

World Café Feedback on a Regional Food System

H.E.R.O. Planning Project

Western Prairie Food, Farm & Community Alliance

Cheyenne, Decatur, Logan, Rawlins, Sheridan, Sherman, Thomas, Wallace Counties



August 2017

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Dear Citizens of Northwest Kansas,

As the chairman of the Western Prairie Food Farm and Community Alliance (Alliance), I am pleased to provide you with the 2017 Northwest Food System Assessment. This report represents the collective thinking and conversations of stakeholders within our regional food system. The Alliance will serve over 28,700 people in our 8-county region. With the majority of the regional population living in a rural food desert, we need to have an effective food system that includes every single person in our region. This food assessment will help guide the Alliance in developing our strategic plan and implementation plans in the future.

Food simply is a necessity to all humans. If utilized correctly, food provides vital nutrition and energy to sustain our lives and allow us to have optimal health. Access to healthy, affordable food is essential for our health and lifestyles. Unfortunately, many in our region do not have access or knowledge on how to obtain healthy, local, affordable food. Oftentimes, many food-insecure families are faced with difficult family budget decisions and are forced to choose between food and other basic household and personal needs. Families that are not food-insecure still face challenging food related decisions that center on convenience and time constraints. Food decisions inundate our lives every day. Nutrient-poor, calorie-dense foods make their way into our lives through vending machines, fast food chains and convenience stores. In our regional food desert, these stores are the only food outlets in several communities.

With many people relying on our work, we wanted to be sure not to unintentionally neglect sectors and consumers of the food system while conducting our food assessment. Our food assessment used the “World Café” model, which helped to provide voices for many groups of people across our regional food system. Thankfully, the World Cafés allowed us to capture strengths, weaknesses and gaps each county brings to the regional food system. Participants helped to guide our understanding of what their perceptions and requests would be of the Alliance as well.

I want to personally thank each participant that attended and contributed their thoughts and ideas to the World Cafés. Advocates of the local food movement welcomed Alliance representatives into every community and have formed County Advisory Teams (CAT) in each county. I encourage citizens in our region to become involved with your local CAT and advocate for our regional food system. I also want to thank the Sunflower Foundation for providing us with the funding to conduct our food assessment.

We look forward to working with all sectors and consumers in our regional food system as we actively pursue solutions to our communities’ food challenges.

In food we share,

Danielle Holzwarth
Western Prairie Food Farm and Community Alliance Chairman

World Café Feedback on Northwest Kansas Regional Food System H.E.R.O. Planning Project

Executive Summary

Throughout the summer of 2017, the Western Prairie Food, Farm and Community Alliance (or the Alliance) worked with County Advisory Teams in eight counties in northwest Kansas to initiate community conversations about the ways to create a regional food system that would promote access to healthy, locally grown foods. The eight counties were: Cheyenne, Decatur, Logan, Rawlins, Sheridan, Sherman, Thomas and Wallace counties.

Using the World Café method, 138 stakeholders were recruited to participate in eight community-based discussion groups to create a common understanding as to how the problem of improving access to healthy food might be addressed. The groups included representatives from each of the food system sectors including growers, processors, consumers and those responsible for food disposal.

As a starting point for the discussions the Café participants sought to define the term “local,” arriving at varied definitions ranging from their county boundaries to a broader multi-county context. Seeking to define healthy foods, participants stressed that consumers need to know where their food was grown and how it was produced, deeming locally-produced food to be healthy and trustworthy.

Barriers to accessing healthy foods including factors such as government regulations and limits on availability and affordability. In addition, participants cited a lack of knowledge on the part of consumers particularly related to both buying and preparing food that is healthy.

Consumers tend to purchase food that is convenient and easy to prepare, choosing food options that are both available and affordable. While some prefer food options that are known to be healthy, the Café participants believe there is a need for broad-based consumer education regarding the value of healthy food choices.

Strategies recommended to improve the accessibility of healthy foods include: 1) policy changes 2) the promotion of healthy food 3) education 4) improving access to healthy food and 5) changes in food processing and packaging.

As a next step, the Alliance will share the results of the World Café discussions with the Community Advisory Teams and their constituent members as a first step toward creating a regional strategic plan that focuses on improvements in each of the sectors of the food system while at the same time monitoring policy and programs related to food access at both the national and state levels.

World Café Feedback on a Regional Food System

H.E.R.O. Planning Project

Background

In 2017 the Western Prairie Resource Conservation & Development Area initiated a planning project to engage partners and stakeholders in the development of a strategic plan for a regional food system in eight counties in northwestern Kansas.

