

Supporting a sustainable food system in Johnson County

Johnson County's Extension office opened in 1917 to bring land grant university resources and knowledge to local citizens. This connection, or cooperation, between the academic side and local government and its residents allowed for working together to solve local problems.

Addressing critical food issues is a huge challenge for Johnson County today. A century ago, Extension helped residents grow, produce, and safely serve food to nourish a growing population. Today, we provide programs and education to meet the modern challenge of providing nutritious, fresh, local foods to our community and working to minimize "food islands" within urban environments, while supporting small farms, specialty crop producers, community gardens, and even home gardens.

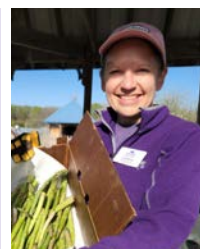
As shared global challenges become more complex, Extension agents and volunteers will continue this work to support a thriving, equitable food system here in Johnson County.

GROWING FOOD

Extension Master Gardeners maintain nine community demonstration gardens throughout Johnson County. Four of those gardens grow vegetables and fruits which are donated to community food pantries: Backyard Garden, Deanna Rose Children's Farmstead, Shawnee Indian Mission, and West Flanders. In 2023, these four gardens produced a combined total of 10,000 pounds of fruits and veggies — the equivalent of 30,000 servings of fresh produce, which went to Village Church Food Pantry, Overland Park Christian Church Food Pantry, New Hope Food Pantry, Catholic Charities of Northeast Kansas, Second Baptist Church, and Free Hot Soup.



30,000 total servings of fruits and vegetables donated to Johnson County food pantries.



Growing around (and for) Johnson County

Food-producing gardens maintained by Johnson County Extension volunteers



A TEACHING GARDEN

Nestled on a quarter acre between the Extension office and the Johnson County Department of Health and Environment, the Sunset Community Garden is a teaching garden powered by community volunteers, led by Horticulture Small Farms Extension agent Anthony Reardon. On Tuesday mornings, volunteers weed, plant, water, and harvest, using sustainable best practices and the latest research from Kansas State University. The goal is to provide a welcoming environment where people can learn to garden together, while addressing food insecurity.

During harvest season, volunteers take produce to the “nutrition nook,” located next door in the Public Health Office, complete with refrigerator and shelf to display seasonal veggies and fruit to the public. In 2023, the Sunset Community Garden grew 4,020 pounds of produce, equating to 12,000 servings. When the nutrition nook overflowed during the peak of the growing season, extra produce such as onions and potatoes were shared with other food pantries.



12,000
servings of fruits
and vegetables



GROWING FOR SPECIAL POPULATIONS

Extension Master Gardeners partner with Johnson County Developmental Supports and the Evergreen Community to grow food for participants and residents through horticulture therapy programs on site.

VIRTUAL GARDENING EDUCATION

The Dig Your Dinner webinar series features both Anthony and Chelsea Reinberg, Nutrition, Food Safety and Health Extension Agent. The pair focus on growing and eating your own food, with monthly episodes highlighting seasonal produce. Anthony covers all things growing—when to plant, how to care for your garden, common challenges, and when to harvest—while Chelsea focuses on nutrition, food storage, food safety, and, of course, recipes. To date, there are eight video programs available: fall harvest, apples and cucumbers, pumpkins and garlic, indoor herbs, cabbage and kale, beans, potatoes, and onions.



LOOKING AHEAD

As we enjoy sustained growth here in Johnson County, we will face more challenges to bring nutrition and fresh food to those who need it most. Extension plays a vital role by producing thousands of pounds of fresh, local food; connecting people to resources like farmers markets, community gardens, and food pantries; and by educating those who want to grow and eat locally sourced food, no matter the scale.

Learn more!



SCAN ME



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