

DOUGLAS COUNTY, KS

FOOD SYSTEM ASSESSMENT

Executive Summary

June 2017

Prepared for the Douglas County Food Policy Council by

Barb LaClair, LaClair Consulting

Helen Schnoes, Douglas County Food Systems Coordinator

This report offers a glimpse of the current food system in Douglas County, Kansas. The highlighted trends, policies, and figures draw from a larger, more in-depth assessment that can be viewed online. A summary dataset can be downloaded and used by community members and organizations. These findings informed the Douglas County Food System Plan, which provides a roadmap for local actions and policy changes.

Learn more at www.douglascountyks.org/fpc

Each of us has a part to play in our local food system.

Read on to see what yours may be.

Sections included:

History | Production | Infrastructure | Retail | Access & Food Insecurity | Consumption | Waste



 www.douglascountyks.org/fpc

 [LawrenceandDouglasCountySustainability](https://www.facebook.com/LawrenceandDouglasCountySustainability)

UNDERSTANDING OUR LOCAL FOOD SYSTEM

Our local food system includes how we produce, buy, eat, and dispose of food in Douglas County. The journey our food takes from field to plate is influenced by ecosystems, education, culture, funding, research, and public policies. Working together, we can foster diverse benefits in our community. This work includes strengthening connections between area producers and consumers to keep food dollars local.



Community benefits from a strong local food system

Economic vitality

- Profitable agricultural businesses
- Successful food entrepreneurs
- Good jobs and career opportunities

Wellness

- Access to nourishing foods
- Food and gardening skills
- Great tasting local produce

Ecological resilience

- Healthy and abundant soils and waters
- Ability to endure extreme weather events
- Waste reduction and reuse

Equity

- Good food for all
- Celebration of diversity
- Empowerment and inclusion

HISTORY

Douglas County and the City of Lawrence have played active roles and become nationally-recognized leaders in supporting the local food system. In 2010, the Douglas County Food Policy Council was created as body of 23 stakeholders from across the local food system, appointed by the Douglas County and City of Lawrence Commissioners. The Council exists to advise these elected officials on food-related policy issues and provides a community forum for local food system development.

Since its founding, the Council has **raised over \$1.1 million** to further local food systems development. The work of the DCFPC complements numerous other efforts throughout Douglas County—and spurred creation of similar Councils in 22 counties throughout Kansas.

2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017
<p>DCFPC formed</p> <p>.....</p> <p>Policymaker farm tour highlights the diversity of county food production</p>	<p>First food system assessment released</p> <p>.....</p> <p>First Chefs Challenge held at County Fair</p>	<p>Common Ground Community Garden program launched</p> <p>.....</p> <p>Food planning workshop sets community goals</p>	<p>City of Lawrence joins DCFPC</p> <p>.....</p> <p>Policies simplified for Fairgrounds incubator kitchen</p> <p>.....</p> <p>Food desert conversation initiated</p> <p>.....</p> <p>County agritourism policies updated</p>	<p>Northeast Kansas Food Hub Feasibility Study released</p> <p>.....</p> <p>SNAP* matching launches at Lawrence farmers markets</p> <p>.....</p> <p>Douglas County and Lawrence start Worksite CSAs**</p>	<p>Food Systems Coordinator hired</p> <p>.....</p> <p>Regional food hub founded</p> <p>.....</p> <p>First local food wholesale directory released</p> <p>.....</p> <p>Farm Fresh Challenge held in August</p>	<p>City of Lawrence approves expansion of urban ag policies</p> <p>.....</p> <p>Farmers market sector report released</p> <p>.....</p> <p>Second policymaker farm tour held</p> <p>.....</p> <p>Fairgrounds incubator kitchen branded as Culinary Commons</p> <p>.....</p> <p>DCFPC presents to Kansas Local Food and Farm Task Force</p>	<p>Updated Food System Assessment released</p> <p>.....</p> <p>Douglas County Food System Plan created</p> <p>.....</p> <p>Lawrence-Douglas County wins Community Health Champion award for local food policy efforts</p> <p>.....</p> <p>Farmers Markets of Kaw Valley launch collaborative campaign</p>

*Supplemental Nutritional Assistance Program, formerly known as food stamps

**Community Supported Agriculture, local food subscriptions with area producers

Farms and farmers are the backbone of our local food system; they are the producers that grow and raise the food we eat. Douglas County boasts a rich agricultural history. We have seen changes in what farmers produce on their farms, and a substantial shift from rural to urban living. Today, local producers sell into international, national, and local markets. Others engage in non-commercial production, such as keeping chickens and bees, or home, community, and school gardening—all growing in recent years.

