health Matters, County Dashboard, Geary County, Kansas, accessed April 15, 2022, <https://www.kansashealthmatters.org/index.php?module=indicators&controller=index&action=dashboard&id=83319366815456082&card=0&localeid=970>.

¹⁵Ibid



Lack of access to healthy food and the preponderance of fast-food chains negatively impact community members’ health:

- Estimates for expenditures per capita on fast food in Geary County are \$608/year¹²
- The number of fast-food restaurants increased by 13.04 percent between 2011 and 2016 (most recent data available)¹³
- 45 percent of residents consume fruit less than 1x per day, and 31 percent of residents consume vegetables less than 1x per day¹⁴
- 33 percent of adults are overweight or obese¹⁵

In addition, the COVID-19 pandemic highlighted the challenges that arise from a fragile food system – supply chain disruptions, shortages, increasing food insecurity, and so on. The pandemic opened our eyes to the fact that our current global food system can’t always respond to rapidly changing local conditions.

To build a more resilient food system that can address these challenges will take careful planning and coordinated efforts between local government and community organizations.



FOOD SYSTEM PLANNING PROCESS

More than a year of community engagement and effort led to the creation of the Geary County Food System Plan. A seven-member steering committee was formed to guide this process and engaged representatives from the city, county, and key stakeholder groups. The steering committee met monthly with consultants from NVA to provide strategic direction on the process and outcomes. The LWGC Food Policy Council also received regular project updates and provided feedback at key decision-making points in the process.

The steering committee first engaged NVA to update the [Geary County Food System Assessment](#). The assessment provided an overview of national data in key food system sectors—food production, consumption, food sector employment, food insecurity trends, and food waste. This assessment was completed in the fall of 2021 and shared with the steering committee and LWGC Food Policy Council.

The steering committee used the assessment and peer community food plans to draft eight potential goals for the Food System Master Plan. These draft goals were then shared with the community for refinement throughout the process:

1. Farmers, food entrepreneurs, and food chain workers thrive in our local economy
2. Our land-use decisions promote a strong and viable food system while stewarding the environment
3. We build and design our communities to ensure that making the healthy choice is the easy choice
4. All residents have equal access to healthy, local food, and food insecurity is reduced
5. All residents have equal opportunities for food and agricultural education (cooking, gardening, food safety)
6. Our community reduces food waste
7. Our food system partners work together to leverage investments and efficiently deliver services
8. Our community celebrates and supports the local food culture and heritage of our region

These draft goals provided the foundation for a community engagement process throughout the summer and fall of 2021. The goals of the community engagement process were to

- **Gather feedback** from the community about their lived experiences in the food system
- **Learn about the challenges and barriers** community members experience when trying to access healthy foods
- **Connect with food system stakeholders** in a variety of sectors to discuss policy barriers and potential opportunities
- **Refine draft goals and objectives** through participant input

To achieve these goals, the steering committee and NVA consultants created a community engagement process that included the following elements:

- **A community-wide survey**, open from July to October 2021, gathered lived experience and insights from 290 respondents from Geary County. The survey was provided in both Spanish and English. Respondents were asked questions about their experiences in the food system and were asked to rank the initial eight goals drafted by the steering committee in terms of priorities for themselves and the community. Intentional effort was placed on engaging residents from often hard-to-reach communities and communities traditionally left out of government planning conversations.
- **Community meetings and events** throughout the process provided steering committee and Food Policy Council members the opportunity to engage with existing groups in the community and invite them to participate in the food system planning process. Steering committee members attended the Chamber Business Expo, the Konza Health Fair, multiple farmers market days, the food pantry, Breaking Bread, and others.
- **Food plan roundtable discussions and follow-up interviews** were conducted in a virtual format throughout November 2021. Key leaders from across the food system were invited to a discussion particular to their area of expertise and interest. Topics included local food production, the local food economy, addressing hunger and food insecurity, and natural resource stewardship. Thirty key stakeholders participated in these conversations and shared their perceptions of policy barriers and opportunities in each food system sector.
- **The plan objective prioritization** step included a survey emailed to all process participants who had engaged in the planning process. The survey shared the plan draft objectives with participants and asked them to prioritize what objectives were the most important for the community to pursue first.



Community Engagement



The steering committee and NVA team analyzed and synthesized the data from these community engagement components and used them to shape draft food plan elements. These potential goals, objectives, and action steps were then reviewed and discussed over multiple meetings with the steering committee members, and where external expertise was needed, steering committee members sought that out.

