

K-State's Engagement E-News

*Connecting K-State to Kansas
and Communities Worldwide*

Rural Grocery Initiative Receives Outstanding Program Award

by Lauren Swirbul

Rural communities around the state are experiencing difficulties in sustaining their local grocery stores. The Center for Engagement and Community Development (CECD) at Kansas State University started the Rural Grocery Store Initiative to strengthen rural communities and their stores. On July 27, 2010, at the Community Development Society International Annual Conference, CECD was recognized with the 2010 Outstanding Program Award for its efforts surrounding the initiative. This prestigious award was given to the initiative because it demonstrated “principles of good practice.”

According to K-State Extension Assistant, Becky O'Donnell, the award will bring greater awareness to the initiative, which in turn will benefit the rural grocery stores.

The Rural Grocery Store Initiative is vital in helping sustain rural communities in Kansas. If the community has the desire to open and maintain a grocery store, the initiative can help strengthen the success of the business.

The initiative works to show the importance of rural grocery stores supporting rural communities. The grocery stores provide a sense of community. They are a place to meet friends, catch up on local news, maintain relationships, and network.

Several significant outcomes the initiative was recognized for include two rural grocery summits, an online forum for grocery store owners, and a website dedicated to informing the public about the work surrounding the initiative.

This past summer CECD hosted the Rural Grocery Store Summit II. The conference brought together grocers, distributors, funders, citizen leaders, academic researchers and policy makers to discuss the disappearances of rural grocery stores across America. Store owners were not sure how to help their stores survive or succeed. The summit gave them the opportunity to learn from other store owners about their struggles and success. In addition, it showed the importance of partnerships between businesses. The summit provided an ideal way for participants to brainstorm, network, and share experiences and ideas.

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Esther Otis (left) leads participants in a breakout session at the 2010 Rural Grocery Store Summit.

“It was a nice match between encouraging dialogue, bringing people together, and facilitating with a structure that promoted a civil exchange of ideas,” O’Donnell said.

CECD promotes the involvement of community members in the initiative and the support of their local stores through the annual summit.

In addition to the summit, K-State is assisting communities and stores by collecting data, researching, surveying, and talking to residents whose local stores are disappearing.

CECD will continue to host summits and dialogues to increase awareness about the extinction of rural grocery stores and the devastating impact it has on rural communities.

Policy Efforts Should Support Rural Grocery Stores

by Lauren Swirbul

At the Rural Grocery Store Summit II, held June 14-15, 2010, participants discussed ways to improve policy efforts to support rural grocery stores. Participants also considered ways to improve the community’s access to nutritious food. The group deliberated over what a good policy should include, what changes should be made to already existing policies, and how that change could be made.

The discussion group agreed that the government should provide a local sales tax policy for purchasing locally produced food. The policy would ensure the money stays local.

The group decided that there needs to be more education and less regulation regarding what a good policy looks like. Providing local incentives to communities will stimulate economic development and benefit the rural communities. Some existing policies were brought up in the discussion group that followed these guidelines. They included the USDA Rural Development Program, food stamps used at farmers’ markets, and local stock ownership.

Several initiatives were discussed on how to change existing policies that did not support the goal of sustainability. The discussion group agreed that storeowners should be allowed to reduce waste by utilizing products whose packaging has been damaged. Another aspect to change is providing state financing through local banks for rural grocery start-ups or improvements to stores. Encouraging local involvement of business owners in policy formation would ensure that owners could voice their opinions on policies that would directly affect them.

Several priorities were discussed on how to pursue change and who would need to be apart of it. A necessary action for change would be to create a comprehensive rural development policy for the state to promote growth and sustainability of rural communities’ incentives, taxes, and regulations.



Jeanne Roberts (middle left) discusses with other summit participants, several strategies to sustain rural grocery stores.

Local community members, legislators, and local policy councils were mentioned as possible people who could create such a policy. Consistent regulations and incentives for all different sizes and styles of stores should be required in order for stores to be sustainable. To create this consistency, affiliated storeowners would need to have better communication between the public and legislature. Lastly, the group expressed the need for incentives to encourage purchasing local and regional food products. The group mentioned the Department of Health and Environment, Farmers Union, and the Kansas Rural Center to be leaders in creating more awareness on health issues and how it affects the economy.

Community Support is Critical to Sustain Rural Grocery Stores

by Lauren Swirbul

Breakout session participants also discussed the importance of building community support to sustain rural grocery stores. The group highlighted ways to accomplish this and how CECD at Kansas State University could continue to contribute to the effort.

Effective marketing is key to bring awareness to the community of what a local store can provide. The discussion group came up with innovative ideas to market a store successfully. They decided stores should target youth and provide college scholarships for students who work in the rural stores. Another strategy was to create T-shirts that emphasized the importance of buying locally to the community. The group determined the best way local stores could gain community support was by responding to community needs. To do this, the store could provide hot meals to impoverished families, deliver food to widows, partner with local schools, and create a benefit plan for individuals with special needs. The group also recommended celebrating the history of the town and store, and to make the store a unique attraction to the town.

The discussion group came across many problems regarding support for the stores. Rural grocery storeowners want to get youth involved but do not know how to reach their generation.

The group suggested using social media tools such as text messages or fan pages for the store on Facebook to reach community youth. The group also decided it was beneficial to create customer loyalty programs to keep customers returning to the store. One summit participant suggested that stores display a thermometer or chart showing the number of loyal store customers and an incentive to reach a certain number.



Bill Huninghake with Affiliated Foods Midwest (left) and **George Kandt** discuss important issues that rural grocery stores across the state are facing.