Trends

- Our farmers are getting older, with the average age near 60.
- Douglas County lost 10,000 acres of farmland between 2007 and 2012.
- Average net farm income in Douglas County was \$11,315 in 2012, with 56% of farms reporting net losses.

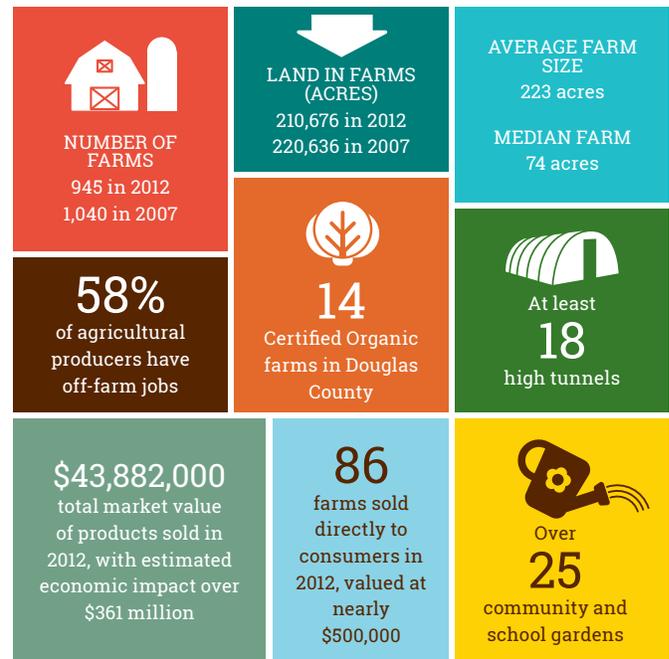
Challenges

- Farm profitability and access to capital, including securing labor and credit
- Access to local wholesale markets
- Variation in weather and seasons
- Urban growth and high land prices

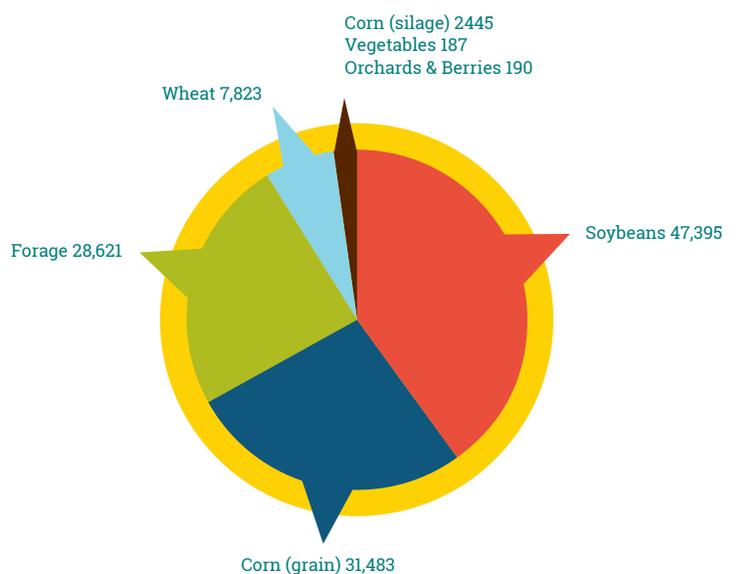
Local Policy Highlights

- **High Quality Agriculture Soils:** Douglas County has made strides to protect our highest quality soils and maintain their availability for agricultural uses.
- **Agritourism:** Douglas County updated its agritourism policies in 2013, but these policies may still present challenges for rural entrepreneurs.
- **Community Gardens:** In 2012, City of Lawrence created the Common Ground Community Garden program, opening up city-owned land to gardeners and beginning farmers.
- **Urban Agriculture Policies:** City of Lawrence allowed backyard chickens and ducks in 2012, expanding to include honey bees, miniature sheep and goats, on-site sales, and an Urban Farm permit in 2016.