In particular, the steering committee focused on the following questions to guide their decisions about which recommendations made it in the final plan:

- **NEED:** Does this address an existing community need or barrier?
- **COMMUNITY INTEREST:** Have we heard about this topic from the community, and do we have partners to work with?
- **IMPACT:** Does best practice suggest that this will help us meet our goal?
- **FEASIBILITY:** Can we actually get this done?
- **FUNDING:** Are there resources to support this work?

The plan that follows is a reflection of the rich input we received from community members and food system stakeholders, refined over months of discussion and reflection.



HOW TO READ THIS PLAN

The sections that follow provide recommendations to guide and foster the development of the local food system in Geary County. The timeline for the plan is 10 years, recognizing that some actions may be able to be implemented immediately, while others will take additional development.

The action steps are focused on the local governments of Geary County and Junction City. The specific goals, objectives, and action steps chosen for this plan represent the areas of the food system where local government policies can have the biggest impact. However, community support and collaboration will be needed to achieve the promise of this food system plan.

The plan is organized from broad goals to specific action steps:

Goals are general statements of desired outcomes for our community. These represent a future vision for the food system in Geary County.

Objectives are more specific, measurable strategies to guide local work to reach each goal. Each goal has multiple objectives that support it. The objectives in the plan were prioritized during the community engagement process and therefore reflect the community's priorities for immediate action.

Action Steps are the specific policies, programs, and initiatives that will help Geary County meet the goals and objectives.



Geary County Food Plan Overview

GOAL 1

All residents have equal access to healthy, local food, and food insecurity is reduced (14 actions)

Reduce the cost of healthy, locally produced food

Strengthen the food assistance network in the county

Support residents' ability to grow, hunt, and fish for their own food

GOAL 2

Farmers, food entrepreneurs, and food chain workers thrive in our local economy (15 actions)

Support local food and farm businesses to increase the supply of healthy, locally produced foods

Build demand for locally produced agricultural products and facilitate markets for local producers and food businesses

Support small businesses and expand workforce development to foster food system entrepreneurship and a robust employment pipeline

GOAL 3

All residents have equal opportunities for food and agricultural education (11 actions)

Support opportunities for education about cooking and healthy eating

Support opportunities for improving access to healthy food for all

Support opportunities for food production education

Support opportunities for food waste education

GOAL 4

We build and design our communities to ensure that making the healthy choice is the easy choice (17 actions)

Invest in food system infrastructure that increases the availability of healthy, locally produced food

Reduce transportation barriers that limit access to healthy food

Increase access to healthy food retail

Support access to healthy food in public buildings and workplaces



GOAL 1: ALL RESIDENTS HAVE EQUAL ACCESS TO HEALTHY, LOCAL FOOD, AND FOOD INSECURITY IS REDUCED

This goal was the highest-ranking goal in the community food plan survey. Out of 290 survey respondents, 66 percent chose “All residents have equal access to healthy, local food, and food insecurity is reduced” as a top goal for Geary County’s food system. The need to reduce food insecurity and improve access to healthy local food was a key concern voiced throughout the community engagement process.

The community-wide food plan survey revealed evidence of food insecurity in the county:

- 37 percent of respondents reported being worried that food would run out, and 18 percent reported that food actually did run out and they did not have the money to buy more
- 59 percent of respondents who reported worrying about food running out also reported that the pandemic made it more difficult to buy food
- The top reason respondents didn’t have the food they wanted was because they didn’t have enough money for food (41%)

Participants in roundtable discussions on the topic of food access and food insecurity shared their thoughts on the challenges and opportunities that exist. The key themes that surfaced were as follows:

- Lack of access to food is both geographic and financial:
 - » Financial: The high (and ever-increasing) cost of food is a barrier to healthy eating
 - » Geographic: Low-income residents with low access to food face transportation barriers, including lack of reliable access to

transportation, the cost of transportation, and bag limits on the bus system (addressed in goal 4)

- The preponderance of fast-food outlets and stores without produce (i.e., dollar stores, convenience stores) compete with and limit access to healthy food (addressed in goal 4)
- Geary County and cities within the county can play a role in supporting the food assistance network, ensuring that community members can access the healthy food they need
- Self-provisioning (i.e., gardening, hunting, and fishing) are opportunities to increase food security in the community; Geary County and the cities within the county can support these activities as well

As the local governments of Geary County and Junction City are the audience for the action steps, the objectives and action steps listed below are focused on the areas where local government can have the most impact.