CECD Mission & Vision

To promote engagement across the breadth of Kansas State University - in teaching, research and outreach - and to connect the vast resources of KSU to the significant issues of public need facing Kansas and communities worldwide.

Engagement occurs when collaborative partners — both on and off-campus stakeholders — work together to address a public need in a way that is both reciprocal and mutually beneficial. Through engagement, K-State endeavors to fulfill its historic land grant mission.

— Dr. David E. Procter, CECD director

The group discussed ways that CECD could continue supporting rural grocery stores. One possible way is for CECD to communicate the importance of rural grocery stores with other organizations around Manhattan and through various partnerships. The group proposed that CECD send emails to members of *ruralgrocery.org* when a relevant grant for rural grocery stores becomes available. The organization could make the on-going information about the summit available to other states dealing with a decline in support for rural grocery stores as well. The group agreed that the summit was beneficial in finding ways for rural stores to gain support and sustainability.



Donald Cain (left) and **Mary Ann Reiderer** discuss within a small group about issues brought up at the summit.

Improve Educational Campaigns to Engage Community Members

by Lauren Swirbul

At another summit breakout session, participants discussed educational campaigns to improve the outreach and education efforts for rural grocery stores. The participants discussed what a successful campaign would look like, if existing campaigns can be modified, and how Kansas State University and CECD can continue to invest in rural grocery store sustainability.

The breakout session participants agreed that a successful education campaign should create sustainable communities and stores that provide access to nutritious food. In addition, it should include clear objectives, strategies, and tactics on how to reach these goals. Participants also considered developing existing-education campaigns to make them more successful. The group agreed that campaigns need to be well known to store owners and the community. To attract the interest of community members, the campaign must be simple and include eye-catching materials. The discussion group thought an emotional component would help demonstrate that the problems rural grocery stores are facing are prevalent in rural communities.

The group discussed the problem of having money available to support education on social marketing to increase awareness of campaigns. According to a breakout session member, the campaign would need a customizable kit, which would include Public Service Announcements for radio, television, or print and news releases to successfully market the campaign.

The campaign's messages are critical for bringing awareness to rural grocery stores. Effective messages would include demonstrating the importance of each dollar spent at rural grocery stores and the impact it has on the community. The discussion group emphasized the idea that a few additional dollars spent at the local grocery store would generate more tax dollars to fund schools, build roads and medical facilities, and provide services to the elderly. The campaign would also encourage consumers to buy-locally to lower transportation costs, create jobs, support other community businesses, save time, and connect with other residents.

CECD will continue to invest in rural grocery stores. The organization will help expand educational campaigns and discover ways to engage community members. Breakout session participants agreed that CECD should be involved by bringing stakeholders together, encouraging independent dialogue, conveying the campaign message, and helping individuals focus on the overall problem rather than personal issues.



David Procter, director of CECD, providing opening remarks at the 2010 Rural Grocery Store Summit.

Partnerships Discussed to Improve Regional Food Distribution System

by Lauren Swirbul

Breakout session participants discussed ways to improve the regional food distribution systems for rural grocery stores. Several issues were identified as the most important to be addressed and acted upon to help sustain rural grocery stores in Kansas.

The group discussed grocery stores and their ability to consistently meet the minimum weekly order requirement set by a distributor. The group felt that this was the primary barrier to sustaining stores. In response to this problem the group came up with several solutions. They decided it would be beneficial for grocery stores to form partnerships in order to meet minimum orders, and have consistent deliveries. In order for the store to meet their customer needs, the group agreed that stores must have full access to a variety of products and brands that are available. Another problem the group discussed is the frequency of deliveries to retailers. Perishables are one of the most important products due to the high demand from customers and they need to be delivered often. Unfortunately, perishables are not delivered often enough to rural stores. The frequency of delivery would significantly improve the quality of product available to customers.

However, the retailers would face the issue of having to pay an additional cost for products being delivered more often. Educating grocery stores on how the distribution centers obtain their products and assisting stores in exploring all products available in their areas will help minimize the cost of increased deliveries.

The final concern the participants discussed was the ability to incorporate local foods and Kansas products into the regional distribution system. Although it is easier to ship processed products, the customer desires quality. There is a challenge for small grocers to obtain local sources and farmer's fresh products. The group advises producers to know what the buyer wants and what products are readily available.



Participants stay after the summit to collaborate over what they learned.

UPCOMING
EVENTS

Kansas MarketPlace

Kansas MarketPlace is a conference focused on small businesses and rural communities. The conference helps individuals gain hands on learning experience with rural community development and network with other rural community leaders.

When: Nov. 16 & 17, 2010

Where: Dodge House Hotel and Convention Center in Dodge City, KS

For more information: <http://www.cfra.org/marketplace/home>

Community Development Academy

The Community Development Academy is a series of workshops that will provide community leaders the assessment and strategic planning information necessary to devise participatory community development plans and strategies. Participants will gain the information, resources, and processes needed to guide planning to create quality sustainable communities.

Dates

February 16*, 17, 23 & 24, 2011

March 2 & 3*, 2011

Location

Kansas Farm Bureau

2627 Kfb Plz

Manhattan, KS, 66503

**indicates dates for community coaches only*

Facilitation Workshop



Workshop highlights:

- How to set up public forums
- The role of the facilitator
- Best practices for facilitators
- Evaluating public issue forums
- Participation in different forms of public conversation
- Individual practice/coaching sessions

For more information, please visit: <http://icdd.k-state.edu/facoverview>

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