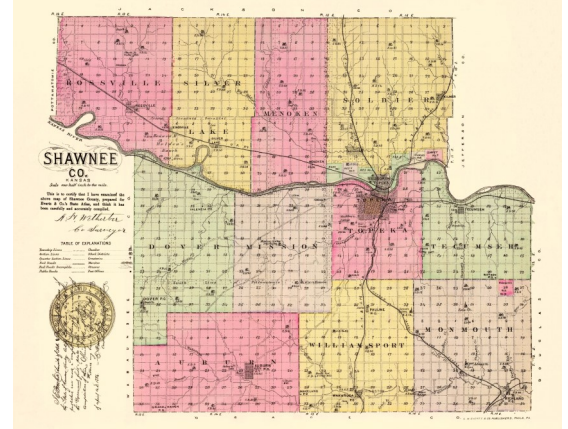


*K-State Research & Extension provides research-based information to help people, businesses and*

## Shawnee County Extension Education for a Healthier Community



The Shawnee County Extension Office had another year to be proud of in 2021. We learned how to deliver our programs virtually in 2020 and in 2021 we took those skills and learned how to deliver programs in a hybrid format.

When it was safe to bring our customers back together, we did not want to exclude those that still had to participate from their homes. We made sure our programs had a virtual option when requested.

Extension is naturally concerned with health. The health of people, the health of our environment and the health of our communities. Our mission is to improve the lives of our constituents through education. Our Agents were quick to keep people safe while providing them the services they needed.

There are three recognized types of education. The two ends of the education spectrum are Formal education and Non-Formal education. Formal education is highly structured with a degree or certification at completion. Non-Formal education is learning from your environment and past experiences.

In the middle of these two types of education is Informal Education. This type of education is for practical use and is sought out by the learner's interests and immediate needs. It is driven by curiosity and need.

Shawnee County Extension does offer a few programs that have a certification, Pesticide Application testing, Master Gardner certification, Quality Livestock Assurance

certification, etc. But the majority of the education Extension Agents are creating and directing are based off of what Shawnee County residents are wanting for immediate benefit.

The selection of our programs are reviewed or recommended by our Extension Council that is 24 elected volunteers from Shawnee County. This is why what Extension does is Ford and Finney County is not what it does in Shawnee County. Our community tells us what our citizens need and Agents work to meet those needs in their area of expertise.

K-State Research and Extension has identified five grand challenges that every Kansas County shares. The research and programming supported by Kansas State University revolves around Global Food Systems, Health, Developing Tomorrow's Leaders, Community Vitality and Water.

All of these challenges relate to the health of Kansas as well as Shawnee County. The last two years have taught our professionals plenty. One thing we are for sure of is our ability to improve our community's health no matter the obstacles.

Thank you for your support. We could not help Shawnee County the way we do without our local advocates for education.

**Visit our website at:**  
[www.shawnee.ksu.edu](http://www.shawnee.ksu.edu)

## Keeping the Next Generation of Farmers and Ranchers Safe

**Leroy Russell**  
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Kansas and Shawnee County has a strong agricultural and agribusiness base that serves as the number one driver of our economy. Shawnee County has 847 farms totaling 201,662 acres in farm ground. The average age of farmers and ranchers in Kansas is 58.1 years old. We will have to have trained replacements for many of our local farmers in the next 20 years.



Pictured above is youth showing at the Shawnee County Fair in the market goat project. All youth that show livestock at the Shawnee County Fair or a state show must complete Youth for the Quality Care of Animals training. The youth learn how to stay safe and how to grow a healthy food product for consumers. This class can be taken on line or in person at the Shawnee County Extension office.

Agriculture, food, and food processing has a direct output of approximately \$1.83 billion and supports 9,108 jobs or 7.63% of the work force in Shawnee County.

Pictured below are youth at the 2021 HOSTA (Hazardous Occupations Safety Training in Agriculture) program. The 29 youth attending this year were trained in tractor and machinery operation, livestock handling, 4-wheeler and skid loader operation, chemical and pesticide application, and grain handling.

The youth attend a two day class and are tested at the end of the program. They then have to do at least 2 hours of practical tractor experience to complete certification. All youth 14-16 years old must do this class for certification to work on any farm or ranch besides their immediate family. We have had 0 deaths from any youth who has attended this class over the last 20 years.



**\$1.83**  
Billion

Value of agriculture, food, and food processing each year from Shawnee County.

**58.1**

The average age of farmers and ranchers in Kansas.

**0%**

Of our youth attending HOSTA training has had a fatal accident working in agriculture.

**9,108**

Jobs in Shawnee County are supported by agriculture.