Objective 1

Reduce the cost of healthy, locally produced food

Action Steps:

1. Advocate for the elimination of the state sales tax on food (6.5% state portion), which would save a family of four an average of \$500 or more on their grocery bill every year
 2. Support access to public food assistance programs like SNAP and WIC through marketing and promotion
 3. Partner with the State of Kansas Department for Children and Families to encourage online application for public assistance programs, including SNAP and WIC
 4. Promote the use of SNAP, Senior Farmers Market Nutrition Program, and Double Up Food Bucks at area farmers markets
 5. Encourage the state to offer the WIC Farmers Market Nutrition Program coupons, which WIC participants can redeem at area farmers markets for fresh produce
- a. Provide grants to food assistance partners to purchase food directly from local suppliers—local farms, local dairies, local grocery stores, and so on
 - b. Support grant funding applications to private foundations and other funders by writing letters of support for food access partners
2. Collaborate with the Kansas Department of Agriculture’s rollout of the Local Food Purchase Cooperative Assistance Program (LFPA) to encourage Geary County growers to sell directly to the program, which then distributes locally produced foods to area pantries
 3. Work with local restaurants and caterers to encourage food recovery practices to supply safe, nourishing food to families in need



Objective 2

Strengthen the food assistance network in the county

Action Steps:

1. Provide local government funding for the community food pantry network and communal meals programs
 - a. Consider utilizing American Rescue Plan Act of 2021 (ARPA) funding to invest in infrastructure that supports food assistance programs. (i.e., funds to support pantry redesign to facilitate client choice, more efficient distribution of food, and food storage)



Objective 3

Support residents' ability to grow, hunt, and fish for their own food

Action Steps:

1. Identify publicly owned property that can be leased to residents for food production (i.e., in parks, vacant lots, etc.)
2. Support the existing 12th Street Community Garden:
 - a. Increase marketing and promotion to encourage participation
 - b. Utilize part-time Parks and Recreation staff to support garden maintenance activities
 - c. Utilize Geary County Extension staff expertise to offer gardening workshops at the community garden
3. Research the feasibility of offering an irrigation-only reduced water rate for home gardeners and urban farmers

4. Promote the Kansas Department of Wildlife and Parks (KDWP) opportunities for hunting and fishing activities in Geary County
5. Promote the KDWP partnership with Kansas Hunters Feeding the Hungry, which pay for the processing of deer donated by local hunters to be distributed at area food pantries

Food insecurity

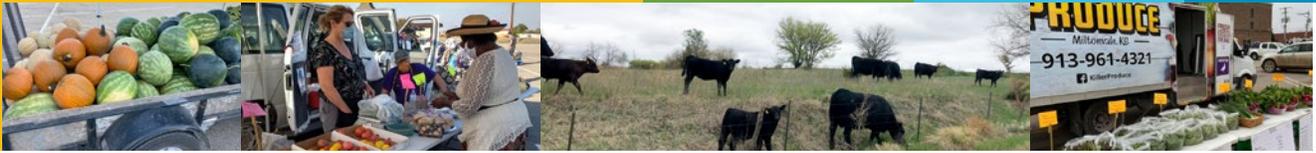
A household-level economic and social condition of limited or uncertain access to adequate food.

Hunger

An individual-level physiological condition that may result from food insecurity.

Low-income and low-access tract measured at 1 mile and 10 miles: (formerly referred to as a "food desert")

A low-income tract with at least 500 people, or 33 percent of the population, living more than 1 mile (urban areas) or more than 10 miles (rural areas) from the nearest supermarket, supercenter, or large grocery store.



GOAL 2: FARMERS, FOOD ENTREPRENEURS, AND FOOD CHAIN WORKERS THRIVE IN OUR LOCAL ECONOMY

In the community-wide food plan survey, this goal was the second most highly ranked, with 53 percent of respondents prioritizing “Farmers, food entrepreneurs, and food chain workers thrive in our local economy.” The need to grow the Geary County local food economy (and the potential benefits of doing so) were key themes we heard throughout the community engagement process.

