

For Immediate Release

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Report Identifies Challenges, Opportunities for Local Food System

The Douglas County Food Policy Council, in collaboration with researchers at Kansas State University, have released an analysis of the food systems of Douglas, Jefferson, and Leavenworth counties in Kansas. This report, *Building a Deep-Rooted Local Food System*, identifies the benefits, challenges, and opportunities for creating a sustainable local food system in our region.

“How food gets from the farm to our plates is a mystery to most of us. This report is the first step in understanding our current food system, and the opportunities we have for building a robust local food economy,” said Daniel Poull, Chair of the Douglas County Food Policy Council.

The report was commissioned by the Douglas County Food Policy Council, a stakeholder council convened by Douglas County Commissioners in 2009. Dr. Rhonda Janke and her team at Kansas State University researched current agricultural production, spending habits of regional consumers, key health indicators, food access issues for low-income community members, and the economic impact of agriculture in the region.

“The most striking findings for us were the significant gaps that exist between what we currently produce in this region today (primarily beef, corn, soybeans) and the other staple food groups our community members eat (eggs, fruits, vegetables, other proteins). In fact, the acres in fruit and vegetables in this region account for only 0.1% of total agricultural production,” said Dr. Janke. The study also points out the significant gaps between what we are eating today (too many fats, sweets) and what the USDA recommends (more fruits, vegetables, dairy).

Among the study’s other key findings were that processing infrastructure is a key missing ingredient in our region’s local food economy. The lack of food infrastructure enterprises: cold storage, light processing, packaging and small meat processing plants make it difficult for schools and restaurants to participate in the local food economy. The study also highlights the issue of food access for our low-income community members. Over 10,000 residents in the tricounty area live in neighborhoods defined by the USDA as “food deserts” where they lack access to healthy food options.

In addition to the challenges identified by the report, the research also revealed many of the agricultural assets our region currently has –our rich agricultural heritage, high quality soils, farming know-how, and a community that is becoming increasingly interested and engaged in food issues.

“I’m thrilled that we now have a comprehensive resource for understanding our local food system, and a ‘roadmap’ for improvements. Anyone in our community interested in the links between agriculture and economic development, environmental protection, food security, and improved health will benefit from the findings in this report,” said Nancy Thellman, Douglas County Commissioner.