A Regional Imperative: The case for regional food systems

By Kathryn Ruhf and Kate Clancy

- Final Report
- Executive Summary
- What We Learned

A Regional Imperative — Thomas A. Lyson Center for Civic Agriculture & Food Systems

Regionalism and “Thinking Regionally”

**What is regionalism?**

- Responds to regional differences & needs.
- Encourages regional approaches & solutions.
- Compels consideration of scale.
- Regions can be located & described; they are special references.
- ‘Thinking regionally’ is an approach to food systems change.
- Both place & approach are essential.

Regionalism can—and should—be applied to a range of public & private sector food system challenges.
Ideal Regional Food System

An ideal regional food system is one in which as much food as possible to meet the population’s food needs is produced, processed, distributed, and purchased at multiple levels and scales within the region, resulting in maximum resilience, minimum importation, significant economic return, and social justice for everyone in the region.

Report Contents

Executive Summary
I. Introduction
II. Language & concept conundrums
III. Regionalism & regional thinking
IV. The Northeast region
V. RFS attributes
VI. RFS dimensions
VII. Constraints & challenges
VIII. Conclusion: core concepts & what is needed

Dimensions
1. Food needs & supply
2. Natural resources
3. Economic development
4. Infrastructure
5. Social justice
6. Human & political capacity

What you can do

Everyone has a role to play in advancing regional food systems.

• Understand & advocate for ‘regional.’ Train & educate on RFS.
• Distinguish regional from local and promote both.
• Build region-scale projects & collaborations.
• Collaborate across regions.
• Employ a systems perspective: horizontal & vertical relationships.
• Support collaborations, structures, activities & mechanisms that enhance regional functioning & governance.
• Read & share the report! (Google Lyson Center)

Southwest Kansas Food System Assessment

→ Led by the Kansas Food Action Network, in partnership with Genesis Family Health.
→ Steering committee members include Network Kansas, K-State Research and Extension, and the Western Kansas Community Foundation.
→ Funded by a State Partnerships Improving Nutrition and Equity (SPINE) grant through the National Association of Chronic Disease Directors.

The purpose of the SPINE Program is to address food and nutrition security through sustainable and equitable actions that tackle economic and social conditions limiting food and nutrition security across the lifespan.

Project Overview

Purpose
- Conduct a food assessment of a 14-county region in Southwest Kansas.
  - Understand the barriers to, challenges to, and opportunities for equitable healthy food access across the lifespan in Southwest Kansas.
  - Lay the foundation for food systems policy work in this region.

Priorities
- The focus of the project is to address food and nutrition security in the counties of Hamilton, Kearny, Morton, Grant, Haskell, Ford, Gray, Seward, Meade, Clark, and Hodgeman.
- As the target region is one of the most socially/economically diverse in the state, the assessment of the following priorities will be conducted from a racial equity perspective.
  - Agricultural Landscape and Food Production
  - Food System Infrastructure
  - Food Retail Environment
  - Access to Food
  - Food Consumption & Health
  - Food Waste and Recovery
Project Timeline

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Secondary Data Collection (NVA leads)

Primary Research Design (led by KFAN)

1. **16 Lived Experience Interviews:**
   - To be conducted by CFANs at Genesis Family Health
   - Participants have experienced food insecurity within the past 6 months
   - Will be asked to share their experience with food insecurity in SW KS
   - Will be compensated $100
   - Interviews will be recorded and transcribed (and translated if necessary)

2. **Stakeholder Roundtable Discussions:**
   - To be conducted by KFAN team
   - Virtual conversations centered around the FSA categories.
   - Participants will be leaders/stakeholders in the SW KS region and recruited, in part, by steering committee members.
   - Participants will be asked to share the challenges, barriers, and opportunities for a strong SW KS food system.

Join us!

Southwest Kansas Food System Virtual Roundtable Discussions: Nov 7-10

- Topics:
  - Local food production
  - Food system infrastructure
  - Food retail environment
  - Institutional food
  - Access to healthy food/food insecurity

https://www.signupgenius.com/go/20c0c45afac2ea3f4c52-southwest

Kansas Food Action Network Annual Convening

Wed Nov 2 from 1:00 - 4:30 pm
Thu Nov 3 from 9:00 - 1:30 pm

Registration Link:
https://www.flipcause.com/secure/cause_pdetails/MTU3OTQ1

Open to all council leaders, members, partners & stakeholders.
Candace Rashada Mujahid

Pandora Thomas

Anu Rangarajan

Samina Raja

Keynote and Invited Speakers

Symposium Audience

Mixture of academic and NGO audience
- Registrants: 215
- Students: 28
- States: more than 35
- Academic institutions: more than 40

Social Activities

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Agenda for today

2) Open discussion about upcoming/ongoing local food systems-related grants in KS:
   a. KSRE application for a USDA Regional Food Systems Program grant
   b. Kansas Rural Center USDA grant application
   c. KDA-Local Food Purchase Assistance grant update, organic cost share program
   d. Regional Food Business Center opportunity

3) Brief announcements of upcoming local food systems events/initiatives in Kansas

4) Evaluation
   - NOTE: Recordings and slides posted at: www.rrc.k-state.edu/localfoods/index.html

Chris Roper
Flower Hill Institute
Local Food Systems Support

“Flower Hill is a native-owned, community-directed nonprofit. Our objectives include preserving and enhancing cultural resources, preparing youth to inherit leadership, improving economic self-sufficiency, agriculture, food sovereignty and security, and improving outcomes to climate change.”
https://flowerhill.institute
USDA Regional Food Systems Program grant

- Grant awarded Oct 19, 2022!

- **Goal:** strengthen and grow the capacity of Kansas’ local and regional foods systems by:
  1. Increase local food system education and coordination capacity across the state
     - Create a Center for Local Food Systems, hire full-time Local Food System Coordinator for the state.
  2. Facilitate partnerships, coordination, and access to resources across the state.
     - Fund intern positions at non-profits, farmers markets, and KSRE offices to work on local foods issues
  3. Develop marketing and promotion strategies
     - Develop a consumer educational campaign on reasons to buy local
     - Will hire full-time Program Director and Program Coordinator

- More information and other funded projects list available:

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Londa Nwadike, Bi-State Extension Food Safety Specialist
Kansas State University/ University of Missouri
lnwadike@ksu.edu
913 307 7391

Contact Details