Participants in community roundtable discussions on the topic of the local food economy shared their thoughts on the challenges and opportunities that exist. The key themes that surfaced were as follows:

- The preponderance of national retail chains in both grocery and fast food makes it difficult to influence food offerings at these outlets, as decision-making for these businesses is not local
- Labor shortages persist throughout food system businesses
- There is a need to build demand for local foods, and local governments can play a role through marketing and promotion of local food businesses and events
- Local governments can also use their purchasing power to prioritize the purchase of locally grown and manufactured foods
- Job training and entrepreneurship support is needed to support food system businesses—both through educational offerings and economic development incentives (also addressed in goal 3)
- Infrastructure is needed to support increasing the supply of local food—i.e. incubator kitchens and farmers markets (addressed in goal 4)



As the local governments of Geary County and Junction City are the audience for the action steps, the objectives and action steps listed below are focused on the areas where local government can have the most impact.

Objective 1

Support local food and farm businesses to increase the *supply* of healthy, locally produced foods

Action Steps:

1. Support recruitment of local food and farm businesses to sell at the farmers market
2. Explore current ordinances that impact food trucks to remove any potential policy barriers that inhibit the growth of this sector

Objective 2

Build *demand* for locally produced agricultural products and facilitate markets for local producers and food businesses

Action Steps:

1. Utilize tourism dollars (i.e., revenues generated from the “bed tax”) to market local food offerings and events
2. Partner with downtown Junction City efforts to facilitate outdoor dining, events, and promotions that highlight local food vendors and outlets
3. Partner with the Convention and Visitors Bureau and the Chamber of Commerce to launch a “buy local” marketing campaign that highlights the local food and farm businesses in the community; consider partnering with neighboring Riley County to highlight regional producers and vendors
4. Develop a local food purchasing policy that encourages city and county departments to purchase food directly from local food and farm businesses:
 - a. First, conduct an assessment of current food purchasing practices to identify what events and activities occur throughout the year that local governments are purchasing food for
 - b. Then, develop an achievable percentage target of food that local governments should aim to purchase locally

5. Partner with school district(s) and other institutional purchasers (i.e., Geary Community Hospital) to encourage them to adopt local food purchasing policies as well; encourage utilization of locally produced meat within these institutions

Objective 3

Support small businesses and expand workforce development to foster food system entrepreneurship and a robust employment pipeline

Action Steps:

1. Leverage small business grant and loan programs to support food system businesses
2. Explore food system labor shortages and identify recruitment opportunities for food system jobs
3. Partner with Junction City main street efforts to support small business education programs, experience-based food initiatives, and so on
4. Partner with Kansas State University (KSU) and Cloud County Community College to promote job training programs in culinary arts and hospitality management, and link graduates with Geary County businesses
5. Support home-based cottage businesses to expand and scale up; partner with Fort Riley’s military spouse groups that have food-based businesses
6. Create a retailer recruiter position at the Junction City Geary County Economic Development Commission (EDC) who can focus on food business recruitment and retention
7. Create a spot on the Live Well Geary County Food Policy Council for an economic development representative and increase small business participation in the council



GOAL 3: ALL RESIDENTS HAVE EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES FOR FOOD AND AGRICULTURAL EDUCATION

In the community-wide food plan survey, this goal was the third most highly ranked, with 37 percent of respondents prioritizing “All residents have equal opportunities for food and agricultural education.”

Results from the community food plan survey and feedback from the community roundtables signal a high interest in food system education, especially in the areas of food production, cooking/healthy eating, food access, and food waste.

- Across three different survey questions, respondents consistently said they are interested in learning how to cook, how to eat more healthy foods, and how to grow/hunt/fish for their own food:
 - » 40 percent of survey respondents were interested in learning how to cook
 - » Out of 274 respondents, 133 said they would like to learn more about how to eat healthier
 - » 39 percent of respondents would like to learn more about how to grow/hunt/fish for their own food and regulations about these activities
- Most residents do not compost at home, but 145 out of 269 reported being willing to participate in a composting program; however, most would not pay for this service and those that said they would pay were only willing to pay less than \$10 per month
- In terms of food education and news, most Geary residents report getting their information from social media (57%) and from friends and family (42%); online news and TV were the next top sources, and only 18 percent of respondents said they get their food information from their doctor. Across all food plan community roundtable discussions, community food system education was a consistently mentioned need. In particular, roundtable participants were interested in
- In terms of food education and news, most Geary residents report getting their information from social media (57%) and from friends and family (42%); online news and TV were the next top sources, and only 18 percent of respondents said they get their food information from their doctor



Across all food plan community roundtable discussions, community food system education was a consistently mentioned need. In particular, roundtable participants were interested in

