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Nutrition and food safety extension programming in urban Kansas City

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Abstract

Kansas State University and the University of Missouri Extension Services conduct a great deal of programming in nutrition and food safety in urban areas of Kansas City (KC). This manuscript highlights the efforts of local and state-level Extension educators' efforts across two different states and in four different counties. Information will be shared on low-income nutrition education, other nutrition education efforts, work with farmers' market consumers and vendors, home food preservation, food preparation, and other related educational and outreach efforts. Methodologies used to work with underserved audiences and with community partners will also be outlined. All areas of Extension programming in urban areas face numerous challenges, which are also present in nutrition and food safety Extension programs. In urban areas, there are normally many other organizations providing similar services to those provided by Extension, including numerous non-governmental organizations (NGOs), hospitals, grocery stores, universities, and other entities. Therefore, it is essential for Extension personnel to partner with appropriate groups and focus on the comparative advantage that University Extension services can provide. Further, many people in urban areas are not familiar with Extension programming and need to be familiarized with what Extension is about and the value of working with or learning from Extension. In addition, populations in urban areas often tend to be more diverse and programming may likely need to be adapted to realities that community faces. Some examples of information that will be covered in the presentation include details about how the Wyandotte County Extension Nutrition Education program (in Kansas City, KS) has worked to personalize education for the diverse populations living in their county. This program has successfully trained community partners to assist with delivering evidence-based curricula to underserved audiences.

Keywords

outreach, health, metropolitan, university, education, partnerships

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Kansas State University and the University of Missouri Extension Services conduct a great deal of programming in nutrition and food safety in urban areas of Kansas City (KC). This manuscript highlights the efforts of local and state-level Extension educators' efforts across two different states and in four different counties. Information will be shared on low-income nutrition education, other nutrition education efforts, work with farmers' market consumers and vendors, home food preservation, food preparation, and other related educational and outreach efforts. Methodologies used to work with underserved audiences and with community partners will also be outlined. All areas of Extension programming in urban areas face numerous challenges, which are also present in nutrition and food safety Extension programs. In urban areas, there are normally many other organizations providing similar services to those provided by Extension, including numerous non-governmental organizations (NGOs), hospitals, grocery stores, universities, and other entities. Therefore, it is essential for Extension personnel to partner with appropriate groups and focus on the comparative advantage that University Extension services can provide. Further, many people in urban areas are not familiar with Extension programming and need to be familiarized with what Extension is about and the value of working with or learning from Extension. In addition, populations in urban areas often tend to be more diverse and programming may likely need to be adapted to realities that community faces. Some examples of information that will be covered in the presentation include details about how the Wyandotte County Extension Nutrition Education program (in Kansas City, KS) has worked to personalize education for the diverse populations living in their county. This program has successfully trained community partners to assist with delivering evidence-based curricula to underserved audiences.

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INTRODUCTION

The greater Kansas City area extends across two states, Kansas and Missouri, and across approximately five counties, depending on the method of classification. Each of the counties has unique needs and realities related to the nutrition and food safety of its population. All of the counties also are served by local Kansas State University (KSU) or University of Missouri (MU) Extension staff involved in nutrition and food safety-related programming and outreach to the people of that area.

Conducting Extension programming in urban areas includes challenges that may be different than those faced in rural areas of Kansas or Missouri. In urban areas, there are normally a number of other service providers that provide similar education and programming as university extension services. This is particularly true in nutrition and food safety as there are numerous non-governmental organizations (NGOs), hospitals, grocery stores, other universities (such as the University of Kansas or the University of Missouri-Kansas City medical schools) that are also providing education and outreach in this content and geographical area. Therefore, it is important for Extension personnel to partner with other appropriate groups working in the same area to help extend the reach and effectiveness of Extension programming. When partnering, it is important for Extension to focus on our strengths, particularly being a research-based and objective organization.

Some organizations providing nutrition and food safety programming in urban areas may be part of a private organization that is trying to sell something and compete with their peers, but Extension can provide unbiased information and assistance that is based on scientific research.

An additional challenge of any Extension programming in urban areas is that many people living in urban areas may not be as familiar with Extension as they may not have had any interaction with Extension in the past. For example, it may be less likely that they were active in 4-H when they were younger or their parents may not have consulted their local Extension office for advice on various topics either. Therefore, it is even more important to familiarize urban dwellers with the value of Extension and the services that Extension can provide.