The Western Prairie Food, Farm and Community Alliance (WPFCA or the Alliance) provided leadership for the project, working in partnership with the Thomas County Coalition and the Thomas County Health Department. The Western Prairie Resource Conservation and Development Council (RC&D) was the fiscal agent.

The Center for Research Strategies (CRS) served as the evaluator for this project. In addition to having worked with the Thomas County Coalition in the past, CRS has previous experience related to food system issues in Colorado and offered an independent perspective on the World Café results summarized in this report.

The stated mission of the Alliance has been to improve access to regionally grown healthy food options while promoting educational resources for the benefit of local populations. Through partnerships within the eight participating counties, the Alliance has focused on creating community-driven policy, programs and education projects that impact all aspects of the food system including: health, economic development, small food business development and natural resource conservation.

Alliance Priorities

To promote the availability of locally grown, healthy food, the Alliance has identified the following priorities.

- ✓ Increase the number of food producers and the number of acres devoted to specialty crops by providing food safety certifications, food production education, and market development for local foods.
- ✓ Assist seniors in gaining access to local healthy food by integrating these options in senior feeding sites, nursing homes, hospitals and local grocery stores.
- ✓ Promote education about healthy foods by providing information regarding what is healthy food, how to cook healthy food, how and where food is produced in northwest Kansas, where to acquire healthy local foods, and food safety.
- ✓ Increase the number of farmers markets and local grocery stores that provide basic food needs and accept SNAP benefits and increase healthy local food options in these stores.

- ✓ Promote local foods and a local food hub to increase the availability of healthy foods within small home owned grocery stores, thereby, increasing their use by consumers.

Methods

To understand the views of local participants on the food system in northwest Kansas and the ways in which it might be improved, eight community-based discussions were organized using the World Café method.

As part of a World Café, small groups of citizens come together to learn from each other and to create a common understanding as to how a community problem might be addressed. Participants spend roughly 20 minutes at a series of small tables while a table host captures the main takeaways generated through the discussion. As the participants rotate from table to table, the table host briefly reviews the previous conversations and encourages all participants to share their views and provide additional input. At the end of the event, the moderators summarize the key results generated from each table conversation.



Between May and July 2017, World Café discussions were facilitated in each of the eight participating counties to engage local partners and stakeholders in discussing options for regional planning related to a food system for northwest Kansas.

In all, 138 participants took part in the World Café discussions, with an average of 17 community stakeholders represented in each group.

Listing of World Café Sessions

County	Date of World Cafe	Number of Participants
Thomas	5/18/17	18
Rawlins	5/27/17	16
Sherman	6/13/17	15
Sheridan	6/14/17	21
Cheyenne	7/27/17	19
Wallace	7/11/17	15
Logan	7/10/17	14
Decatur	7/20/17	20

The Food System

A food system entails all the activities required to make food available to people including the processes and infrastructure that put food on the table. As displayed below in Figure 1, these processes include: growing or food production, processing, packaging, transportation and distribution, marketing and retail sales (buying), consumption (cooking and eating), reusing, and disposal of food-related wastes. Supporting this system are all the inputs and outputs that occur at each step in the food system cycle, as shown in the newer graphic in Figure 2 below produced by the Douglas County Food Policy Council.

Food systems need to be viewed within a community context and vary depending on the social, political and economic environments in which they operate. The outside green circle of the newer graphic shows the external contextual factors that influence the supply chain elements, including ecosystems, education, culture, funding, research and public policy.

Community stakeholders bring a unique set of priorities to food system planning depending on local interests and resources and the relative importance of issues such as the availability and affordability of healthy food options.

Figure 1: Graphic used in World Café discussions



Figure 2: Graphic created by Douglas County Food Policy Council



As part of the World Café discussions in northwest Kansas, group organizers deliberately set out to recruit participants from all segments of the food system. As some participants represented more than one sector, the total number of discussants by food system category includes some double-counting. Nonetheless, the World Café organizers were successful in hearing from representatives of all food system sectors including growers, processors, consumers and those responsible for food disposal, as shown in the table below.