- Collaborating with food producers at all scales to promote soil—and water-conserving agricultural practices
- Educating producers to reduce pesticide and herbicide usage on farms to lessen the impacts of runoff on the Milford Lake ecosystem
- Increasing opportunities for educational programs to help beginning gardeners develop skills
- Reducing the SNAP “gap” (the gap between the number of individuals eligible for food assistance programs and those that actually enroll) through expanded education and outreach efforts
- Educating food retail businesses (i.e., grocery stores and restaurants) about the opportunity to donate food that would otherwise be wasted to food pantries
- Providing community education on food waste and at-home composting
- Supporting agritourism opportunities for families in urban areas to experience agricultural production and rural landscapes

As the local governments of Geary County and Junction City are the audience for the action steps, the objectives and action steps listed below are focused on the areas where local government can have the most impact. The leadership of the local governments within Geary County can play a key role in educating their residents about food system topics and can partner with community organizations to achieve this goal.



Objective 1

Support opportunities for education about cooking and healthy eating

Action Steps:

1. Increase funding for SNAP education programs in Geary County to ensure all families receiving food assistance can access nutrition education
2. Promote and market food and nutrition programs facilitated by community organizations (i.e., Live Well Geary County, KSU Extension-Geary County, etc.)

Objective 2

Support educational opportunities for improving access to healthy food for all

Action Steps:

1. Work with pantry operators, grocery stores, and food retailers to identify opportunities to increase fresh food donations from retailers to food insecure residents
2. Partner with the Kansas Department for Children and Families to promote the availability of SNAP and WIC food assistance programs; aim to increase the percentage of eligible individuals who enroll in these programs

- Promote the Double Up Food Bucks program at the Geary Community Farmers Market—Double Up Food Bucks provides a dollar-for-dollar match on SNAP benefits spent at the market, which doubles the spending power of low-income shoppers

Objective 3

Support opportunities for food production education

Action Steps:

- Encourage school districts and early childhood education centers to launch farm-to-school programs within their lunchrooms and classrooms
- Provide a letter of support to the school district to apply for USDA Farm to School and other grant opportunities
- Promote partnerships with Junction City High School’s vocational agriculture program to promote agricultural job opportunities for youth
- Continue to support KSU Research and Extension’s food production outreach programs, including rebuilding the Master Gardener program within Geary County
- Continue to support the conservation district and encourage additional education programming for Geary County producers on soil- and water-conserving agricultural practices
- Review current county policies related to agritourism to ensure policy barriers don’t prohibit these activities and encourage agritourism activities that support local residents’ awareness of and knowledge of Kansas agriculture
- Provide education and a map of specialty crop growers in the county to avoid drift and crop damage when Geary County Public Works sells volatile chemicals to landowners for noxious weed control



Objective 4

Support opportunities for food waste education

Action Steps:

- Partner with KSU’s Pollution Prevention Institute to conduct a food waste audit of city and county food operations (a food waste audit helps an organization identify the primary components of their waste stream so they can identify how best to divert that waste from the landfill through recycling or composting activities)
- Encourage community partners to conduct food waste audits
- Encourage KSU Research and Extension to offer home-scale food waste composting classes; consider subsidizing the cost of backyard composters for class attendees
- Conduct a feasibility study to inform community leaders about the possibility of a commercial food waste program



GOAL 4: WE BUILD AND DESIGN OUR COMMUNITIES TO ENSURE THAT MAKING THE HEALTHY CHOICE IS THE EASY CHOICE

This goal was the fourth highest-ranking goal in the community food plan survey, as 34 percent of survey respondents chose “We build and design our communities to ensure that making the healthy choice is the easy choice” as a top goal for Geary County’s food system.

This goal addresses both the infrastructure that supports a strong local food system and the community design elements that make it easier to make healthy eating choices in Geary County.

The need to make it easier for residents to choose healthy local food is supported by the results of the community food plan survey and roundtable discussions.

- The community-wide food plan survey revealed that

- » 14 percent of respondents report living beyond ten miles from a grocery store, which puts them in a “low supermarket access” category according to the USDA
- » Most residents use a personal vehicle to access food but about one-third of respondents have challenges driving to the store (i.e., not having enough money to buy gas or complete needed car repairs)
- » Additionally, almost three-fourths of respondents report not being able to find healthy food options at work

- Participants in community roundtable discussions shared their thoughts on the challenges and opportunities that exist. The key themes that surfaced in those discussions were as follows:

- The preponderance of fast-food outlets and stores

without produce (i.e., dollar stores, convenience stores) compete with and limit access to healthy food

- » There is a need to attract full-service grocery stores with healthy food options to the county’s low-income, low-access census tracts
- » Residents face transportation barriers when trying to access food, including lack of reliable access to transportation, the cost of transportation, and bag limits on the bus system
- » Infrastructure is needed to support increasing the supply of local food (i.e. commercial incubator kitchens and farmers markets)
- » While residents expressed the ability to find healthy food at school, at restaurants, and in grocery stores, there is a significant lack of healthy food options in workplaces

As the local governments of Geary County and Junction City are the audience for the action steps, the objectives and action steps listed below are focused on the areas where local government can have the most impact.