Urban populations are often more diverse than the clientele with which Extension personnel in more rural areas typically interact. Extension programs may be developed at the State level by a subject matter specialist who may not have much experience with ethnically or racially diverse populations. Urban settings may also have a larger immigrant population or other groups which necessitate adapting the materials developed at the state level to fit the local situation. Local Extension personnel working in urban areas strive to be aware of the realities of the population they are serving, so they often need to modify curricula and programming developed elsewhere to meet the needs of people in their area.

KSU and MU Extension personnel working in urban areas of KC work hard to meet the challenges of Extension programming in urban areas to share unbiased, science-based information with the local population. This is particularly true with nutrition and food safety programming. This manuscript provides information on Extension programming in the areas of low-income nutrition education, other nutrition education, home food preservation, farmers markets, and food safety for businesses. It also provides information on how KSU and MU Extension work with community partners to benefit the communities that they serve.

DISCUSSION

Both MU and KSU have strong low-income nutrition education and outreach programs in urban areas of KC. Much of these efforts are directed towards people eligible to receive Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) funding, which was formerly known as “food stamps”. Most of the funding for these programs comes from the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) through either the SNAP-Education (SNAP-Ed) program or the Expanded Food and Nutrition Education Program (EFNEP). In the past, efforts were focused more on primarily nutrition education and now the programs have been expanded to include a larger focus on the policy, systems and environment that affect peoples’ healthy food choices.

The MU low income nutrition education program in urban areas of KC works in Jackson, Clay and Platte counties, as well as in MO counties surrounding urban KC. A majority of the low-income nutrition programming on the Missouri side of urban KC occurs in Jackson County which had a population of 703,011 in 2019 (US Census Bureau, 2019) and a population density of 1,115 people per square mile. An estimated 24% of the population is African-American and 9% is Hispanic, with 13% of the population living below the poverty line (US Census Bureau, 2019). Note that the most recent comprehensive data available is from 2019, thus before the COVID-19 pandemic. MU Extension has 19 diverse Nutrition Program Educators working in many areas of Jackson County. As much as possible, MU Extension also works with Lincoln University Extension, which is a historically black 1890 land-grant, public, comprehensive institution based in Jefferson City, Missouri and with outreach efforts primarily in urban areas of Missouri. This collaboration with Lincoln University occurs in nutrition education efforts, as well as other areas of Extension programming. MU Extension emphasizes the use of evidence-based standardized curricula across

the state, but also adapts programs and partners with other local organizations to provide the greatest impact in improving nutrition with that particular group. Some particularly successful activities of the MU Extension low-income nutrition program in Jackson County have been as follows:

- 1) Working with Harvesters Community Food Network to create videos for healthy, budget-friendly recipes which are shown at Harvesters food distribution sites and on social media
- 2) Developing a webinar series with Harvesters on nutrition basics and consumer food safety
- 3) Working with a local library where individuals can check out basic kitchen supplies and virtually cook with the Nutrition Program Assistant during online classes.

KSU's primary efforts in low-income nutrition education in the urban areas of KC are currently occurring in Wyandotte County. In 2019, Wyandotte County had a population of 165,429 (US Census Bureau, 2019) with a population density of 1,039 per square mile. An estimated 23% of the population is African-American and 30% is Hispanic, with 18.4% of the total population living below the poverty line (US Census Bureau, 2019). The low-income nutrition education program in Wyandotte County emphasizes adapting the evidence-based curricula used at the state level to the diverse populations living in the county. The program has also found that the peer education model and training of community partners to deliver programming has been very effective. For example, the program has successfully trained community partners such as El Centro, a non-governmental organization (NGO) that assists Latinos and others in Wyandotte and Johnson counties, to deliver nutrition education programs. One of the major challenges in nutrition education is hiring and retaining culturally competent bi-lingual educators to meet the community's needs. This is part of the reason that training community partners to assist in delivering training has been so effective.

