

2020 Activities: Report to the Legislature

The Situation

Although activities were somewhat curtailed by the pandemic, the program remained active throughout the year of 2020. The Kansas Center for Sustainable Agriculture and Alternative Crops (KCSAAC) continued to be a resource for producers and professionals providing information about diversified, sustainable agriculture. As part of K-State Research and Extension, KCSAAC facilitates research, education and outreach activities about sustainable agriculture practices and alternative food, fiber, and medicinal crops in Kansas. The Center is also home to the Kansas Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education (KS SARE) Professional Development Program. Advised by a committee of producers, extension agents, extension specialists, non-governmental organization representatives, and governmental agency personnel, the Center's goal is to provide educational training and professional development activities to producers and agriculture professionals. Program focus areas for 2020 were: Local Foods, Beginning Farmers and Ranchers, and Diversified Farming Systems. Resources and activities are updated regularly on the KCSAAC web site.

KCSAAC 2020 Initiatives

Local Food

The importance of locally grown food moved to the forefront during 2020 as COVID-19 changed the food access landscape. KCSAAC involvement included coordinating acquisition of external grant funding for the Kansas Rural Center, Kansas Specialty Crop Growers Association, and Kansas Farmers Union for education programs about online sales; supporting Kansas Farmers Market Workshops through the Kansas Department of Agriculture and the international Urban Food Systems Virtual Symposium hosted by K-State Olathe and K-State Extension; and helping the City of Lawrence establish a Community Garden model that can be replicated by other municipalities in Kansas.

Beginning Farmers & Ranchers

KCSAAC continued to support the Fort Riley Warrior Transition Battalion with an on-base vegetable garden, Farmer Veteran Coalition of Kansas, and with Servicemember Agricultural Vocation Education (S.A.V.E.) Farm, helping veterans and servicemembers transition into farming.

Diversified Farming Systems

KCSAAC supported work at the Kansas State University Willow Lake Student Farm to establish hügelkultur (a type of permanent agriculture) beds and provide experiential learning opportunities; Women in Agriculture and Women Managing the Farm conferences; a project exploring soil health impacts from adding biological nutrients to cash crops; and collaborated on a [Western Economics Forum report](#) of the first year of hemp production in Kansas.

NCR-SARE Grants

Since 1988, North Central Region Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education (NCR-SARE) has awarded \$4.3 million in total funding to Kansans for 166 grant projects. In 2020, Kansans received \$252,786 in awards from NCR-SARE for the following projects:

- **\$39,583 - Partnering in plant health: Improving our understanding of fruit tree diseases in Kansas.** This project will enhance knowledge of fruit production constraints and fruit pest/disease issues in Kansas and build collaborative relationships.
- **\$1,400 - Red Kidney Bean production in Kansas.** Expanding research on an organic system for growing red kidney beans that increases yield, minimizes tillage and labor, conserves water, and discourages weeds.
- **\$3,370 - Medicinal Root Production for Small Scale Agriculture.** An investigation of how the mechanization of organic medicinal root production can help diversify crops and profit in Midwestern small scale agriculture.
- **\$27,000 - Market Allergy-Friendly Food Using Local Vegetables, Fruit, Proteins, and Value-added Products to Increase Small Farm Sales.** Parents and institutions are struggling to meet the dietary needs of their children and clients with food allergies. Small farms can help solve this problem.
- **\$4,000 - Going Hog Wild: A sustainable agriculture project raising pastured pigs.** Students manage all aspects of pork production, breeding-to-market. Using sustainable practices, students make management decisions (nutrition, breeding, farrowing, finishing & marketing) for our pastured pig operation.
- **\$10,000 - Defining Business Education for Small Scale Specialty Crop Farmers.** This project seeks to address issues surrounding financial viability of small-scale specialty crop growers by surveying and interviewing farmers on what they see as essential components of business education to develop a curriculum that can better address small farmer needs.
- **\$167,433 - Improving disease resistance in the perennial grain Kernza to protect the value of the grain and the environment.** Survey pathogen populations in fields and measure toxin content in Kernza to develop improved disease resistance while reducing pesticides and economic loss.

KCSAAC Enabling Legislation

KSA 76-4, 103 –...Functions and duties of the center of excellence on sustainable agriculture and alternative crops shall include but are not be limited to:

- Emphasizing research, education, outreach and marketing for sustainable agriculture and alternative food, fiber and medicinal crops.
- Assisting farmers to increase their share of the food system dollar.
- Collecting and analyzing basic information on the Kansas food system and opportunities for production and direct marketing.
- Focusing research on value added processes and new crops that offer low-volume, high margin niche opportunities.
- Assisting small farmers to access lower input costs through a delivery system with expanded access to sustainable agricultural practices.
- Marketing assistance to promote products produced and processed in Kansas.
- Expanding small farm research to include: Organic products; less capital intensive investments; energy saving technology; and agricultural practices that reduce soil erosion and restore soil health.
- Developing and distributing a guide of all state services for small farms and value added agriculture

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 and Alternative Crops

Kansas State University Agricultural Experiment Station and Cooperative Extension Service

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