Production by the numbers



Douglas County Farm Production, by Acres of Production, 2012



Most data reflects answers from the 2012 Census of Agriculture, and may not capture full scope of local agriculture due to questions asked and participation.



Most food travels through multiple steps before reaching the retail shelf and a consumer’s table. Combined, these stages of transportation, aggregation, processing, packaging, cold storage, and distribution can be considered “infrastructure.” These sectors may also be referred to as “food manufacturing”—taking raw commodities and making new food products from them. In Douglas County, few large food system infrastructure businesses exist. However, many entrepreneurs are creating businesses in this sector. Recent energy in building our local food system has focused on addressing the identified lack of infrastructure in a 16-county Northeast Kansas region, which makes it difficult for local smaller-scale producers to reach larger wholesale markets.

Trends

- **Food Hub Creation:** In 2013, the Douglas County Food Policy Council and numerous state and regional partners embarked upon a multi-year effort to support creation of a “food hub” to aggregate local products. Douglas County leadership attracted over \$353,000 to support the initiative.
- Statewide research is helping farmers create on-farm infrastructure, particularly with cold storage and packing facilities.
- Some large-scale food system infrastructure does exist in the Northeast Kansas region, particularly around Kansas City.

Challenges

- Lack of light processing capacity, needed for schools and others to easily use local food products
- Limited access to meat processors, forcing livestock producers to travel farther with their animals

Local Policy Highlights

- The Lawrence-Douglas County **Economic Development Strategy** identified food systems infrastructure development as a priority area.
- **Value-added agriculture:** Douglas County changed its zoning regulations to promote rural businesses that economically add value to agricultural products by changing their state (milling wheat, making strawberry jam) or separating a product from standard commodities to enhance value (identify production from local farm).
- **Culinary Commons:** Kitchen rental policies at the Douglas County Fairgrounds were changed to better support entrepreneurs launching new businesses. The facility has been branded as Culinary Commons to help raise awareness, with a comprehensive website created.

Infrastructure by the numbers



The retail food sector includes grocery stores, restaurants (full service and fast food), farmers markets, food service operations, vending and concessions, and a range of other stores, including supercenters and convenience stores. These businesses exert a significant economic impact in the community and employ many residents. The term “food environment” describes how the mix of food outlets we encounter can shape our food options and health.

Trends

- Douglas County has the highest per capita density of fast food establishments in the region and state, increasing in recent years to 89 establishments per 100,000 residents.
- Increasing numbers of local restaurants, grocery stores, and food service operations are looking to source foods from regional producers.

Challenges

- Very competitive sector with low margins, often accompanied by high land or rent costs
- Many low-wage and part-time positions

Local Policy Highlights

- **On-site sales:** The urban agriculture changes made in Lawrence in 2016 allowed non-permitted sale of home-grown whole produce in residential neighborhoods.
- **E-communities:** New low-interest loans have helped Douglas County entrepreneurs grow their food businesses, loaning over \$60,000 since 2012.

Retail by the numbers



ACCESS AND FOOD INSECURITY

When families in Douglas County struggle to regularly access healthy food, it is not due to a lack of availability in the community. Although there is an abundant supply of healthy foods, some community members face challenges accessing those foods because they either have difficulty getting to locations where the food is available or they lack the financial resources to purchase the food that they need. Geographic areas where lower-income residents lack access to a grocery store are often called “food deserts*.” A robust local conversation has begun in Lawrence, seeking solutions for food desert areas in the city.

Individuals or families that struggle to access enough food because they lack the money to buy it are sometimes referred to as “food-insecure.” Food-insecure families often face difficult choices in stretching their budget, having to choose between food and other basic needs such as housing, utilities, and medications. Some low-income residents benefit from a range of public programs to support food access, including food stamps (Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, SNAP) and WIC (Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants and Children). Yet, many residents fall in a gap—earning too much to qualify for these government-sponsored food assistance programs, but still challenged with a limited food budget. Private food assistance programs, led by organizations such as Just Food, Harvesters, and churches, help those in need to access food.

Trends

- Food insecurity has remained fairly consistent in Douglas County since 2010, with 2015 annual estimates suggesting 16.6% of the population is food insecure.
- Between 2012 and 2016, Douglas County SNAP enrollment decreased by 19%, or 1,628 individuals. Average monthly enrollment in 2016 was 6,932
- Between 2012 and 2016, Free & Reduced Price Lunch eligibility in Douglas County schools rose 9.6%, from 34.4% to 37.7% of students.

