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Eileen Horn
Sustainability Coordinator

Testimony on SB 380: Establishing the local food and farm task force

To the Senate Agriculture Committee
Provided by Eileen Horn, Douglas County, Kansas
February 19, 2014

Dear Senator Love and Members of the Agriculture Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to speak to you today, and for your leadership in supporting our state's largest industry- agriculture.

My name is Eileen Horn, and I stand in support of SB 380- establishing the local food and farm task force for the state of Kansas. I currently serve as the Sustainability Coordinator for the City of Lawrence and Douglas County. In that role, it is my privilege to serve as the staff support for our Douglas County Food Policy Council, a Commission-appointed advisory body very similar to the local food and farm task force proposed by this piece of legislation.

The Douglas County Food Policy was established by the Board of Douglas County Commissioners in 2010 to address the challenges and opportunities for building a robust local food economy. The task of the Food Policy Council is to recommend local policy initiatives that support our region's agricultural producers, helps create farm and food businesses and jobs, and ensure that all members of our community have access to healthy, locally grown Kansas farm products.

From my three years of experience in working with the Douglas County Food Policy Council, I would like to offer a few comments on the proposed legislation:

First, I commend you on the creation of a task force that is composed of a diversity of voices and perspectives. To truly create a local food economy in our state, we will need experts from agriculture, health, social services, universities, small businesses, and most importantly, agricultural producers themselves. Our Douglas County Food Policy Council has 23 stakeholders, from all sectors of our food system. Our producers range from a 400 head feedlot operator and a 2 acre vegetable farmer. Our food retailers include a large chain grocer, a cooperatively run grocery store, and the chef of a small, local restaurant. We also have representatives from nonprofits such as the Douglas County Farm Bureau, Kansas Rural Center, Douglas County Child Development, Douglas County Senior Services, USD 497, and many others. In our experience, having a diversity of stakeholders at the table, from all levels of the food system is instrumental to proposing reasonable and balanced food policy recommendations.

I also support the direction for the proposed task force's product: a food and farm plan to be submitted to the legislature in 2016. I would encourage you to direct the task force to creation an *actionable plan*, with recommendations that are well-researched and recognized best practices in food system development. There are models across the country that the task force can draw from as they propose solutions for Kansas.

In Douglas County, we created a similar report to guide our recommendations to the Board of County Commissioners. We worked closely with researchers at Kansas State University to create a food system report for our food region which included Douglas, Leavenworth, and Jefferson Counties. The key findings of the report are included in the executive summary provided with my testimony. This data – on local food production, the economic impact of local food sales, food system infrastructure, and the health impacts on our community members – was instrumental in informing our Food Policy Council and to directing the successes we have experienced.

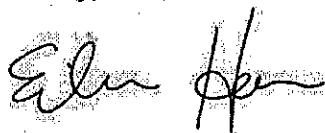
As a direct result of this food system assessment and the key findings of our current deficiencies in food system infrastructure, we have initiated a Food Hub Feasibility Study for 16 counties in NE Kansas. This feasibility study is funded by USDA Rural Development and the Kansas Health Foundation, and will assess the feasibility of a "food hub" – a site for aggregation, packaging, and distribution of our locally-grown products to serve larger markets and institutional buyers such as schools. This study will be released in June 2014. It will recommend food system infrastructure investments that will allow us to better connect our food producers with the outlets for their products – grocers, restaurants, schools, and hospitals. This food system development will support increase on-farm income as producers scale up to produce food for larger markets, and will help increase our citizens' access to local foods.

A similar, actionable, strategic plan for the state of Kansas will help address our state's needs for rural community revitalization, unmet market demand for local food, and create opportunities for farm and food sector job creation and retention.

And finally, although the Douglas county Food Policy Council is the first of its kind in Kansas, we have been working closely with health departments, extension offices, and community coalitions in Sedgwick, Riley, Reno, and Crawford counties – all looking to establish local food policy councils in 2014. Clearly, there is statewide interest in addressing our local food systems and a statewide task force would serve to coordinate these efforts across Kansas.

Thank you for the opportunity to present to you today. I believe that the state of Kansas is uniquely poised to capitalize on our rich agricultural heritage and the current surging demand for local foods to create a robust local food economy. Together, we can make a vibrant local food economy a reality to the benefit of Kansas farmers, entrepreneurs, and communities, and add another chapter in Kansas's rich agricultural heritage.