## Educational Efforts Promote Healthy Gardens

Ariel Whitely-Noll  
Horticulture Agent  
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### Response Line Calls Provide Research-Based Information to Residents

In 2021, Shawnee County Extension Master Gardeners answered 747 calls on their Response Line. The information provided on the Response Line helps homeowners to have healthy plants and encourages best practices for a thriving ecosystem. The hottest topic of 2021, fall armyworms, brought in over 100 questions to our Response Line in the month August!

### Garden Hour Webinars Engage Kansans

The *K-State Garden Hour* webinar series is hosted by K-State Research and Extension horticulture staff from across the state. In 2021, these educational programs have engaged 5,834 learners. The Horticulture Agent taught, hosted, and moderated these programs throughout the growing season.

### Spring Garden Basics Webinars Encourage Best Gardening Practices for Healthy Gardens

The *Spring Garden Basics* webinar series taught by Shawnee County Extension Master Gardeners and Extension Staff had 110 registrants. Topics covered included: Garden Site Selection, Right Plant, Right Place and Planting and Maintenance.

### Edibles in the Summer Garden Webinars Encourage Growing Fresh Produce

The *Edibles in the Summer Garden* webinars taught by Shawnee County Extension Master Gardeners and extension staff engaged 71 learners. Topics covered included: Kitchen Gardens, Vegetable Pests and Their Control and Growing Tomatoes.

### Garden Problems Webinar Focuses on Proper and Safe Control of Garden Pests and Problems

The *Garden Problems* webinar series taught by Shawnee County Extension Master Gardeners and K-State Specialists taught gardeners the best practices for controlling nuisance wildlife, insect pests, invasive plant species and diseases and environmental issues in lawns.



*SCEMG volunteers teach students about water conservation and growing vegetables at the 2021 Topeka Water Festival.*

**733**

People participated in the K-State Garden Hour Xeriscape webinar taught by the Horticulture Agent.

**67,673**

People were reached through our social media efforts just on horticultural topics!

**50**

Educational articles, written by the Horticulture Agent, appeared in the Topeka Capital-Journal this past year.

**859**

Lifetime views on Horticulture videos on the Shawnee County Extension Office YouTube channel.



## Eating Well on a Budget

Lisa J. Martin, MPH  
RD, LD  
EFNEP/SNAP-Ed Agent  
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**FRESH**  
CONVERSATIONS

*Inflammation, Fuel Your independence with Protein; and Cancer, Preventable Not Inevitable* are just a few of the monthly topics Shawnee County SNAP-Ed offered this year using our new curriculum series—*Fresh Conversations*. The lessons come in the format of a newsletter and topics focus on health in later life. Activities include recipe tastings, physical activity and nutrition discussions. Classes were provided at LULAC, East Topeka Senior Center, and Citizen Potawatomie Nation Community Center in Rossville.

### Success Story from *Fresh Conversations*

*Mary sampled the roasted cauliflower recipe that was presented with the "Cancer: Preventable; Not Inevitable" lesson and decided it was her new favorite way to eat cauliflower. She liked it so well that she cut up a variety of vegetables to roast and found that they were all sweeter and not as bitter. She especially liked her roasted Brussels sprouts so she plans to continue experimenting with roasting vegetables and trying different seasonings.*

**Teen Cuisine** 3.0

EFNEP moved into middle school, high school and young adult audiences this year, providing *Teen Cuisine* to students at Hope Street Academy, Highland Park

High school Girl UP! Program and students with disabilities in the Turning Point program at Highland Community College Perry Campus. Lessons at Hope Street and High-

land Park were delivered virtually. Food supplies were dropped off ahead of time and students followed the EFNEP educators online as they make the recipes. Classes at Perry were delivered in person to students in the Turning Point Independent Living program.

### Success Story from *Teen Cuisine*

*At the first lesson at Perry, one participant let the educators know in no uncertain terms that he did not like vegetables. The recipe chosen for this class was a tomato, black bean and corn salad. He ate the entire sample that he was offered and decided some vegetables were okay.*



### Who Nurses?

Baby monkeys nurse. Baby elephants nurse. Baby tiger cubs nurse. Human moms nurse. This is the theme for our new lactation bench at the Topeka Zoo.

The bench was built by one of the zoo docents. Zoo graphic designers are working on signage and educational materials.



A ribbon cutting is planned during March 2022 National Nutrition Month.

**72%**

of EFNEP graduates made changes to be more physically active.

**94%**

Of EFNEP graduates are making better choices with their food dollars.

**97%**

Of EFNEP graduates improved the quality of their diet.

**\$5000**

awarded to the Downtown Farmers Market from Topeka Community Foundation helped seniors stretch their food dollars.

## Learning a New Role to Continue to Serve Shawnee County

**Candis Meerpohl**  
County Extension Director  
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In April, I was proud to be selected as the Shawnee County Extension Director after serving as the 4-H Youth Development Agent for nine years. My first day was April 19th and my new commute to work, was turning left into my new office instead of turning right.