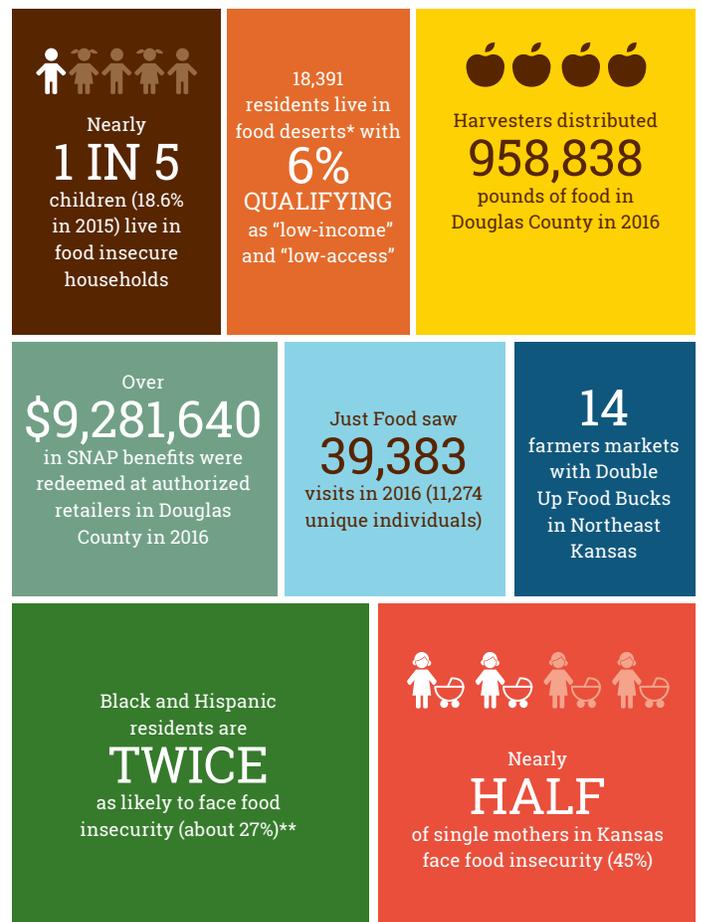
Challenges

- Kansas has one of the highest rates of sales tax on groceries in the nation, 6.5% before adding local sales tax rates
- Decreasing state supports for food assistance programs

Local Policy Highlights

- **Community Health Plan:** “Access to Healthy Foods” was identified as one of five community health goals in 2013, directing efforts to support food access, with particular focus on access for low-income families and SNAP enrollment.
- **Double Up Food Bucks:** This program launched in 2014 by City of Lawrence, Douglas County, and LiveWell Lawrence, to allow SNAP users to “double” their benefits (up to \$25) when shopping at farmers’ markets. With national and regional partnerships and funding, the program has grown across the region, serving hundreds of Kansas families.

Access and Food Insecurity by the numbers



*Geographic areas in which a substantial portion of the population is low-income (a poverty rate of 20 percent or higher), and one-third or more of households is low-access (live further than one mile in urban areas or ten miles in rural areas from the closest full-service grocery stores) are designated as ‘food deserts’ to denote challenges with getting to a grocery store that offers a variety of healthy food options.

**Compared to all households in Kansas, 13.2% of whom face food insecurity in 2015.

The foods we eat play an important part in our celebrations, cultural heritage, and quality of life. Balanced nutrition can involve a wide variety of foods, and is a prerequisite to good health. Most consumers have at least some awareness of nutrient-dense foods that nourish our bodies. Yet, subtle and not-so-subtle cues and messages in the food environment, from advertising to product placement, may derail our good intentions.

Our food environment is also filled with an abundance of highly processed foods and fast food – low-cost options that often offer ease but fewer nutritional benefits. People are eating out more frequently, too, often citing a lack of time, money, and skills to prepare meals at home. Chronic diseases related to food consumption, like diabetes and heart disease, can contribute to disability and high medical costs in later years of life.

