2020 Johnson County Extension Annual Report
Working with stakeholders across the state, K-State Research and Extension identified five Grand Challenges facing every Kansan. The university’s research and extension services are focused on addressing these five challenges: global food systems, health, developing tomorrow’s leaders, community vitality and water.

Local Johnson County Extension faculty (called “agents”) balance these Grand Challenges with Johnson County Government’s Guiding Principles, providing educational outreach that serves the county, municipalities, businesses and citizens.

Johnson County Extension agents take complex, research-based information from universities across the country and government at all levels and localize it. Agents deliver this information without bias; their mission is to provide the most accurate, science-based research, not to sell products.

Agents help citizens understand and apply this information so that it addresses their individualized need. Once presented with the facts, it is left to the resident to ultimately determine the best solution.

Our agents work closely with faculty in Manhattan so that university researchers and specialists are aware of local issues. Agents also work closely with stakeholders in the county to make sure the university continues to develop programming that benefits the citizens of Johnson County.
2020 forced us all to have a hard stop on life as we knew it. A worldwide pandemic was something most of us in our community never thought of or lived through. The challenge became how do we maintain our educational services for Johnson County residents but safely and securely. Some called it forced innovation while others embraced a new way to engage and reach citizens through a virtual platform. As you can see from the cover our staff and volunteers stepped up to the plate once again to deliver quality programming. Our goal was to create engaging virtual programming through live events and videos. The Silver Clovers program accomplished this effort as an Extension wide program to answer this goal. Traditionally, Extension is a hands-on and face-to-face experience, however, changes were needed for these important programmatic aspects to happen in 2020! Through mitigation practices:

- Extension Master Gardener demonstration gardens were maintained, donating nearly 5,000 lbs of fresh produce and they even opened a new site in Shawnee’s West Flanders Park.
- 4-H Youth Development alternative showcase opportunities were provided allowing 4-Her’s to complete their projects safely.
- Extension Master Naturalists continued monitoring bluebird houses.
- Extension Master Food Volunteers delivered creative and engaging food demonstrations virtually.
- SHICK/Medicare educational videos and training were facilitated and over $665,000 in savings identified during open enrollment by beneficiaries.
- Volunteer Income Tax Information (VITA) volunteers provide free income tax assistance for the eleventh year in a row assisting residents filing and receiving more than $1.6 on tax refunds.

Addressing critical issues impacting our community and how we are working to address them is at the heart of the work we do and have been doing for the last 103 years. In 2020, the Johnson County Extension Education Foundation continued support through awarding over $15,000 in program grants and supporting the first virtual 4-H Project Auction. I would be remiss if I did not call out our infrastructure which makes all these efforts happen. The Johnson County K-State Research and Extension staff are the cream of the crop! Yes, the agriculture pun was intended to highlight how all our efforts continue to support Johnson County residents to address the five Grand Challenges with the unique capabilities provided by Kansas State University, the first Land Grant University. I am extremely thankful to work with an amazing and talented group of individuals who make up our small but mighty office which produces high-quality community educational opportunities daily. Please enjoy reading about our efforts and results in helping to maintain and support a strong and vibrant Johnson County.

Tara Markley
Director
Extension Master Gardener's Contribution to Food Insecurity

Extension Master Gardeners (EMG) donated 4,812 pounds of fresh produce, or 14,436 servings of fresh fruits and vegetables, from demonstration gardens to those in need (1 pound = 3 servings). Deanna Rose: 880 lbs, Shawnee Indian Mission: 850 lbs and Backyard Garden: 3082 lbs.

“Most of these folks can’t get to food pantries where there is produce either because they are working poor and the pantries are during the work week, or they are homeless and have no transportation. So this was a real treat for them when the EMGs dropped off fresh produce.”

- A Gathering of Friends Leadership

Extension Tackles Food Insecurity

There are many projects and community programs we offer at Johnson County Extension. In a time when the world feels so insecure, Johnson County wanted to contribute to those who needed it most.

Extension partnered with the Johnson County Food Policy Council to help coordinate the 2020 curbside food drive.

Volunteers deliver produce at A Gathering of Friends.
In 2019, our Extension Office received a grant to create a Culture of Health in Johnson County. After much research and conversation with community members, Jo Co E.A.T.S. (Easy. Affordable. Tasty. Solutions.) was born. The mission behind this program is to make healthy eating delicious and accessible. Jo Co E.A.T.S. employs the time and talents of staff and volunteers to find, test and tweak recipes that utilize familiar and budget-savvy ingredients. These recipes and meal plans are featured on www.jocoeats.com and demonstrated at local food pantries. In 2020, several cooking videos were made demonstrating these recipes on Johnson County Extension’s YouTube channel.

