

Extension Master Gardener Volunteer Program Master Gardener Efforts Improve Food Security

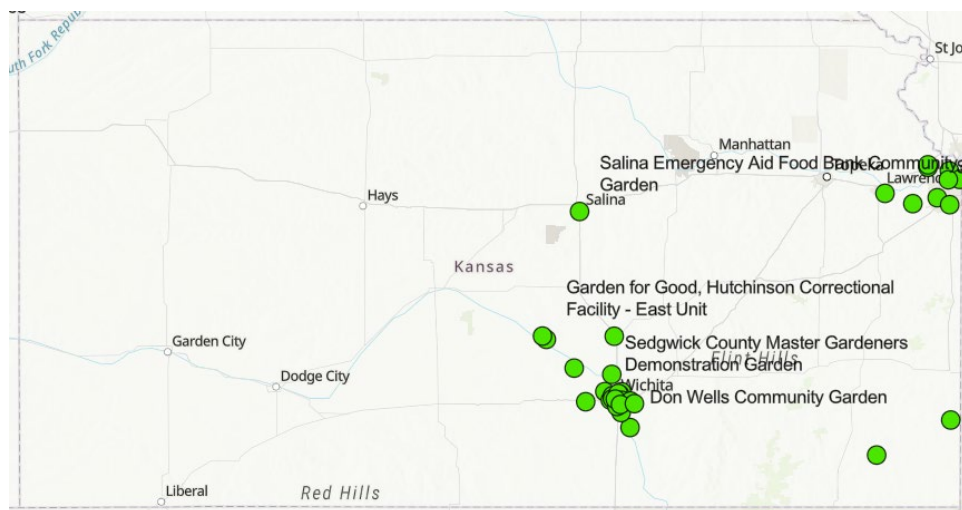
The Situation

In 2021, 10.2 percent of Kansas households (291,460 adults and children¹) experienced food insecurity.² To help meet their needs, these Kansas families rely on food pantries. However, the availability of nutritious, fresh foods can be inconsistent, even though both food pantries and their clients express a desire for more fresh produce.³ Food pantries routinely cite reliance on donations as one barrier to stocking fresh fruits and vegetables.³ Organizational partnerships, such as with Extension Master Gardener, increase the likelihood of fresh produce distribution.

What We Did

The Kansas Extension Master Gardener (EMG) volunteer program improves local food security and increases the availability of nutritionally adequate foods by maintaining community garden sites dedicated to growing and donating fresh produce. Trained volunteers work together to manage the gardens and build relationships with local food assistance organizations willing to distribute the donated produce.

The impact of this work in each community extends beyond donating fresh, healthy food options. Through educational programming, EMG volunteers also teach adults and children how to successfully grow their own food. Education and outreach take place in demonstration gardens, during youth programs, seminars, and local events, and through individual contacts in local Extension offices, bridging critical issues such as nutrition education, food safety, and physical and emotional well-being through gardening activities.



[Extension Master Gardener Donation Gardens Map](#)

*(A product of the Partnerships for Data Innovation at USDA-ARS⁴)
(This image does not represent all food garden sites in Kansas.)*

Outcomes

Food-insecure Kansas families were recipients of **76,122** servings of fresh, healthy produce grown and donated through the efforts of **436** trained Kansas Extension Master Gardener (EMG) volunteers.

- **One-third of all** active Kansas EMG volunteers are involved in food garden projects.
- **28** community garden sites (in **19** counties) are maintained by EMG volunteers for growing fruits and vegetables for donation.
- Over **25,374** pounds (about the weight of a school bus) of fresh produce were safely harvested to donate locally.
- **54** local food assistance organizations partnered with their local Extension office through EMG to accept fresh produce donations.
- **27** communities received fresh, nutritionally adequate, locally grown fruits and vegetables to distribute to those in need.
- **\$47,957** in produce was grown and donated from EMG-hosted garden sites.

Success Story

Kansas Extension Master Gardener volunteers in Cowley and Reno counties partner with correctional facilities to facilitate volunteer training and mentor residents growing, harvesting and donating fresh produce locally. Since the start of the Reno County-Hutchinson Correctional Facility program in 2011, participants have grown more than 232,782 pounds of produce. The Cowley County-Winfield Correctional Facility program, which began in 2022, grew and donated over 1,500 pounds of produce in its first year.

Garden for Good Program

“The Garden for Good program, started in 2011, is a collaboration between K-State Research and Extension, or KSRE, and the Hutchinson Correctional Facility to educate the inmates about gardening and provide an activity to occupy and enrich the men's free time. The program has evolved into a community project that benefits both the inmates and the community.”⁵



[Garden For Good, Hutchinson Correctional Facility](#)

(A product of K-State Research and Extension⁶)

WCF Residents learn to become Master Gardener while donating harvested produce to local food pantry

“With the help of volunteers from the K-State Ag Extension office in Cowley County, twelve Winfield Correctional Facility residents are the first [residents in this facility] to undergo a program tailored after the Master Gardener program of K-State. The organically managed gardens are yielding produce that include radishes, potatoes, sweet potatoes, pumpkins, basil, zucchini, yellow squash, spaghetti squash, watermelons, cantaloupe, honeydew melons, okra, cucumbers, lettuce, dill, cilantro, and a variety of peppers. The program has harvested more than a thousand pounds of produce in one season, donating the produce to the local Winfield Food Pantry.”⁷



[WCF Garden Program](#)

(A product of Kansas Department of Corrections⁷)

References

- ¹ Map the Meal Gap 2023. <https://map.feedingamerica.org/county/2021/overall/kansas>. Published May 3, 2023.
- ² Food Security in the U.S. <https://ers.usda.gov/topics/food-nutrition-assistance/food-security-in-the-u-s/interactive-charts-and-highlights/#States>. Updated October 25, 2023.
- ³ Food Assistance and Hunger in the Heartland 2021. <https://foodsecurity.missouri.edu/wp-content/uploads/2022/05/FAHH-2021-Full-Report-Kansas-Statewide.pdf>. Published June 2022.
- ⁴ Extension Master Gardener Donation Gardens Map. <https://usdaars.maps.arcgis.com/apps/instant/basic/index.html?appid=52bd703ad6e8475582ee7fcfdc9cd07e>. Updated October 2023.
- ⁵ Paulsen Named Recipient of 2023 Excellence in Engagement Award. <https://ksre.k-state.edu/tuesday/announcement/?id=90175>. Updated May 16, 2023.
- ⁶ Garden for Good, Hutchinson Correctional Facility. https://youtu.be/_VKDROXMYmQ?feature=shared. Published July 24, 2013.
- ⁷ WCF Garden Program Donates Produce to Local Pantry. <https://www.doc.ks.gov/wcf-garden-program-donates-produce-to-local-pantry>. Updated October 11, 2022.

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[2022 Statewide Impact Report](#)