MU Extension also provides a number of other nutrition education programs and outreach to people of all income levels in urban areas of KC. Some of these programs include: Chronic Disease Self-Management, Diabetes Self-Management, Cooking Matters (for both kids and adults), Cooking Matters at the Store, Eat Smart in Parks, and Stock Healthy, Shop Healthy. MU Extension has also developed a Missouri Food Assessment Healthy Food Access Community Tool: <https://allthingsmissouri.org/missouri-food-assessment/> for Missouri communities to utilize and developed the Missouri Food Finder <https://mofoodfinder.org/> to assist consumers looking for sources of food other than typical grocery stores during the COVID-19 pandemic. MU Extension also conducts a number of other physical activity and health-related programs in the urban KC area.

KSU Extension also conducts other nutrition education programs for people of all income levels in the urban KC area. One unique feature of KSU's program is the utilization of Master Food Volunteers (EMFV) for training and assistance with other education and outreach efforts (www.ksre.k-state.edu/mfv). The EMFV program is modeled after the Master Gardener program, where volunteers must undergo extensive training before they start to assist with educational programs. Some examples of nutrition education programs of KSU Extension in urban areas of KC include: Hands-on cooking classes for adults with developmental disabilities, Kids in the Kitchen, Chronic Disease Self- Management, Dining With Diabetes, and numerous other types of food preparation classes.

Home food preservation education is an area of growing interest for both KSU and MU Extension. All the counties in the urban areas of KC teach various home food preservation classes, including information on canning, drying, and freezing foods. Both KSU and MU Extension also provide information and demonstrations on safe home food preservation at grocery stores and health fairs in the urban KC area, when possible before COVID, and now offer virtual classes. Both

KSU and MU Extension have websites and social media pages with home food preservation information, which includes a number of short videos on various canning topics, which are available from www.rrc.k-state.edu/preservation. KSU and MU Extension also develop and distribute a joint two-state home food preservation newsletter throughout all of both states.

Food safety at farmers markets is a topic of growing interest and Extension programming in urban KC, as well as in the rest of Kansas and Missouri. KSU and MU Extension personnel have developed publications and delivered workshops with information on food safety and other topics of interest to farmers market vendors in urban KC, as well as other areas of the two states. KSU and MU Extension also provide information for consumers on shopping safely at farmers markets in urban KC and throughout both states, both before COVID-19 and in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic. KSU Extension is a partner in the Heartland Double Up Food Bucks collaborative that provides incentives for SNAP recipients to purchase additional fruits and vegetables at farmers markets. MU Extension distributes the Missouri Senior Farmers Market Nutrition Program vouchers to seniors in Missouri side of the Kansas City metro. Both of these programs help produce growers to sell more produce and allow vulnerable populations to access more health fresh fruits and vegetables.

Food Safety training for other businesses in urban KC is also provided by MU and KSU Extension. ServSafe Handler courses and other food safety training is offered to restaurants, food service, food processors, and other interested groups, in particular by the Wyandotte County Extension Office in Kansas City, KS. MU and KSU Extension also provide training and information related to on-farm produce safety in urban KC and throughout both states, including the Food Safety Modernization Act (FSMA) training for produce growers. MU Extension's Metro Foods Team developed a Selling Local Foods curricula that has been offered throughout urban KC and the rest of Missouri. Both KSU and MU Extension also work with food banks and food pantries on food safety issues and training, particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic, to help ensure the safety of the personnel working or volunteering and the safety of the food consumed by those utilizing food banks.

CONCLUSION

MU and KSU Extension personnel are increasingly recognizing the importance of working closely with community partners to help to improve the consumption of safe and healthy foods by the people living in urban areas of KC. We recognize that working with other partners can greatly magnify the impact of our work. This is particularly evident in the low-income nutrition education programs, which in the past focused primarily on education alone. Now there is a much stronger emphasis on strengthening the policy, systems and environment that surrounds those educational efforts, which necessitates working with a broad range of community partners. Many of the Extension personnel working in urban KC are active in different local and state-level coalitions including various stakeholders to address issues facing urban KC. Extension personnel work with relevant NGOs, governmental organizations, and the private sector to help improve the health and community and economic vitality of urban KC. We work with NGOs such as El Centro, Catholic Charities, and various food banks. We also work with governmental departments of agriculture, health, and social services in various capacities. Hospitals, grocery stores, farmers, and other businesses are also important partners for Extension programming efforts in urban KC.

Various publications and more information on these and other programs offered by MU and KSU Extension in nutrition and food safety is available from the following websites: www.ksre.k-state.edu/food and <http://missourifamilies.org> or <http://extension.missouri.edu/nutrition>.

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