

Kansas Rural Center Transfers Local Food Program

The Kansas Rural Center (KRC) and the Kansas Department of Agriculture today announced that the state agency will take over administration of “Our Local Food” (OLF), a project developed by the Kansas Rural Center.

“After several hard years of work establishing the need for and user platforms for this brand, we are thrilled to see the program taken up by our state agriculture agency,” said Julie Mettenburg, executive director of the Kansas Rural Center. “This will be an important next step in growing our local foods infrastructure in Kansas, as farmers, consumers and food businesses receive more support in growing their local food economies and businesses.” Mettenburg said that KRC will continue to work in local foods issues, such as its current role as a partner in Kansas State University’s Rural Grocery Initiative and in sponsoring other producer education and outreach opportunities. “We will continue to promote the OLF program, while seeking to work on the next important needs in local food systems development in our state,” she said.

Beginning Jan. 1, 2013, KDA will take over ownership and administration of the OLF brandmark, promotional materials and website, ourlocalfoodks.org. In addition, KDA will assume ownership and responsibility for ksfarmersmarkets.org. These programs have been purchased by KDA from the KRC through a U.S. Department of Agriculture Specialty Crop Block Grant, to promote growth in the production, consumption and sales of fresh fruits and vegetables.

The Our Local Food program will join the state trademark program for Kansas products and will specifically promote Kansas-grown fresh fruits and vegetables.

“The Our Local Food program will give us additional options for promoting, assisting and supporting producers, food businesses and consumers across the state,” said Sarah Green, local foods and rural outreach coordinator for KDA. “The Kansas Department of Agriculture is committed to supporting the entire spectrum of Kansas agriculture, which is our state’s largest industry.”

The centerpiece of Our Local Food is the website ourlocalfoodks.org, which serves as an online “food hub” for Kansans looking to sell or purchase locally grown produce and other farm goods. KRC launched the program in 2010 in several counties in northeast Kansas; in 2011 it expanded into three regions — the Kaw River Valley, or Lawrence-Kansas City region, the Twin Rivers, or Emporia region, and the South Central, or Wichita-Hutchinson region. In 2012, it expanded statewide, including to counties in the Southeast region.

The regional chapters will be phased out of the program, and attention turned to recruiting producers across the state. Interested consumers, producers or food businesses may sign-up for the program by visiting ourlocalfood ks.org.

Mettenburg said the transfer of the OLF program and websites was a testament to KRC's long history of work in local food systems.

"KRC has served as a pioneer in the agricultural community, listening to the needs of our farmers and rural Kansans and initiating important conversations," she says. "Our work in local food goes back to our early days, and includes our leadership of the Kansas Food Policy Council. KDA's further promotion of this program is a major indicator of just how important local foods will be in the future to our state economy and rural community development."