The advantage of having strong relationships with office staff helped balance the challenge of learning a new programming area. I now direct the Community Vitality efforts for Shawnee County Extension and manage the day to day operations of the office.

I was excited to meet my Program Development Committee for the first time with our previous director Cindy Evans. Having worked for Shawnee County Extension for 31 years, Cindy did everything she could to settle me into my new role.

All Extension Agents are guided by a Program Development Committee and mine had a lot of good thoughts about ways I could take the program in 2022.

I will continue to help our two PRIDE communities in Shawnee County and be ready for any other community that would like to work towards the PRIDE community designation. Currently Rossville and Dover are both part of the Kansas PRIDE program.

Kansas PRIDE is dedicated to serving communities across the state to encourage and assist local government and volunteers in making their community a better place to live and work.

Through the Kansas PRIDE program, local communities identify what they would like to preserve, create, or improve for their future. Then, working with the resources of K-State Research & Extension and the Kansas Department of Commerce, community volunteers pull together to create their ideal community future.

Shawnee County Extension continues to partner with Shawnee StartUps. Shawnee StartUps mission is to support entrepreneurs in Shawnee County by offering different partner loan programs and education.

In 2021 Shawnee Startups launched a new website to help promote what they do in the community. You can find out about the group's E-Community Partnership and apply for programs at [www.shawneestartups.com](http://www.shawneestartups.com).

Another program our Program Development Committee is wanting to bring back to Shawnee County is Board Leadership series. Board Leadership lessons help local board members learn about their legal responsibilities when serving on a board and how to be more efficient. It is helpful to volunteer board members who need training to better fulfill their new roles for an organization they care about.

I am looking forward to continuing into my new role and serving Shawnee County in a new way!

**\$89,400**  
Total Amount of 3 loans funded by Shawnee StartUps in 2021

**2**  
Number of Kansas PRIDE communities in Shawnee County

**\$28.54**  
The Value of one Volunteer Hour to the community they serve. *\*according to [pointsoflight.org](http://pointsoflight.org)*

**Immeasurable**  
The number of virtual meetings and Zoom calls with customers, volunteers, and KSRE staff as we learned new techniques to share Extension education.

## Financial Programs Help Ease Stress

**Susan Fangman**  
Family & Consumer  
Sciences Agent  
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There are many dimensions of health and wellness. One of them often overlooked is the way our financial health affects our physical health. Stress about finances is prevalent all across our country, and high levels of constant stress can lead to many serious health issues such as loss of sleep, anxiety, digestive issues and high blood pressure to name a few.

Susan leads several programs that help Shawnee county residents put more money back into their pockets, thus lessening their stress concerning finances.

### Free Unbiased Senior Health Insurance Counseling

One of the many hats Susan wears at the KSRE Shawnee County Extension office is that of SHICK counselor (Senior Health Insurance Counselor of Kansas). Susan provides counseling to New-to-Medicare beneficiaries as well as counseling during the Medicare Part D Open Enrollment season.

Making the right decisions when first signing up for Medicare is important. Missing deadlines can result in financial penalties for a lifetime, and signing up for a plan you might later regret is often expensive and challenging to change. Susan worked with 27 New-to-Medicare clients this past year to help them make educated decisions about their health insurance needs.

Medicare Open Enrollment happens each year October 15-December 7. It is a time for seniors to shop drug plans

for the upcoming year. During the 2021 Open Enrollment season Susan provided one-on-one counseling to 204 clients by Zoom or phone, helping them save a collective \$77,800 in premiums and drug costs. Clients often comment on how over-whelming the process is when they try to figure it out on their own and how relieved they are to have Susan's help.

### Volunteers Provide Free Tax Assistance to Those in Need

Susan oversees the Asset Building Coalition in Shawnee County; the coalition represents VITA and AARP tax volunteers, as well as educational, government, and social services agencies. The volunteers of this group provide free tax assistance to low to moderate income taxpayers and the elderly in the community, and a partnership with Fellowship & Faith Ministry helps reach Spanish Speaking taxpayers.

During the 2021 filing season 51 volunteers volunteered more than 2,000 hours to file 2,127 tax returns. This helped residents save approximately \$478,575 in tax preparation fees, and helped them to receive \$2,596,621 in refunds due to them.

Because of the pandemic, in-person tax preparation was suspended for the VITA program this year. Determined to still provide services, volunteers planned a Taxes-by-Mail initiative. This allowed volunteers to continue to provide the same level of service as they had in the past but without meeting anyone face-to-face. This method has been so successful they plan to offer it as an option in the future.