Number of Café Participants Representing the Food Sectors Across Eight Counties

	Growers	Transportation	Processing	Packaging	Buying	Cooking/Eating	Disposing	Reusing
Thomas	5	0	2	0	11	11	3	1
Rawlins	9	1	1	0	12	14	0	1
Sherman	7	3	1	1	7	8	2	2
Sheridan	11	1	0	0	17	17	0	0
Cheyenne	10	2	5	2	7	9	4	5
Wallace	9	0	0	1	7	7	2	2
Logan	6	0	2	0	7	7	0	1
Decatur	11	1	2	0	9	13	0	1
Total	68	8	13	4	77	73	11	13

World Café Format

At each of the World Café discussions, the following table topics were addressed:

- What is the definition of the word “local?”
- Question 1: What are healthy foods? Are healthy foods locally produced and affordable?
- Question 2: What are barriers community residents face in accessing healthy foods?
- Question 3: What are the most important factors when residents make food decisions?
- Question 4: What ideas do you have about changes or improvements in the regional food system to improve access to healthy, local affordable food? Participants were prompted to think of improvements within specific food sectors.



Participants brainstormed the meaning of the word local and the definition of the term healthy food. For other questions, participants used affinity diagramming

techniques to categorize their responses. Participants used post-it notes to list their answers to specific questions and then posted them on a flip chart, seeking to array like-minded responses in groupings. For the last question related to food system improvements, participants were asked to highlight the improvement they would most like to share with the larger group at the end of the World Café session.

World Café Findings



What is the Definition of the Word "Local?"

To give context for local food production, Café participants were asked to define the word "local." The term was defined differently by the participants across the eight counties.

Some described local as representing activities located within their own county, while others considered local to include a multi-county area (e.g. nine counties in Northwest Kansas or the three surrounding counties).

- Participants from Decatur County stated that because their county is so sparsely populated, they think of local as covering a much larger area than just their own county boundaries.
- Participants from both Logan and Rawlins defined local as spanning a certain distance, for example, within 50 or 100 miles.
- One participant commented, "*Just take out the middle man from farm to table.*" Food is local when there is no separation between the producers of food and its consumers.

Question 1: Definition of Healthy Foods

When asked what was meant by the term “healthy foods,” Café participants focused on how food was produced and where it was grown. All the groups considered locally produced foods to be healthy and more trustworthy.

“Foods raised closest to home area deemed to be the healthiest.”

“People want to know where their food comes from, how it was grown and who handles it.”

“People want to be able to trust the producer of their food.”

Participants also described healthy foods as being fresh, natural, whole and organic, and minimally processed, with no preservatives, additives or chemicals. When foods are sweetened, the healthiest option is to use fruit as a natural sweetener. Some mentioned that eating a variety of foods is healthy as well as eating foods containing less fat.

Finally, Café discussants suggested that preparing foods in a healthy manner is also important. Home cooked meals that are “cooked from scratch” are the best option, although participants noted that people do not always know how to prepare home cooked meals and that it takes time to prepare them.

Question 2: Barriers in Accessing Healthy Foods

Participants were asked to identify the barriers that make it challenging for people to access healthy foods. The barriers they cited included government restrictions or regulations, not being able to afford healthy fresh foods and the limited availability of healthy foods.

Most often cited barriers
Government regulations <ul style="list-style-type: none">○ Regulations control bringing local food into stores.○ Regulations limit restaurant owners purchase of farm fresh food.○ There needs to be clarity and understanding regarding the rules, regulations and policies for schools, food retailers, farmers markets, etc.
Not affordable <ul style="list-style-type: none">○ It’s more expensive to buy fresh, healthy, homegrown food.○ Kansas sales tax on food contributes to cost.
Limited availability <ul style="list-style-type: none">○ Quality of produce is poor. It can be hard to find fresh food.○ Farmers markets and community gardens are limited.○ The hours for farmers market operations are limited.○ Produce is only available on a seasonable basis. There is no infrastructure for year-round growing.○ The number of grocery stores is limited.○ Restaurants tend not to offer healthy options.○ Food that is given away is of low quality or processed.○ There is a need to increase local producers.

Other barriers mentioned related to the knowledge and behavior of consumers. Participants said that families have not been educated about what constitutes healthy eating and lack the cooking skills to prepare healthy meals.