Sincerely,



Eileen Horn, Sustainability Coordinator
Douglas County Food Policy Council

BUILDING A **DEEP-ROOTED LOCAL FOOD** SYSTEM

A FOOD SYSTEM ANALYSIS FOR DOUGLAS, JEFFERSON AND
LEAVENWORTH COUNTIES IN KANSAS

Northeast Kansas has a rich agricultural heritage, one that has mirrored the national trend towards centralization and globalization of our food supply. Recently, we have seen an emerging trend as consumers in our region seek out locally-grown foods. From the phenomenal growth in farmers' markets in our region to a growing interest in Farm-to-School programs, members of our community care

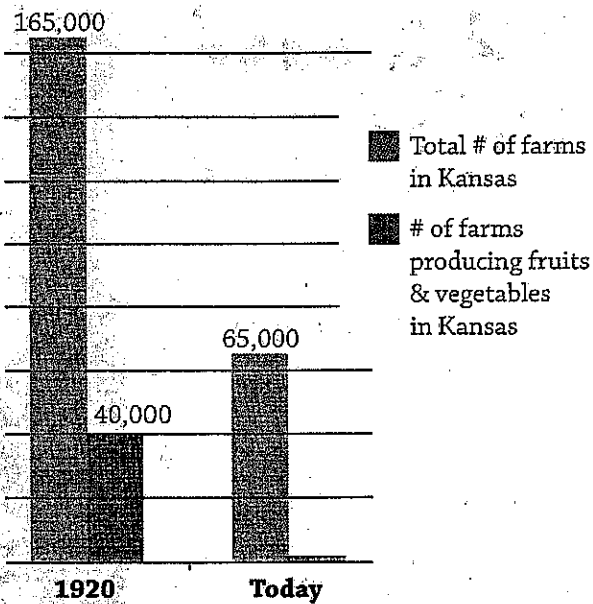
about the food their families eat, and the region they call home.

To explore this growing demand, we are taking the first step—understanding how our local food system currently works. The goal of this report is to identify the challenges and opportunities for a successful and sustainable local food system in Douglas County and our surrounding region.

THE QUESTIONS WE ASKED IN OUR ANALYSIS

- How does the food we eat today make it from the farm to our plates?
- How much food does our region produce for export?
- How much could be locally grown and consumed?
- How much do we currently spend on food?
- How do our food purchases impact our health and economy?
- Do all members of our community have access to wholesome food?
- Could our food choices actually help shape a robust local economy?

KEY FINDINGS



HISTORIC TRENDS

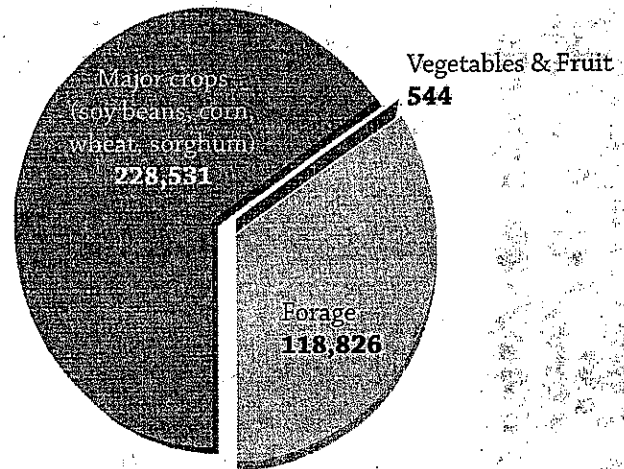
In 1920, Kansas had more than 165,000 farms. Forty thousand of these farms produced fruit and vegetables for sale. Today, these numbers reflect a dramatically different agricultural reality: By 2007, the number of farms in Kansas had dropped to 65,000, only 473 farms statewide were producing vegetables for sale, and only 432 had land in orchards.

The face of farming in our communities is also changing. Of the 1,040 farmers in Douglas County: only 35% are employed full time on the farm, 65% claim off-farm employment as their main income, and the average age of our farmers is 58.5 years.

NATURAL RESOURCES

The combination of the tricounty area's rich soils, climate, precipitation, and even terrain make it well suited for agriculture. We have thousands of acres of prime farmland (Class I and II soils), that can support nearly all cultivation practices, including the more nutrient-intense production of fruit and vegetable crops. These fertile soils are concentrated near population centers in our counties, and therefore, experience development pressure from our growing cities.

Production (in acres) by Crop



PRODUCTION

The land in our three counties is primarily in cropland and rangeland, with the dominant crops being soybeans, corn, forage, and wheat for export or animal feed. Beef cattle make up the vast majority of livestock produced. The 386 acres of farmland in our tricounty area devoted to vegetable production represent less than 0.1% of total crops.

Of the 3,380 farms in the tricounty area:

- 756 PRACTICE CONSERVATION METHODS
- 135 SELL VALUE-ADDED PRODUCTS
- 36 SELL THROUGH A COMMUNITY-SUPPORTED AGRICULTURE PROGRAM

KEY FINDINGS

CONSUMPTION & HEALTH

When compared to the USDA recommended servings, tricounty residents are eating significantly fewer fruit, vegetables, and dairy than are advised. Overconsumption of fats and sugars can have serious health impacts – with overweight/obesity rates ranging between 54-62%.