4-H Science Matters Team, #WatchYourWaste, delivered a food waste awareness and education campaign to tackle food insecurity, reaching over 1,100 people in Johnson County. Supported by grants from National 4-H/Nutrien and Johnson County Extension Education Foundation, the team of four 4-H members were in the community, bringing hands-on learning to school-aged youth and organizing composting education workshops. Nancy Bergdall, the team advisor, helped empower the 4-H’ers to make a difference through working with numerous mentors. The group shared their journey at Kansas State University’s Science of Ag Challenge and returned home with first place recognitions.
The Extension Master Naturalist (EMN) Program typically has a very hands-on and outdoor focused training. However, new class training in 2020 was abruptly interrupted by COVID-19. Trainees responded with grace and flexibility by transitioning to an entirely online offering with very low attrition rates. Training was pushed back in March when the pandemic started, but thanks to Zoom, they were able to start training in June.

Current members also rose to the challenge by serving their communities safely and through virtual means even with a paused requirement for volunteer hours.

Every September, EMNs host a wonderful program called Hasta Luego Monarchs, as the Monarch butterflies migrate south for the winter, usually hosted at the Pollinator Prairie Garden in Olathe. This year they hosted the event all online! Our volunteers created videos showcasing the garden and all of the native plants. They also posted on Facebook everyday, highlighting some of the EMNs who are instrumental in the upkeep of the Pollinator Prairie.

Another main project the EMNs maintain is the Bluebird Stewardship project which monitors bluebird houses throughout Johnson County. They monitor the boxes for predators and success rates. There are currently 400 nest boxes being monitored throughout the county. This was an easy project for the volunteers to continue since it was outside so social distancing was not an issue.

These volunteers have worked hard to help their community and also maintain safety guidelines. Thank you, volunteers!
In January, Johnson County was one of 32 host site locations across the state to address financial risk among a struggling farm economy. Farm Financial Skills was open to everyone to get hands-on experience with agriculture financial matters as well as listen to guest speakers and hear about available resources.

The classes covered topics on financial management from how to create balance sheets to income statements and cash flow for agricultural operations. Supplemental topics included “this is different stress” and “managing family living expenses” which addressed mental health and the struggles of running an agricultural business. Johnson County Mental Health presented on local resources for participants to utilize.

Our participants learned how to perform analysis of their business and to understand what all goes into financial matters. The goal for those enrolled was to acquire the knowledge they needed to make successful financial decisions.

The program was supported by the USDA’s National Institute of Food and Agriculture through North-Central Extension Risk Management Education. This program is just one example of K-State Research and Extension’s commitment to diversity and inclusion. While the program was designed to highlight women’s issues in agriculture, it was open to any participant without regard to gender. Over 670 participants statewide came together to learn and form a virtual community over a four-week period. This class series was so successful it is being implemented as a self-paced online non-credit course through K-State Global Campus in 2021.
Volunteer Income Tax Assistance (VITA)

By Denise Dias

For 11 years Volunteer Income Tax Assistance (VITA) Program has been helping Johnson County limited resource families get their taxes prepared for free. Volunteers receive training directly from the IRS. The IRS fully vets these individuals to be sure they meet their standards for becoming a tax volunteer. Many of our volunteers come back year after year because they like helping others with a complex issue the average person does not feel comfortable handling themselves.

In the spring of 2020, our VITA site opened as usual to help individuals who make less than $66,000 annually with their taxes. Our site was set up to serve anyone as they walk in on a first come, first served basis. For the first four weeks of our tax season, things were running smoothly. Once COVID-19 struck, our volunteers' safety became the priority and our VITA site was suspended.

The VITA volunteers were committed to finding a way to help residents with their taxes even through the pandemic. They figured out that if clients could access the necessary IRS forms either through our website, mail or email, then they could send or drop off their tax documents to get their taxes prepared. Many residents were desperate for help with their taxes because the government was starting to send out Stimulus checks. Our service helped many families receive their Stimulus check to cover their day-to-day living expenses.

When the Federal government extended the tax deadline to July 15th, our dedicated volunteers continued to offer tax preparation services until the end. VITA volunteers offer help to residents who need to complete up to five previous years of income taxes. This helps residents receive refunds from prior years to use in catching up on bills and other family expenses.

Socially Distanced VITA volunteers prepare taxes at the Johnson County Extension Office.