Consumers can use their purchasing power to influence the foods that are available in their communities. Grocery stores and other retail outlets have responded to changing consumer interests and increased fresh, easy, and healthy meal options. A number of ethnic food stores exist in Douglas County, and grocery stores are adding culturally-specific foods to their aisles. Many shoppers have an interest in buying local foods to support the local economy and enjoy the taste of fresh, in-season foods. A range of programs in Douglas County support consumers in becoming smart shoppers, skilled cooks, and confident gardeners.

Trends

- Americans spend much less of their total household budgets on food than in past generations—and less than many international peers today.
- Nationally, and in Kansas, rates of obesity have been rising steadily since the 1960s.
- Kansas is seeing closure of small, rural grocery outlets.
- On average, one-third of total local consumer food dollars are spent on foods prepared away from home.

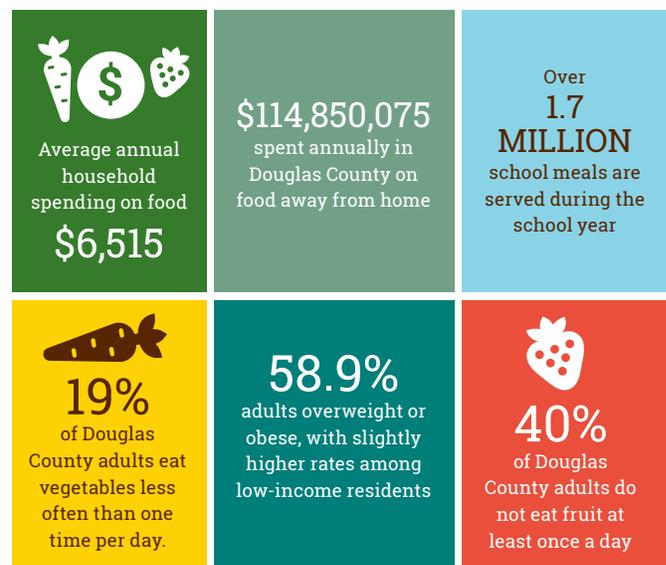
Challenges

- Some healthy food options can cost more, and take more time to prepare, than highly processed foods and pre-made meals
- Most fresh foods are perishable, requiring proper storage and prompt use or preservation

Local Policy Highlights

- **Healthy food:** The LiveWell Lawrence Coalition has worked to improve the food environment in a number of local settings through the *FuelGood* campaign, which requires up to 50% of foods offered in vending machines and public concessions to meet nutritional guidelines. The Healthy Food for All Work Group is working with food pantries to offer healthy food options.
- **Farm to School:** School districts are investing their purchasing dollars in local foods. In the 2016-2017 school year, USD497 purchased over \$61,000 from six area producers for school meals.

Consumption by the numbers



National studies suggest that up to 40% of all food produced is wasted. Loss occurs at each step in the food system. The amount of waste varies by the type of product, ease of transportation, and how long it stays good on the shelf or in the refrigerator. Farmers may leave a crop in the field if they lack labor to harvest or a market to profitably sell their products. While some food waste also occurs in processing, distribution, and retail sectors, the largest volumes of food waste occur at the consumer or household level. Environmental, social, and economic costs arise when the food we produce ends up in landfills.

Trends

- Many school cafeterias use food waste audits to gather baseline data about food wasted in their operations. In 2015, a series of audits at Haskell University identified an average of 54 pounds of food and 6 gallons of drinks thrown away at each meal.
- A number of local institutions work with private hauler Missouri Organics to collect food waste and other compostable scraps, to turn them into a valuable soil amendment.

Challenges

- Consumer confusion about “date labeling” on packaged foods, such as “use by” or “best by,” contributes to food waste
- Improper storage can make perishable foods spoil more quickly
- Businesses are concerned about liability when donating food
- Retailers want to sell foods in “abundance,” leading to over purchasing and large portion sizes

Local Policy Highlight

- **Food Recovery with Good Samaritan Law:** Local food assistance organizations are partnering with food retail outlets to rescue unwanted but safe and healthy foods for families in need. The State of Kansas and federal Good Samaritan Laws protect good faith food donations.
- **Composting Support:** The City of Lawrence Solid Waste Division offers workshops and sells reduced-cost backyard compost bins to help residents reduce the amount of waste they create.

Food Waste and Recovery by the numbers



Consumer-level food waste includes the food left on the plate when eating out, the forgotten foods in the back of the refrigerator that went bad, and food scraps, the “inedible” parts of the foods (such as banana peels or meat bones).