

Kansas State University Hosts National Summit

Local grocery stores are vital to rural America. But as small towns lose population to larger cities, the issue of finding healthy food in rural areas is a growing concern.

To help small grocery store owners create sustainable solutions, Kansas State University is hosting the fourth National Rural Grocery Summit, June 9-10, at the Hilton Garden Inn, 410 S. Third St., **Manhattan**.

Store owners, nonprofits, foundations, citizen leaders, food suppliers and other concerned stakeholders will spend two days talking about the triple bottom line of rural grocery benefits: nutritional health, economic development and community sustainability.

The summit is part of Kansas State University's Rural Grocery Initiative, which is supported by a \$500,000 grant from the U.S. Department of Agriculture. The initiative addresses nutritional challenges faced by rural communities and is organized by the university's Center for Engagement and Community Development. An interdisciplinary team of professors from the university's agricultural economics, human nutrition and marketing departments and K-State Research and Extension specialists are working on supporting research.

"K-State is not only a leader in making food available to the world, but also is a leader in making food available across the state of Kansas," said David Procter, professor and director of the Center for Engagement and Community Development.

Kansas State University researchers found that 98 percent of people who live in rural areas work and shop in larger communities nearby. This creates food deserts — large rural areas where people don't have easy access to healthy food. People who don't have reliable transportation or the elderly can't always get to a big-box grocery store that's 20 miles away, Procter said.

Grocery stores are community hubs providing essential jobs and taxes. They also are important sources of nutrition and health. Thriving local grocery stores are a sign of a healthy rural community, but Procter said that too often these stores are struggling to survive.

The concept of food hubs, community gardens, farmer's markets, food policy councils and cooperative grocery store business models will be discussed at the summit.

"Our goal is to bring business, financial and marketing professionals in to talk about enhancing and running grocery stores and other venues for healthy food to rural areas," Procter said.

Since the first summit in 2008, attendance has grown by almost 100 percent, and participants have come from 16 states.

More information on the summit, including how to register, is available at <http://www.dce.k-state.edu/conf/ruralgrocery/>.