Comments related to knowledge and behavior barriers
Knowledge
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ People are not fully aware of the nutritional differences between fresh and processed food, or healthy and not healthy food. ○ People need more education on the value of a balanced diet or the benefits of healthy food. ○ People don't know the additives or chemicals in food. ○ Information is lacking on how to and where to purchase healthy foods. ○ People should know how to read labels to know what is in the food they're eating.
Eating and food preparation
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ People need to eat a balanced diet with moderate servings. ○ Processed foods are cheaper, easier to access and easier to prepare. ○ Lack of planning and impulse buying. ○ No cooking facilities in homes. ○ Food Bank donated a Christmas turkey to Food Bank families. City dump called and said lots of turkeys were thrown away because families did not know how to cook or have tools to do so. ○ Youth are no longer taught to cook. Home Economics is no longer required. ○ People lack the skills to preserve fresh food (i.e., canning, freezing, dehydrating). ○ Convenience food. People have gotten used to this. Women are working/fast-paced society.

Question 3: Important Factors in Making Food Decisions

World Café participants discussed the factors that influence consumer decisions about the food they buy and eat. Consumers were deemed to be most influenced by convenience and ease of preparation, as well as the affordability and availability of food options.

Comments related to convenience, affordability, availability
Convenience and ease of preparation
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ People want food that is convenient and easy to prepare. ○ Wives work. They don't have time for food preparation. ○ People tend to make the meals that are quick to prepare and that they know how to make. ○ They need to fix food their families will eat or the food will go to waste. ○ The number of portions is relevant for smaller families and those living alone.
Affordability
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Healthy food has a shorter shelf life, therefore can cost more. ○ People on fixed incomes must be thrifty shoppers.
Availability
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ People need to know where to buy fresh, local food ○ Local food options are limited in some areas, especially in local grocery stores

Consumer food preferences also influence food decisions, with some preferring to eat healthier foods because of nutrition content and taste. An individual's health status can also influence health choices, particularly for those required to eat a specific diet. Café participants believe many consumers do not have enough knowledge regarding healthy food options.

Comments related to preference and knowledge	
Preference for healthy food	
o	Fruits and vegetables are a priority for young families.
o	Taste is an important criterion as well.
o	The quality of food is important as well as its nutrition content.
o	Some seek food that is fresh and free from chemical additives.
o	Older residents have health issues that influence their diet choices.
Knowledge and education	
o	People don't know how to read food labels.
o	Many buy food on impulse without a grocery list.
o	Family background and past food experiences influence food choices.
o	Education is needed to teach people what is local and healthy.

Question 4: Changes to Improve the Food System

As a final question, participants were asked to share their ideas about possible changes or improvements in the regional food system that could help to improve access to healthy, local affordable food. Participants were prompted to think of improvements within each of the food sectors, including growing, packaging, processing, transporting, buying, cooking and eating, disposing and reusing.

Policy Changes

Participants in each of the eight World Café groups identified policy change as a means for improving the availability of fresh foods in their communities. Specific suggestions included providing tax breaks on locally grown food, improving the labeling of whole foods, enforcing anti-trust laws for large corporate food wholesalers, passing policy to eliminate sugary drinks and foods in schools, and reforming health insurance to allow coverage for nutrition-based treatments.

In general, respondents believe that government regulations that prevent people from growing and selling their produce should be modified and that city and county governments should increase their support for locally grown food.

Participants recommended that information be disseminated to community residents and growers regarding current food regulations. They suggested that a policy steering committee be organized to inform people as to these regulations and to promote regulations that can benefit growers while encouraging new growers to enter the local food production business.

Comments related to policy recommendations
Implement regulation for locally grown food
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Cut/loosen government regulations that prevent people from growing and selling their produce ○ Provide tax breaks on locally grown food ○ Improve city/county support for locally grown food
Improve labeling of whole foods
Pass safe handling regulations
Anti-trust law enforcement for large corporate food wholesalers
Reform health insurance to allow coverage for nutrition-based treatments
Form alliance networks of all Farmers Markets managers in the region to share ideas, resources
Eliminate sugary options in schools

Promotion of Healthy Food

Participants in the Café groups suggested that media-based strategies can help to promote healthy food consumption and production. Marketing and advertising can be employed to encourage consumers to choose healthy foods including green and lean foods, foods with fewer preservatives, and dye-free and gluten-free foods. Healthy food can also be marketed through sponsoring events, such as farm-to-table events, cooking demonstrations with a variety of meals prepared, food festivals, and local food parties featuring educational presentations and demonstrations.

Broader marketing efforts could include improving communications with local grocers and growers, encouraging community residents to become involved in the local food movement, connecting growers to viable markets and offering financial incentives for local growers, advertising healthy food resources such as farmers markets, the Bountiful Baskets program and encouraging consumers to purchase locally grown produce and meats.