$1,633,547
FEDERAL TAX REFUNDS
Medicare Basics classes were taught in a new format over Zoom. Attendance was higher due to the ability for people to connect from home. The other innovation with this program was a new webpage on the Johnson County Extension website to provide on-demand education and information. It features a full-length Medicare Basics class designed to educate older adults on the four parts of Medicare. Three short videos help participants gain an understanding of what steps are needed to take and how to sign up for Medicare. Publications are also available for download to help understand and compare their options for healthcare coverage.

During the pandemic, residents received Medicare counseling sessions through Zoom, phone or email. There were seven Medicare classes taught virtually. These classes helped reach 353 older adults. There were 83 people personally helped one-on-one during Open Enrollment. With the help of our three SHICK volunteers, Johnson County Extension was able to help 33 Medicare beneficiaries save $9,389 on prescription drug costs.

$665,896
MONEY SAVED BY
BENEFICIARIES
DURING OPEN ENROLLMENT
The pandemic of 2020 brought many challenges to our Health and Food Safety classes, but one program, which at its foundation is a team-based activity, was surprisingly successful.

It’s no secret that many dealt with pandemic fatigue in not so healthy ways. According to news reports and social media confessions, our country turned to bingeing on TV shows and snack foods, rather than creating healthy habits for our stay-at-home survival strategies. And, it’s no secret that prolonged sitting is terrible for our health. Studies even report that sitting is just as bad for one’s health as smoking. The same studies show it doesn’t matter how active you are, if you sit for more than an hour at a time, you are jeopardizing your health and affecting your longevity.

But those who participated in Johnson County Extension’s Walk Kansas program last year found an alternative means for coping with the COVID crisis. Walk Kansas is an award-winning statewide Extension program. It encourages participants to form teams that will, for eight weeks, encourage each other to exercise and make healthy lifestyle choices.
The program includes weekly newsletters with physical activity suggestions, nutrition tips, and easy healthy recipes. But the primary focus of the program is to have your team digitally walk across Kansas on a pre-selected route. The program works like this: six people form a team, choose a team name (some past favorites include “Holy Walkamolies” and “Red Hot Chili Steppers”), and select one of three challenges with varying weekly physical activity goals. Each challenge is a different route across Kansas.

How do teams digitally walk these miles? Walk Kansas participants who pay the $10 enrollment fee have access to a website where they log their physical activity minutes into their team’s database. The website converts these minutes into digital miles. Every 15 minutes of exercise equals one Walk Kansas mile. The system then plots these miles across the state according to the challenge route the team selected. As the teams progress, the online Walk Kansas map reveals information about points of interest as they move through their selected trails.

Walking isn’t the only activity that counts. Any activity done for 15 consecutive minutes or more, at a moderate or vigorous intensity, can count including strengthening exercises, gardening and even cleaning.

The program usually runs from March to May, which meant our 2020 program was starting just as the pandemic was beginning. But, this seemed to encourage participation rather than deter it because in 2020, we had over 1,000 participants and almost 200 teams. This is a 100% increase from 2019’s numbers. It seems participants were looking for something to motivate healthy behaviors, and according to our survey results, looks like it worked.

“Thank you for this program. It has helped me to get up and get moving even if I am staying home so I appreciate this and it helps me to still feel a little connected.”

- 2020 Walk Kansas Participant
4-H Youth Development

The 4-H Mission Remains Through the Pandemic

By Ami Lin

How do we achieve the 4-H mission of “engaging youth to reach their fullest potential,” when a pandemic limits our face-to-face engagement? How do we stay strong to the “do, reflect, and apply,” learning model? We had to be creative. Club meetings moved to a virtual platform, but it continued to be youth-led and they learned quite a bit from the experience. The 4-H members practiced perseverance through the frustration of trying to recite the pledge in sync. They spent time to research fun, virtual recreation. Clubs found creative ways to conduct community service in family units rather than large groups. Above all, the pandemic challenged the 4-H’ers to remain positive, be flexible and empathize. It might not have been the learning experience the 4-H families signed up for but the learning continued through the pandemic.

4-H project learning continued using kits delivered directly to individual’s homes and families connected online. Stanley Buccaneers 4-H Club was one of the first in our county to coordinate a virtual plant science project meeting. The participants received the materials delivered to their home and the project leader virtually provided guidance.

The Johnson County Fair is often a highlight of summer, so the Extension staff, volunteers, and partners worked together to make sure 4-H’ers had a showcase event. 4-H’ers recorded their presentations for the judges to provide feedback. Families arrived at the Fairgrounds in shifts to drop off exhibits and receive encouragement and critique from the volunteer judges. Families were provided options to participate in ways they felt the most comfortable, but they did miss having the opportunity to socialize with their peers and share their publicly displayed projects with their friends and families.

