



February 2026



We All Need Community

Sixty days ago, I moved from Fargo, North Dakota, to the Wichita area. After 12 years in the northern tundra, I felt confident leaving our snowblower behind. There was no way it would have fit in the U-Haul anyway.

The day we arrived in November, it was 79 degrees. I remember thinking I'd practically moved to Arizona. So you can imagine my surprise over the past few weeks as I've been reintroduced to cold temperatures and snow.

Last week, as I looked out at my snow-covered driveway, I really wished that snowblower had made the trip. Just as I was working up the motivation to grab a shovel, I heard the familiar scrape of metal on concrete. One of my new neighbors was clearing our driveway and sidewalk.

It was a simple act, but a meaningful one. A neighbor helping a neighbor. It created an immediate sense of belonging and genuine gratitude. I hope to return the favor very soon.

Feeling connected to a community has powerful mental, emotional, and physical health benefits. It increases happiness, reduces stress, and strengthens our sense of purpose. Community also provides a vital support network, helping explain why people who feel connected experience less loneliness and depression and often lead healthier, more active lives.

Many of the programs offered by K-State Extension Sedgwick County are designed to help people connect with others who share their interests. I invite you to learn more below about the programs, services, and volunteer opportunities available through the Sedgwick County Extension Education Center.

Explore our [website](#) and [Facebook page](#), and [reach out to us](#) if you are looking for information and resources on any of our topic areas.

Kelli Anderson, Extension Director

Numbers that Matter: The Impact of Extension Master Gardeners



Contributed over **29,486** hours of volunteer service (equivalent to 14.2 full-time extension staff) and a dollar value of **\$1,025,817.94** to Sedgwick County.)



Delivered horticulture education to more than **100,574** residents of Sedgwick County (equal to more than 1 in every 5 county residents.)



The Master Gardener Spring Garden Fair attracted over **2,254** community members to learn about **water conservation**.



Plant A Row For The Hungry program collected **4,034** pounds of fresh produce donations in order to help the food insecure of our community.



The Youth Education Committee conducted classroom lessons in a total of 66 classrooms across **31** schools to over **1,390** students and adults.



Thank You Sedgwick County Extension Master Gardener Volunteers

On Jan. 22, K-State Extension Sedgwick County horticulture staff celebrated the hard work and passion of the 374 Extension Master Gardeners who participated in the program in 2025. The impacts of their work in 2025 include:

- Contributing over 29,486 hours of volunteer service (equivalent to 14.2 full-time extension staff and a dollar value of \$1,025,817.94)
- Educating over 100,574 residents of Sedgwick County (equal to more than 1 in every 5 county residents)
- Recognizing 102 Master Gardeners who contributed over 100+ hours of volunteer service in 2025
- Celebrating 159 Sedgwick County Master Gardeners who have been active volunteers for 10 years or more now

As a group, their incredible work in the community did not stop there. Here are just ten of the ways they helped educate Sedgwick County residents in 2025:

- Garden Hotline answered questions from over 2,399 community members
- Youth Education Committee conducted classroom lessons in a total of 66 classrooms, across 31 schools, to over 1,390 students & adults
- Plant A Row For The Hungry collected 4,034 pounds of fresh produce donations in order to help the food insecure of our community
- Speakers Bureau provided presentations to 41 community groups
- Community Booth Outreach Committee attended 19 community events & reached over 4,406 total contacts
- Hosted over 10,700 attendees at some of our biggest events, including Garden Tours, Spring Garden Fair, Youth Lawn Mowing Clinic, and our booth at the Engineering Expo
- Social Media Committee created 98 posts that earned over 470,062 views
- School Gardening Committee hosted 43 after-school garden club meetings at local elementary schools, with a combined total of 582 students
- Spring Garden Fair attracted over 2,254 community members to learn about water conservation
- Therapeutic Gardening Committee hosted 6 booths, 5 presentations, and classes at 8 community care facilities for over 1,065 program participants

Check out their many other accomplishments and services to the community in this video.

Thank you Sedgwick County Extension Master Gardener Volunteers! You are truly amazing individuals who make our community a better place.

Extension in Action: 4-H and Youth Mental Health



4-H and Youth Mental Health: How Participation Supports Well-Being

Young people today face increasing pressures, from academic expectations and social challenges to rising rates of anxiety and stress. In this context, programs like 4-H play a vital role not just in building life skills but also in supporting youth mental health.

Participation in 4-H activities offers structured support, opportunities for meaningful engagement, and connection

with nature, all of which are linked to improved psychological well-being.

4-H and Youth Mental Health: The Impact by the Numbers

Youth mental health challenges are increasing nationwide, making supportive, research-based programs more important than ever. Participation in 4-H offers protective benefits for young people by providing structured activities, positive relationships, leadership opportunities, and meaningful connections to nature, all of which are linked to improved mental well-being.

