

Funding Kansas Community Gardens: Lessons From a Mini-Grant Project

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Challenge, Opportunity, and Objective

Many Kansans want to grow their own fresh produce, but often lack a place to have a garden. Kansas State University Research & Extension (KSRE) partnered with the Kansas Health Foundation to establish the Kansas Community Garden Grants project in 2011. The objective of this project was to increase Kansans' access to fresh, healthy produce by expanding the number of community gardens in Kansas. The goal was to establish 60 new gardens over a three-year period. Seed money was made available for groups to receive mini-grants of up to \$5,000 to establish new community gardens.

Implementation

K-State Research and Extension developed the criteria for the mini-grants, including the application process and the rating form. A selection committee of horticultural Extension educators and community leaders was chosen to evaluate the applications. Extension personnel promoted the project throughout the state.

Applications were solicited each of the 3 years of the program, with approximately \$100,000 available for distribution each year. The first year a total of 90 applications were received. Because of the exceptional response, an additional \$50,000 was added to the award pool for both 2013 and 2014.

Some gardens did not request the full \$5,000 and were later offered a "supplemental" grant award in order to offer the most support to successful gardens.

New Resources Created

Website (www.KansasCommunityGardens.org)

- Grant recipient descriptions and links
- 16 videos
- Links to relevant KSRE Horticulture pubs
- Conference archive
- Garden registry by county
- Sample community garden documentation
 - By-laws, rules, budgets, etc.
- Other grant opportunities
- How to donate produce

Conference Goals (2013 & 2014)

1. Bring community garden leaders together to learn new information, share successes and challenges they had with their own gardens, and build a network of gardens across the state.
2. Provide workshops on gardening and management topics, presented by specialists in these areas.
3. Plan garden tours of successful community gardens to allow participants the opportunity to see best gardening and management practices put into action.

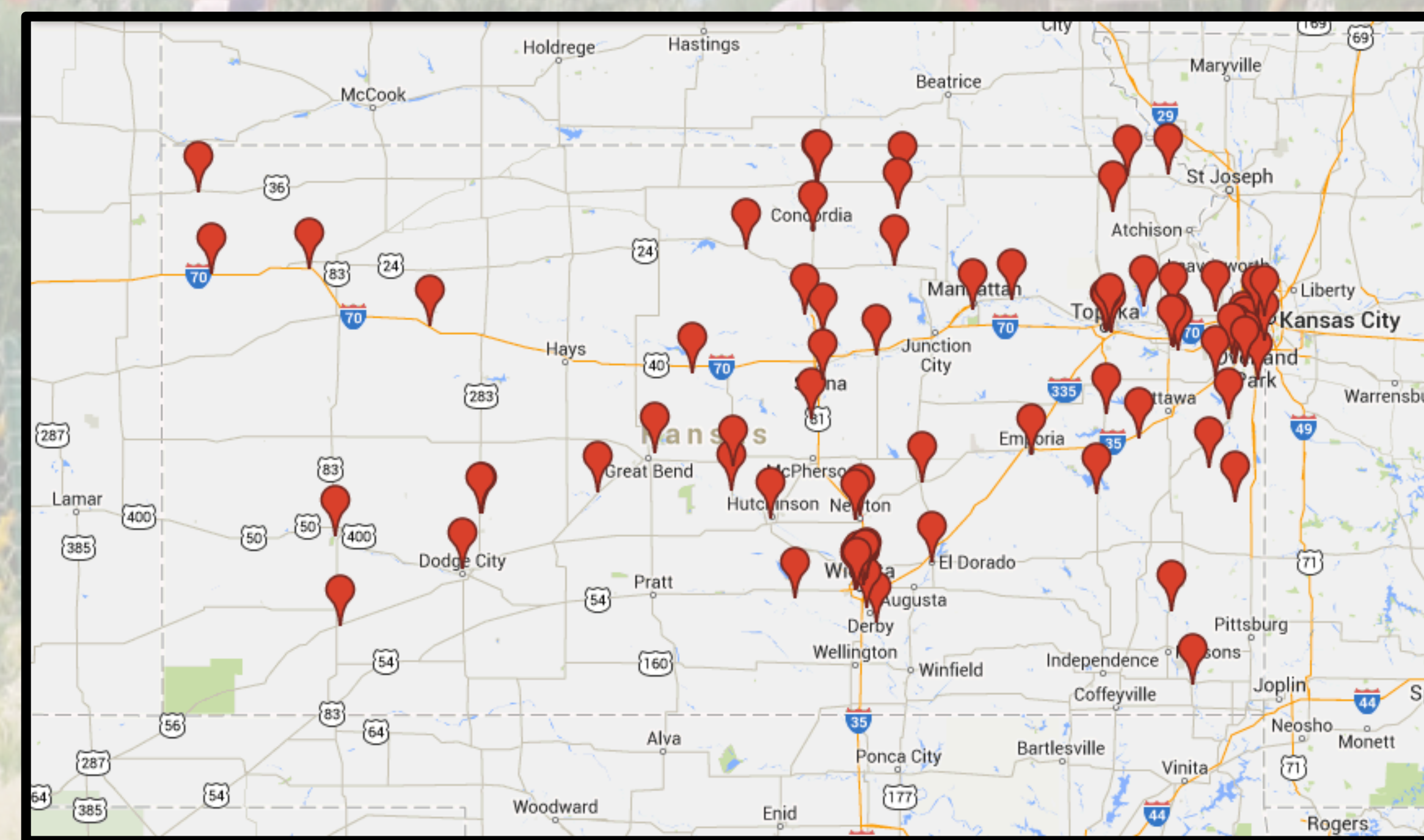


Figure 1: Eighty-five new community gardens created in Kansas as a result of a grant from the Kansas Health Foundation to K-State Research and Extension.

Impact

Through the 3-year period, 85 gardens (25 over the original goal) received grants worth more than \$394,000 (Figure 1). The gardens were located in rural, suburban, and urban areas of all parts of the state. Both allotment gardens and communal gardens were funded. The wide range of gardens involved in this project put us in contact with a diverse audience. Prior to this project some of the garden participants had little or no connection with the Cooperative Extension Service.

At the end of the third year:

- 85 gardens funded (82 still operating)
- 875,632 Sq. ft. in communal gardens added
- 1,500,805 Sq. ft. in total community garden space available
- 1,551 allotment garden plots added
- 5,253 gardeners/volunteers involved in community garden projects

The gardens have made a significant impact in providing more Kansans with access to fresh, healthy foods.



Lessons Learned

Clearly there was much more to this project than just collecting applications and awarding the mini-grants. Our goal has been to assist all the recipient gardens in developing into successful community gardens that will still be thriving 10 years from now. Along the way, we found that some of the most successful gardens exhibited the following characteristics:

- Sense of community and commitment—a "community within a community"
- Good gardeners (to teach the new gardeners)
- Diverse, robust leadership team (not a single person)
- Good communication, governance
- A plan for obtaining water (wells, hydrants, pump from lake, rain barrels, etc.)
- A plan for managing and paying for the water (plot fees, produce sales, etc.)
- Good budget, changes over time with the resources and needs of the garden
 - Shift efforts from development stage to financial & organizational stability
 - Other strategies needed for ongoing, yearly expenses