Comments related to promotion of healthy foods
Encourage news, marketing and advertising regarding local food production
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Promote more green/lean choices with fewer preservatives, dye-free, gluten-free ○ Increase marketing of health related to food ○ Effective marketing of fresh, local produce ○ Promote whole foods, less convenience food ○ Encourage farm to table events, cooking events with a variety of meals made, food festivals, local food parties involving education presentations, demonstrations, and participation. ○ Communication with local grocers, growers, participants ○ Promotion of seasonal eating ○ Offer free fresh food samples while parents shop ○ Publicize free cooking demonstrations at convenient hours on cooking and canning
Purchase locally
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Buy local bread, grain ○ Use local farm meats

- Eliminate the additional costs that are built into food costs (transportation, packaging)
- Donations: information on where to share excess produce
- Create food hub/public market
- “Buy local. We have an awesome grocery store. Keep dollars in our community.”
- Education of the public as to where the food resources are: farmers markets, Bountiful Baskets, food co-ops

Incentives

- Utilize USDA programs
- Connect with commodities programs
- Provide incentives to produce locally (financial aid for production and/or processing)
- Promote membership in 4-H

Recruit more people to the local food movement

Connect growers to a viable market

Market outside our area

Education

World Café participants offered a variety of education approaches to increase the consumption of healthy food options including broad-based public education campaigns as well as more targeted education efforts directed toward segments of the population such as children. Classes, trainings, posts on social media and presentations were among the different modalities suggested with topics covering healthy eating habits, selecting and buying healthy foods, preparing meals with fresh ingredients, label reading, gardening, constructing community or school gardens, preserving fresh foods through canning and drying, and handling food waste and composting.

Comments related to education

Preparing healthy food

- Using social media to give education on healthy meals
- Offer classes to teach healthy cooking, to grow food and pre-prepare meals
- Teach young people cooking, growing and getting involved in community gardens
- Provide education to consumers of government assistance programs (e.g., SNAP)

Education in schools

- Create school gardens
- Teach home economics classes
- Promote food education in Head Start
- Training for parents, lessons on cooking healthy for young parents
- Teach gardening/farming through the school years
- K-State teaching kids how to cook and prepare breakfast

Education of the public

- Encourage and teach label reading
- Educate for a better understanding of what healthy is
- Help people to improve their buying skills, selecting better choices
- Educate on preserving (canning, freezing, dehydrate, freeze dry)
- Teach lessons on food waste and composting
- Teach about natural gardening and herbs
- Education on growing gardens from a young age to older people

- Conduct educational campaign to increase consumer awareness of the value of foods
- Ban texting at meals
- Encourage family meals

Train cooks in institutions

Have master gardeners share gardening ideas

Improving Food Access

Participants expressed concern that many local community members lack access to fresh foods and offered a variety of recommendations to improve the availability of healthy food options. Increasing the availability of affordable fresh food would enable more people, including seniors and low-income families, to be able to make healthy food choices. Government assistance could provide incentives to those with lower levels of family income to buy healthy food. Additionally, local fresh produce could be stocked at local food pantries and food banks. As another strategy, produce could be specifically grown for low-income families.

Transportation was mentioned as a barrier to reducing costs. It was suggested that food delivery be provided at no or low cost to the disabled and elderly. Local transportation companies could be hired instead of larger companies to transport food. Finally, transportation options be provided to enable more people to travel to farmers market to purchase fresh food. There was also a suggestion that mobile farmers markets be created to travel to small towns to sell and distribute healthy food items and local produce.

Other innovative ideas included setting up a local access point for purchasing food that would operate as a distribution warehouse or neighborhood sharing site. Café participants recommended that community greenhouses be installed to allow fresh produce to be grown and to be available throughout the year. Options might also be considered to establish a system for distributing excess produce to schools, senior centers and other institutions. Local community members can also be encouraged to grow a larger variety of foods in personal gardens, and to process any extra food that is grown through drying, vacuum sealing, and canning.

Finally, the participants recommended that food access be improved by increasing the number of local producers and strengthening the relationships between local farmers and government run programs such as schools.