The Current State of Youth Mental Health

Research indicates that mental health concerns among youth are widespread:

- An estimated 10–20% of children and adolescents worldwide experience mental health disorders, including anxiety and depression (Vella et al., 2022).
- In the United States, 7 out of 10 teens report struggling with mental health challenges, with 55% experiencing anxiety and 45% reporting high levels of stress (4-H, 2020).
- Additionally, 81% of youth believe mental health is a significant issue facing their generation (4-H, 2020).

These statistics highlight the urgent need for programs that foster emotional resilience and positive development.

How Organized Youth Programs Like 4-H Help

A comprehensive umbrella review examining organized youth activities, including 4-H clubs and community programs, found consistent links between participation and improved mental health outcomes (Vella et al., 2022). While effect sizes were generally small, findings were meaningful and consistent across studies.

Key findings include:

- Approximately 40% of children and adolescents globally participate in organized extracurricular activities, placing a large portion of youth in environments shown to support well-being (Vella et al., 2022).
- Youth involved in organized activities report higher self-esteem, greater emotional regulation, and stronger social connections compared to nonparticipants (Vella et al., 2022).
- Supportive adult mentorship and peer relationships, core components of 4-H, are identified as critical mechanisms for positive mental health outcomes.

4-H's positive youth development framework directly aligns with these protective factors by emphasizing belonging, skill-building, and purpose.

Ready to [learn more about the mental health benefits to youth involved in 4-H?](#)

New members are welcome to join at any time of the year, and joining is easy and

Extension Resources for Real Life



Research on child development and family well-being is clear.

Perfection does not
strengthen families;
Connection does.

Connection Over Perfection: A 2026 Goal

Now that the year is well underway and we have entered the month of February, many families continue to feel pressure to start “better”—to create perfect routines, follow strict schedules, and make immediate changes. The first months of the year often come with high expectations and quiet comparisons. However, research on child development and family well-being is clear: perfection does not strengthen families; connection does.

As February moves forward and daily life settles into its rhythm, this is an ideal time to pause and reflect—not on what is missing, but on how we are relating to one another. Studies on attachment, resilience, and social-emotional development show that children thrive when they feel emotionally safe, heard, and valued. These bonds are not built in error-free homes, but through consistent, responsive relationships.

Family connection is nurtured in everyday moments: conversations during meals, unexpected laughter, shared play, or simply being emotionally available at the end of the day. Evidence also shows that when adults prioritize connection over perfection, family stress decreases and emotional well-being improves. In contrast, pressure to “do everything right” often leads to exhaustion and emotional distance.

Rather than rigid resolutions, families can set simple, evidence-based intentions: listening with attention, spending quality time together without screens, and creating small family rituals. Simple actions—such as a weekly device-free evening, a short walk together, or a safe space to express emotions—help build trust, communication, and a sense of belonging.

Many families continue to face fatigue, financial stress, or uncertainty. Developmental science reminds us that it is not necessary to have everything figured out in order to move forward. Small, consistent moments of connection have a deeply meaningful and lasting impact. This year does not demand perfection, but compassion, patience, and presence. In the end, what lasts most are not perfect routines, but the moments when we feel seen, heard, and truly connected.

Connection over perfection. Start with one small step today. **Find family resources for connection on the K-State Extension Sedgwick County website.**

For more information: Elizabeth Brunscheen-Cartagena, K-State Extension Sedgwick County Home and Family Agent, lizb@ksu.edu.

Read this article in Spanish.

People Who Power Extension: Alicia Bruster



EFNEP Educator Reaches Sedgwick County Youth

The Expanded Food and Nutrition Education Program, federally funded since 1969, offers a series of interactive nutrition education sessions for limited resource youth and families with children. Participants learn how to prepare and eat more meals at home, increase their consumption of fruits and vegetables, increase physical activity, make healthy drink choices, and much more.

February's EFNEP spotlight is Alicia Bruster, a Sedgwick County Extension Nutrition Educator. Alicia loves teaching the curriculum "Teen Cuisine" to middle

school youth in Sedgwick County, motivating them to take ownership of making healthy food choices.

Alicia partners with YMCA afterschool, Boys and Girls Club and SPARK afterschool program in Haysville, aiming to reach 150 youth this year. Alicia shared that one of her participants enjoyed class so much, they prepared a recipe from class for their family; a true testimony of the impact of Alicia's teaching and the EFNEP program.

Alicia shares that EFNEP classes "plant seeds" for continued growth. EFNEP works!

To learn more about EFNEP in Sedgwick County, visit sedgwick.k-state.edu/efnep.

Seasonal Solutions

Protect Yourself from Medicare Scams

Scams targeting older adults continue to increase, and Medicare fraud remains a common concern here in Sedgwick County.

Fraudsters often use phone calls, emails, or mail that appear official and urgent to pressure people into sharing personal information.

A good rule of thumb: treat your Medicare number like a bank account or credit card number. Only share it with trusted health care providers, and never give it out to unsolicited callers. Medicare will never contact you asking for your Medicare number, Social Security number, or payment information.