Regardless of our delivery mode, the 4-H mission did not change. We did not let the pandemic stop us from bringing the community together to offer opportunities and experiences for youth to develop the knowledge, skills and attitudes needed to become productive and contributing members of society.
4-H connects with the community to help youth find their “spark” and helping them thrive by connecting those youth with caring adults and peers. 4-H groups were active during the spring months hosting a booth at outdoor festivals and school events to encourage young people to explore projects and activities they might otherwise not consider. The 4-H Ambassadors shared their entomology box and wood working project at the Shawnee Mission Indian Fall Festival; Prairie Moon 4-H Club members shared their work in photography, fiber arts, and livestock projects; the Computer Science youth leaders shared their creative projects made using microcomputers; the Science Matters team encouraged families to reduce food waste by helping families start composting. Young people with an identified spark engage in fewer risk-taking behaviors, are less depressed and lead to more developmental assets in their lives (Search Institute, 2010).

During the 2019-20 year, 525 youth were active throughout the year as enrolled 4-H members and 4-H volunteers provided over 4,500 hours of service. Community 4-H Clubs offer youth an opportunity to practice essential life skills and character building, including leadership, communication and teamwork. These 4-H families work together as a group to share expertise and provide opportunities for the 4-H’ers to connect with a caring adult in the community that will help them grow and thrive. 4-H families see that we all play a role in making the community a great place to live and grow up.

Research: https://www.search-institute.org/our-research/youth-development-research/sparks-and-thriving/
Extension expanded its network of demonstration gardens by partnering with the City of Shawnee in 2020. West Flanders Park, located at 55th and Neiman, welcomed the assistance of the EMGs to turn a neglected area of the park into a beautiful garden. The first phase of the garden features natives, herbs, pollinators, vegetables and a children’s area. Two additional phases are planned in the coming years to expand on these efforts.

Demonstration gardens are a key method of outreach in the community. What better way to learn than to see first-hand? Demonstration gardens educate by showcasing recommended plant selections, best management practices, design ideas, environmentally-friendly pest management methods and community beautification.

West Flanders joins the 8 additional Extension Master Gardener Demonstration gardens located throughout the county.
Extension soil testing services are vital in determining baseline nutrients. These results, as well as any recommendations, help clients decide the rates and timing of fertilizer to use for success in the lawn and garden. On average, around 700 to 1,000 residents utilize this service yearly.

A user survey conducted in 2020 helped Extension gauge the success of the program and how the results are used to maintain lawns, vegetable gardens and landscape beds. The user survey showed how necessary soil testing is to residents wanting to learn and improve their management for a healthy environment and community.

95% of users indicated soil testing was helpful to them in maintaining their properties. Just as important, 70% reported they saw improved plant growth after following Extension recommendations.

A soil test not only provides fertilizer recommendations. It is also an opportunity to share cultural practices, answer pest problems and educate residents on best management practices for the lawn and garden. This additional information helps keep fertilizers, pesticides, and organic debris out of local water sources, resulting in a healthy environment. Information is also provided on organic waste management, such as composting and organic recycling, to reduce the removal of waste and the cost associated with pickup.

Soil testing is one of the easiest practices to ensure a healthy community. It only takes 2 cups of soil to receive all this information, helping to preserve the beauty and nature of our Johnson County community.
The WIC Garden Helping Families in Need

As a Horticulture Extension Agent with Kansas State University, technical assistance and training to fruit and vegetable growers in Johnson County is provided. So not only is working in the orchard part of the job, the job often requires traveling to local farms, vineyards and community gardens to diagnose plants, identify insects and collect soil samples.

The orchard and connected 1/4 acre garden, conveniently located between the Extension Office and the Department of Health and Environment, was developed to educate, empower and feed the families in the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants and Children (WIC). The Johnson County WIC program provides nutrition and health education, healthy food and other services to more than 4,000 area families who qualify.

WIC clients who volunteer in the community garden are given first pick of the fresh fruits and vegetables harvested. The remaining produce is distributed to clients at the Health Department and neighboring food pantries. To date, the garden has produced over 20,000 pounds of fruits and vegetables for donation.

EMG Coordinator, Karen Bailey, helps prune apple trees in the WIC Garden.
Apart from the sheer production of fresh fruit for our clients, the orchard is an educational space where community members build new skills and awareness around agriculture and natural sciences. Regular volunteers grow in their confidence level with orchard tasks like tree planting, pest scouting, blossom thinning, etc. Nothing is better than watching one of our volunteers pick an apple for the first time, but I’m also partial to seeing a new gardener expertly wield their loppers to make that perfect pruning cut right off the branch collar.