Objective 1

Invest in food system infrastructure that increases the availability of healthy, locally produced food

Action Steps:

1. Support the creation of a community commercial kitchen available for rent by entrepreneurs and community organizations
 - a. Conduct a feasibility study to identify the potential for a commercial kitchen in Geary County; include the identification of publicly owned buildings that could be converted to commercial kitchen space
 - b. Consider subsidizing the cost of commercial kitchen space rentals to encourage entrepreneurs and small businesses to utilize the facility
2. Strengthen the farmers market—invest in signage, promotion and in-kind support from local government departments
3. Partner with neighboring county efforts (i.e., Riley County) to explore the potential for a “food hub” that would assist local producers with aggregation and distribution of their products

Objective 2

Reduce transportation barriers that limit access to healthy food

Action Steps:

1. Fully fund the aTa Bus system to ensure that residents can utilize public transportation to access grocery stores and food retail outlets
2. Work with aTa Bus to
 - a. Eliminate the bag limit policy on buses, which restricts residents’ ability to utilize public transportation for grocery shopping
 - b. Review bus routes and schedules to ensure that bus service is available for food-insecure residents to access pantry locations and communal meals
 - c. Offer free rides to the farmers market, and market this opportunity to residents of low-income neighborhoods lacking access to food
3. Design streets and public rights-of-way to include safe sidewalk connections between neighborhoods and food access points (pantries, farmers markets, grocery stores, etc.)
4. Collaborate with community partners and pantry operators to explore the feasibility of mobile food pantry operations



Objective 3

Increase access to healthy food retail

Action Steps:

1. Assess the policy barriers that may prevent grocery stores from locating in low-income, low-access census tracts (this could include local zoning, building regulations, parking requirements, and other development standards)
2. Consider developing economic development incentives to attract grocery stores to low-income, low-access census tracts in the county
3. Consider policies that restrict the proliferation of dollar stores and convenience stores in low-income, low-access neighborhoods
4. Consider a policy that would require any new food retail outlet wanting to locate in the county (including dollar stores and convenience stores) to stock at least 10 percent of their square footage with fresh food items—produce, dairy, and so on

Objective 4

Support access to healthy food in public buildings and workplaces

Action Steps:

1. Pass a healthy vending policy in city and county buildings to ensure that a percentage of vending options are healthy
2. Launch a CSA (Community Supported Agriculture) share program for city and county employees as part of workplace wellness initiatives (a CSA program provides a weekly share of locally grown produce from a nearby farm)
3. Partner with Work Well Kansas to encourage employers to pass internal policies that outline healthy food guidelines for meetings and events
4. Encourage school districts within the county to continue to invest in farm-to-school and school gardening initiatives and programs
5. Encourage Geary Community Hospital and the Konza Prairie Community Health Center to continue to promote healthy food options with their patients and staff



IMPLEMENTING THE GEARY COUNTY FOOD SYSTEM PLAN

The Geary County Food System Plan will serve as a guiding document for Junction City and Geary County for the next ten years (2022–32). It will help guide community policies and programs that will build a more resilient food system in the region. Although the audience for this plan is the elected officials of Junction City and Geary County, it will take a broad coalition of partners to achieve the plan's recommendations. A variety of partners will need to be involved—from nonprofit organizations, agencies, and businesses—to help see the plan to fruition.

The LWGC Food Policy Council will spearhead implementation of the Geary County Food System Plan. The Food Policy Council will

- Collaborate with elected officials to create project timelines for the plan action steps
- Identify potential funding sources to support implementation of action steps
- Invite community partners to collaborate on plan implementation
- Monitor and evaluate progress toward plan objectives over time
- Communicate with project partners and community members about progress made over time

Join us!

The LWGC Food Policy Council meetings are open to the public. Come join us at our monthly meeting and share your ideas about the Food System Plan. Also, we are always looking for new members to join the council and serve as advisors to the city and county.

Connect with us!

Website

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