Another helpful step is to regularly review your Medicare Summary Notices or Explanation of Benefits to check for services you don't recognize.

If you suspect a Medicare scam, error, or abuse, assistance is available through Senior Medicare Patrol (SMP) via the Kansas Department for Aging and Disability Services or the National SMP Resource Center at 1-877-808-2468. Help is free and confidential.

For more information: Tat Hidano, K-State Extension Sedgwick County Adult Development and Aging Agent, hidano@ksu.edu



K-State Extension Sedgwick County to Offer Heart Health Education Program

February is American Heart Month, a time to raise awareness about cardiovascular disease—the leading cause of death for women in the United States. Many heart conditions develop silently, making prevention and early detection essential.



K-State Extension in Sedgwick County is bringing heart-health education, specifically self-monitored blood pressure management, to citizens of Sedgwick County through the HAPp Works (Hypertension Awareness and Prevention program). This program provides education and practical tools to help participants better understand blood pressure management and build heart-healthy habits. The program begins on Feb. 3.

“Nearly half of U.S. adults have high blood pressure, often without symptoms, highlighting the importance of regular health screenings,” says Sara Sawyer, K-State

Extension Sedgwick County nutrition, health and wellness agent. “Simple lifestyle changes, such as eating a heart-healthy diet, staying physically active, managing stress, and knowing your health numbers can significantly reduce the risk of heart disease. This American Heart Month, take time to learn, talk, and advocate for your heart health and the health of those you love.”

For more information about heart health, visit heart.org or goredforwomen.org.

To register for HAPp Works, contact Jennifer Exline at 316.660.0143 or exline@ksu.edu.

Doing Good for Kansas



How K-State Turns Community Engagement into Statewide Impact

From rural towns to global partners, **engaging with and improving Kansas' communities** is ingrained in Kansas State University's land-grant DNA.

K-State was recently nationally recognized for its exemplary commitment to community engagement through the **Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching's Community Engagement Classification**. K-State was selected with this national designation that recognizes excellence among universities for building meaningful, long-term partnerships that impact real community needs.

K-State is one of 237 institutions — and one of only three in Kansas — to receive the designation this cycle.

Learn how K-State is positively affecting Kansas communities while creating global impact.

Where You'll Find Us: Extension Events and Opportunities



K-State Garden Hour Webinar: Honey Bee Colony Management and Key Floral Resources in Kansas

Wednesday, Feb. 4, Noon to 1 p.m.

Honey bee behavior is influenced by the seasons and the availability of flowering plants. Beekeepers must perform various tasks throughout the year to raise healthy and productive colonies. Join Ryan Engel, Golden Prairie District Horticulture Agent, to learn more about standard beekeeping management practices and essential food sources for honey bees in Kansas.

This free webinar will be presented live from noon to 1 p.m., and recorded and available online. Register for this and all of the upcoming webinars of 2026 at www.ksre-learn.com/KStateGardenHour.



Registration open for the 2026 Hutchinson Local Food Producers Workshop

The Hutchinson Local Food Producer Workshop will provide producers and small food businesses with practical training on expanding sales through farmers' markets, direct-to-consumer channels, and other local market opportunities.

Hosted in collaboration with the Kansas Department of Agriculture and the Kansas Center for Sustainable Agriculture & Alternative Crops, the workshop also offers valuable networking opportunities, allowing participants to connect with peers and gain insights to strengthen their businesses.

Click here to register, learn more or find a workshop near you.



Growing Growers apprenticeship and host farm applications now open for the 2026 season

Growing Growers is a farm apprenticeship program that combines hands-on experience with structured education. Apprentices receive 12 months of access to an online, non-credit course, along with textbooks, and participate in in-person workshops, farm tours, and networking opportunities throughout the growing season. Positions may be paid or unpaid and typically run



Registration open for Medicare Options Class

Get ready to embark into the world of Medicare with us on Friday, March 6, from 11 a.m.-1 p.m. or from 6 to 8 p.m. at Larksfield Place Independent Living (7373 E. 29th St. N., Wichita). Each participant will receive a copy of

from March through October, depending on host farm needs.

Apprenticeship and Host Farm applications are now open for the 2026 season! To learn more or apply for an apprenticeship or to be a host farm, visit growinggrowers.org or contact growers@ksu.edu.

the program materials. It is best to plan to attend several months before you become Medicare eligible.

This class is free, but registration is required. Class size is limited.

Register for the 11 a.m. to 1 p.m. class.
Register for 6 to 8 p.m. class.



This monthly e-newsletter is intended to inform citizens of events, activities and research-based information from K-State Extension Sedgwick County.

K-State Extension is an equal opportunity provider and employer.

K-State Extension is a short name for the Kansas State University Agricultural Experiment Station and Cooperative Extension Service, a program designed to generate and distribute useful knowledge for the well-being of Kansans. Supported by county, state, federal and private funds, the program has county extension offices, experiment fields, area extension offices and regional research centers statewide. Its headquarters is on the Kansas State University campus in Manhattan.



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