Socioeconomic, cultural and environmental factors contribute to poor nutrition habits. The WIC Community Garden and Orchard aims to overcome these barriers by meeting volunteers where they are, empowering them with foundational knowledge and providing direct access to nutritious food.

Many of our regular community volunteers have been with the orchard for many years including our loyal Garden Manager, Louis Seibel. They work one-on-one with WIC clients, youth groups, and drop-ins to ensure the space is maintained and productive.

This year, just days before the WIC Garden’s 2020 season opening, COVID-19 stay-at-home orders went into effect. Extension staff worked to maintain the garden and plant a few items—hoping that the pandemic would blow over in short time. But with passing months, it became clear that the health crisis would endure and the need for fresh food in the community was at an all-time high. Some regular and new WIC volunteers stepped in to meet the need despite the overarching challenges and risks.

Thanks to our community volunteers, the garden thrived, producing crops of potatoes, tomatoes, peppers, sweetcorn, leeks, garlic, cantaloupe and apples. Alongside the Giving Grove’s expert team, they planted new strawberries, peaches and pears for future harvests. Overall, the volunteers helped grow, package and deliver over 3,000 pounds of produce for donation. And moreover, the lush garden plot provided a therapeutic space and scenery for neighboring residents at the local assisted living facility and the on-site essential workers who provided service to the county throughout this pandemic.

Big thanks to the many individuals and organizations that have supported our orchard and garden for all these years, including partners at Johnson County Department of Health and Environment, Johnson County WIC Program and Giving Grove!
Community Development

Silver Clovers

By Tara Markley

Silver Clovers was a new initiative our Extension Office created in response to the immediate needs of ages 50 and older population during the COVID-19 pandemic. The challenge posed to Johnson County Extension was how do we help fight the battle against social isolation of older adults during the pandemic?

Extension’s answer was to create a free and engaging program virtually for our county residents. We did not want to only provide a virtual experience but allow for hands-on activities to accompany the educational sessions. By creating this combination of virtual and live activities, residents remain safe, but still connect to classmates and instructors to maximize learning.

We had three months to create and implement this program from the ground up and in the end, it was quite successful. Over 500 residents participated in the 16 classes offered through Silver Clovers. Classes ranged from Zoom cooking classes, to Facebook Live plant education and crafts, to tours of local museums.

Most courses provided a free kit or book to follow along with or after the class was held. With the help of our volunteers, we were able to make food kits, drop off or build birdhouses and deliver kits to people who couldn’t leave their homes. We also offered curbside pick up for those who felt safe doing so, all with COVID-19 safety guidelines in place. The funding for Silver Clovers was provided by the Johnson County Coronavirus Relief Fund.

Silver Clovers was created out of an immediate need for the community. However, the success has highlighted the need for this type of program to continue providing accessible learning and engaging programs for our 50+ residents. We are currently exploring external funding options to support this free service.
Funding

Educational Outreach

Our federal appropriation makes up 5.2 million dollars (9%) of the 61 million dollar K-State Research and Extension Cooperative Extension system budget. The vast majority of this federal appropriation for Cooperative Extension is from the Smith-Lever Act funding and its related offshoots.

Johnson County Extension augments its core funding from county, state and federal governments through grants, participation fees, product sales and private contributions.

 Volunteers

We could not provide our high level of service without the dedication from our volunteers. They are passionate and hardworking for their community. Johnson County volunteers give back by facilitating research-based, accurate, unbiased Extension educational programming.

Volunteers in our three Master programs are interested in health and nutrition, horticulture, and/or natural resources and the environment. Training from university and industry experts increases their knowledge and skill.

K-State Master programs:

- **Extension Master Food Volunteers**
  - Volunteers: 77
  - Hours: 3,765

- **Extension Master Gardeners**
  - Volunteers: 450
  - Hours: 29,285

- **Extension Master Naturalists**
  - Volunteers: 110
  - Hours: 6,874

Additional programs:

- **4-H Youth Development** (adult & youth)
  - Volunteers: 214
  - Hours: 4,665

- **Family and Community Education**
  - Volunteers: 19
  - Hours: 146

- **Home and Family Volunteers**
  - (VITA, SCHICK & others)
  - Volunteers: 53
  - Hours: 5,310

TOTAL VOLUNTEERS: 923

TOTAL VOLUNTEE HOURS: 50,045

Dollar Value of Extension Volunteer Service to Johnson County

\[
\text{50,045 hours} \times \$24.70 \text{ per hour} = \$1,236,111.50
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*Source: Independent Sector 2019 for Kansas wages*
Key Stakeholders

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