Comments related to food access & availability

Provide easier access

- Grow produce for lower-income families
- Explore options and resources to help low-income families
- Keep healthy eating affordable
- Have fresh local produce for food pantry
- Variety of healthy foods offered through government assistance
- Provide easy access to gardening products and plants
- Increase access to local food at public places/retailers (grocery, restaurants, hospitals, schools, senior housing)

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Install greenhouses to access fresh fruits and vegetables off season
Transportation
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Provide delivery for the disabled and the elderly ○ Provide transportation for consumers to get to farmers markets ○ Expedite transportation to get product to market ○ Hire local transportation ○ Cheaper, more efficient transportation ○ Create local packing plant for milk, bread
Distribution
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Create mobile farmers markets that travel to all small towns to sell, distribute ○ Create distribution spine ○ Provide a local access point for purchasing food, neighborhood sharing site, centrally stocked warehouse ○ Local market place, different from a farmers market, where it's easy to sell and buy, online website. ○ Use people's extra produce: have list of who has extra (local growers), distribution point, local processing with blast freezer vacuum sealer, use senior centers, hospitals, etc. ○ Increase investment in processing and distribution ○ Open a community commercial kitchen
Local farmers/growers
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Improve the relationship between local farmers and government programs (schools, etc.) so that local food can be used locally by the masses ○ Have more local producers ○ Trade goods with producers
Greater availability
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Growing a bigger variety in my own garden ○ Increase number of farmers markets ○ Increase availability, especially to shut-ins and outlying areas ○ Have cold storage

Changes in Food Products

The Café groups addressed strategies for improving the food system by changing the ways in which food is prepared, processed and packaged. They suggested that the packaging of foods be reduced or eliminated to the extent possible and recommended that simple, recyclable and attractive food labeling and packaging could be strategies for making healthy or fresh foods more appealing for consumers to buy.

Many participants believe that food should be processed through healthier practices, such as employing canning or drying techniques in place of preservatives. Improved options for handling food waste effectively were also mentioned. The consuming public should be more broadly educated about food waste. In addition, the participants suggested that community composting and recycling systems be instituted to effectively deal with extra food supplies that would otherwise go to waste. Lastly, the participants considered optional farming practices that could improve the food system such as natural forms of farming (e.g. permaculture and hydroponics/aquaponics), improving crop management practices that promote healthier soils for growing, instituting smarter watering practices to lower farming

costs and reduce environmental impacts, and designing edible landscaping projects and raised bed gardening.

Comments related to changes in food product
Packaging <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Reduce packaging ○ Increase local processing and packaging ○ Simple, recyclable, attractive food labels/packaging for local foods ○ Encourage bio-degradable packaging ○ Packaging: make more alternatives to plastic available
Less/better processing of foods <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Less processing, growing with fewer chemicals ○ Make processed foods healthier ○ Get rid of “middle man” regarding processing, shipping, shelf life
Institute community composting and recycling <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Address food waste ○ Reuse/eliminate waste ○ Use expired foods for local compost/growers ○ Develop a local disposing system ○ Get local businesses involved in composting ○ Dispose by recycling ○ Stop throwing away food. Give to help homeless, etc. ○ Create end users for ugly fruits-veggies
Farming practices <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Use more natural forms of farming: permaculture, hydroponics/aquaponics ○ Do raised bed gardening, especially with seniors in mind ○ Better crop management practices=better soil=better yields ○ genetics- better, longer lasting food ○ edible landscaping ○ Institute smarter watering practices to lower cost and impact to environment

Next Steps

Having convened 138 community stakeholders to participate in World Café discussions across eight counties in northwest Kansas, the Western Prairie Food, Farm and Community Alliance will now review these stakeholder recommendations as it considers next step options for promoting a system-wide approach to improving access to healthy, local and affordable food in Northwest Kansas.

As a first step, the findings from this report will be distributed back to the County Advisory Teams within each of the participating counties for their review and feedback.

Next step options under consideration include the development of an action plan defining possible strategic directions. Using the food system graphic, the Alliance is considering an assessment that will evaluate each food system sector in terms of both assets/strengths and well as potential gaps/challenges.

The Alliance will continue to encourage citizen involvement through the County Advisory Teams while staying informed regarding state and national initiatives that impact the region's food system.

At the national level, the Alliance will monitor potential food system changes that might result from potential revisions to the Farm Bill as legislated by the US Congress. Budget appropriations for the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) and the Double Up Food Bucks program will be tracked. Finally, Federal efforts to promote agritourism will also be closely watched.

At the state level, the Alliance will advocate for continued reductions in the Kansas sales tax on food and will seek to document the burden represented by the food sales tax through resources developed by the KC Healthy Kids organization and other advocacy groups.

The Alliance is grateful for the continued support it has received from the County Advisory Teams and their engaged constituents who offered an insightful and action-oriented set of recommendations as a foundation for the Alliance's continued efforts to create system-wide strategies for improving access to healthy, local and affordable food.

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