## 204

Medicare beneficiaries received counseling during Part D Open Enrollment

## \$77,800

Estimated savings for those changing Medicare Part D plans after counseling

## \$478,575

Saved in tax preparation fees (average of \$225 per return) by those who used VITA services

## \$2,596,621

Federal & state refunds returned to taxpayers served through Shawnee co. VITA



## Part of 4-H is Belonging

**Candis Meerpohl**  
County Extension Director  
candism@ksu.edu



4-H is a researched based youth development organization, designed to empower young people with the skills to lead for a lifetime.

Through research we know that one of the needs youth have is the need to belong. That is why our youth meet in community clubs. They are not just in 4-H, they are a member of Auburn 4-H Club.

It was hard to convey the sense of belonging in a virtual environment, but our 4-H volunteers did great making sure they were still reaching out to youth. In May we were allowed to bring our clubs back together with the proper social distancing and safety precautions. We were all happy to be back in person.

In June we went to Rock Springs 4-H Camp with 26 youth and ready to see our 4-H friends from other counties. We could only use 50% of the camp's capacity, but it was still 100% 4-H fun!

In July the youth got to have an "In-Person" county fair. Our setup was a little different and we look forward to our normal set up in 2022. Watching the youth be judged and show their animals was a joy! But the best part of fair is what happens after the judging. The youth get to talk, enjoy events with friends and laugh! That is the sense of belonging that keeps 4-H youth happy and healthy.

Every year we ask our graduating high school seniors what their favorite part of 4-H was. The responses revolve around events where 4-H'ers got to be with their

friends. Over and over we see, the County Fair, Discovery Days or Club parties as the things youth will miss the most.

Shawnee County 4-H is a place where youth can belong together as they pursue their interests. It doesn't matter if their interest is photography, baking, swine, rabbits or Legos. 4-H has a variety of projects for youth to study and bond with other like minded members.

Emotional health is a part of physical health. Meeting the needs of youth to belong, master a project and be independent is an important part of keeping our young people happy and healthy. 4-H is designed to meet those needs!



Our 4-H'ers receiving a donation from the Shawnee County Sheriff's office for our Annual Pancake Feed. Our fundraising committee worked hard this year and doubled the event's profit!

**4x**

More likely to give back to their communities than their non-4-H peers.  
\*Tufts Study of PYD

**46**

Number of Kansas 4-H Projects, youth can choose to learn from

**1788**

Number of Shawnee County 4-H Fair Entries in 2021

**10**

Number of Shawnee County youth who served as 4-H Camp Counselors for 4 days in June

## 2021 Extension Appreciation Award Recipients

**Kevin Siek** has been a Shawnee County Extension Master Gardener since 2018. In those few years, Kevin has shown outstanding leadership to our organization. In his first year, Kevin was highly active in the newly re-named Prairie Pollinator garden. He worked with the committee to remove plants left from previous trials and researched the best pollinator plants to include. He also wrote to the governor and received a proclamation for a 2019 pollinator week in Kansas. In 2020 and 2021 Kevin has taught webinars on pollinators, invasive plants and fruit. Kevin is a current member of our volunteer Advisory Board, has served as a mentor for new Master Gardeners and lead an effort to sell birdhouses for our group in 2021. He is extremely active in the community gardening committee and has spearheaded a project to revitalize the native plant garden. Kevin has applied for and received several grants for new projects that expand our mission of education. One project added interactive QR codes to our demonstration garden and in another he added accessible parking and raised beds to our Demonstration Community Garden. In both efforts, his focus has been on accessibility and reaching new audiences. Kevin exemplifies what it means to be a Shawnee County Extension Master Gardener and is deserving of this recognition.



Steve Kersting has been a VITA (Volunteer Income Tax Assistance) volunteer since 2012. Steve is a site coordinator; providing coordination, organization and supervision for all aspects of the North Topeka tax site as well as co-coordinator of other sites. He is our IT guru taking care of every aspect of the technology we use, from set-up, trouble-shooting, and purchasing new equipment. He helps with training, is the go-to person for many of our volunteers when they have questions and or problems, and fills out the mountain of paperwork required by the IRS for us to perform our services. This by no way is all inclusive to what Steve does for the VITA program.

This past tax season, because of the uncertainty of COVID we made plans for a taxes-by-mail initiative, instead of our usual face-to-face service. Steve was the master-mind behind this project, putting together an incredible amount of planning to keep not just volunteers and clients safe from virus exposure, but to keep sensitive tax information secure as well. We would never have been able to pull this off had it not been for his hard work. Steve earned the new title this year of Process Coordinator. One of his many responsibilities was to scan every single piece of paper mailed to us by the 605 clients that used our taxes-by-mail program. Steve worked full-time hours in this volunteer position, almost always with a smile!



Shawnee County K-State Research and Extension  
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*K-State, County Extension Councils, Extension Districts and U.S. Department of Agriculture  
Cooperating.*