If we compare how much food we currently produce in the area and how much we consume, we find that major gaps appear. In all 24 food categories we studied, only beef, soybeans for oil, corn, and wheat are produced locally in enough quantity to meet our local consumption demands. Significant deficits exist in our current production levels of fruit, vegetables, chickens, eggs and other staples.

PROCESSING & DISTRIBUTION

Of the state-licensed food processors located in our tricounty area, most process small batches for local markets. We currently lack the capacity for light processing (chopping, packaging, etc.) required to prepare local food for our restaurants and institutions, and the storage and transportation infrastructure to get it there. Instead, most institutions utilize nationwide distributors such as Sysco and US Foodservice, that ship food long distances from other markets to our buyers.

FOOD SECURITY

Despite being an agriculturally-based state, our citizens are not immune to food insecurity and hunger. In Kansas, more than one in five children under the age of five are growing up with food insecurity. This is one of the highest rates in the U.S. In our tricounty area, over 10,000 residents live in neighborhoods with limited access to grocery stores and healthy food choices.

ECONOMICS

Agriculture remains a key contributor to our regional economy today. According to the 2007 Census of Agriculture, the total market value of agricultural products sold in the tricounty region was \$135.8 million, only \$1.2 million of which was direct sales to local consumers. Tricounty residents spend \$392 million on food purchases each year, 42% of which is spent at local restaurants and businesses.

54%

OVERWEIGHT/OBESITY RATE

10,000+

RESIDENTS WITH LIMITED
ACCESS TO GROCERY STORES
& HEALTHY FOOD CHOICES

\$392 M

AMOUNT SPENT BY
TRICOUNTY RESIDENTS ON
FOOD PURCHASES EACH
YEAR

<0.1%

FARMLAND IN OUR
TRICOUNTY AREA DEVOTED
TO VEGETABLE
PRODUCTION

RECOMMENDATIONS

From our prime soils to our long history of farming know-how, our tricounty region has all of the raw ingredients to create a deep-rooted local food system. The challenges outlined in this report also point to significant opportunities to grow our local food system in a way that protects our natural resources, provides access to healthy food for all residents regardless of income, improves the health of our citizens, and builds our local economy.

The Food Policy Council recommends seizing these opportunities for a thriving local food economy:

PLAN

Prime farmland soils are essential for the development of a sustainable local food system in our region. Our planning processes should ensure that prime farmland is allocated for its best and highest use while taking into consideration the needs of all stakeholders.

To ensure that this high quality agricultural land is available for farming, policy tools and incentives should be developed that are economically feasible for the land owner. City and county ordinances should be revised to remove unnecessary barriers to agricultural activities in and near urban areas.

PRODUCE

Currently there are significant gaps between what we are eating today (too many fats, sweets) and what the USDA recommends (more fruits, vegetables, dairy). We also have significant gaps between what we're producing (beef, corn, soybeans) and the other staple food groups we rely on (eggs, fruits, vegetables, other proteins).

Increasing and incentivizing local production and consumption of fruits, vegetables, poultry, and dairy would help close both gaps - meeting an urgent health need and providing economic opportunity to our agricultural entrepreneurs.

PROCESS/PACKAGE

Processing is a key missing link in our food system's economic chain. The lack of food infrastructure enterprises: cold storage, light processing, packaging and small meat processing plants make it difficult for institutions and restaurants to participate in the local food economy.

Actively attracting food processing businesses to the region and supporting local entrepreneurs will address this missed opportunity. With food sales in our tricounty region totaling \$392 million, substantial potential exists to capture more economic activity with the development of a local food economy.

PROVIDE

Food purchases represent a significant percentage of income, especially for the low-income residents in our community. Efforts to build a local and regional food system must consider price impacts, and address areas in our communities where low-income residents lack access to grocery stores (i.e. "food deserts").

Establishing economic development incentives for grocers who locate in low-access neighborhoods, or who improve existing stores will help address our Lawrence and Leavenworth "food deserts." In addition, supporting the expansion of farmers' markets, community gardens and mobile carts/trucks that sell fruits and vegetables will help provide greater access throughout our community.

The full text of this report is available at www.douglas-county.com/sites/fpc

This assessment was commissioned by the Douglas County Food Policy Council, a stakeholder council convened by the Douglas County Commissioners in 2009. The FPC serves as a forum for discussion and coordination for community-wide efforts to improve our community's access to local food supply and distribution networks. We represent a wide range of stakeholders in our food system—from agricultural producers to retailers to health and food security advocates.