



SALINE COUNTY
FOOD ACTION COMMUNITY TEAM

Saline County Food System Assessment

October 2025

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Design Team / Acknowledgements

The Saline County Food Action Community Team (FACT) commissioned the Center for Applied Research and Evaluation (CARE) at Wichita State University's Community Engagement Center (WSU CEI) to conduct this food system assessment. The following members of FACT were instrumental in guiding the project and conducting interviews.

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In collaboration with FACT members, the assessment was conducted by the following members of the Wichita State University Center for Applied Research and Evaluation (CARE) and Center for Public Health Initiatives (CPHI)

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Introduction



Food Sector	Definitions/Examples
Produce	Growing, raising, or catching food, like farming or ranching.
Process	Using equipment, energy, and tools to make agricultural products into food ingredients or food products.
Distribute	Gathering products from farmers and food processors, storing them, and transporting them to stores or restaurants.
Access	Being able to get enough healthy, affordable food that fits your culture and needs.
Consume	Buying, preparing, and eating food.
Recover	Finding ways not to throw extra food away, such as sharing it with others, feeding it to animals or composting (also known as food waste management).

What Is The Food System?

K-State’s Local Food Collaborative defines the food system as “everything that is part of ensuring that people have the food they need to survive and thrive” and breaks it down into six different sectors.

These sectors work together to support a community’s environment, economy, nutritional health, and food security.

The community assessment was designed to gather information and input regarding the six areas of the food system. Interviews in particular were focused on giving a voice to those who contribute to Produce, Process, and Distribute (i.e., farmers and food business owners/operators) while secondary data (publicly available data) and survey responses were collected to provide a view of public perceptions across all areas.

The goals of this Community Food Assessment for Saline County’s food system were:

- gain a deeper understanding of the system
- grow community awareness and knowledge
- identify strengths and challenges
- provide a foundation for changes

Assessment Process

This assessment included secondary data and primary data. The secondary data used in this assessment were from publicly available sources and may be several years old, or not available for smaller communities.

The primary data are from a community-wide survey, interviews, and listening sessions. CARE and FACT worked together to create the survey. It was available online, open to everyone in the community that was 18 years old or over, and could be taken in English, Spanish, or Vietnamese. The survey opened on March 31st, 2025 and closed on June 15th, 2025. FACT distributed the survey by:

- sending out press releases to media
- sources across the county
- distributing flyers
- sending emails to stakeholders and other partners
- using their website
- sharing on social media
- word of mouth

FACT identified specific persons involved in production, processing, and/or distribution and interviewed them using questions developed by CARE. A total of nine people were interviewed in July and August of 2025. Four were farmers, ranchers, and/or local producers; and five were food business owners, operators, or managers.



CARE and FACT hosted two listening sessions in Salina on August 20th, 2025. One session was in the afternoon at 1:30pm at the Salina Public Library with about 25 people in attendance. Another session was in the evening at 6:30pm at Church of the Cross with about 15 people in attendance.



The following pages provide an overview of findings, demographics of participants, primary themes by food system area, and recommendations/next steps. The Appendices, which follow the overview contain more specific data from all methods: Secondary data, survey responses, interview summaries, and listening session notes by question.

Key Findings Summary

Saline County has a wealth of resources but could better highlight the value of **local food**:

- Encourage businesses to use local food.
- Promote collaboration to ensure resources are equally accessible to all.



Access was rated as the greatest need in Saline County's food system

Cost consistently comes up as a major barrier for access to local, healthy, nutritious foods.

50% of survey respondents struggle to cover food costs.

Residents also expressed that processed foods and fast food are easier to access due to affordability and convenience, especially for families.

Food System Sectors Ranked by Survey Respondents Indicating Area Is A Strong Need

1. Access (53% of 406)
2. Recover (52% of 405)
3. Produce (47% of 406)
4. Consume (39% of 405)
5. Distribute (39% of 402)
6. Process (32% of 402)

Residents **WANT** to buy more local food, more frequently. But they don't perceive the community in general as valuing local food as highly as they do individually. This may be an opportunity for highlighting local resources and promoting the value of local food and local food producers.

Key Findings Summary

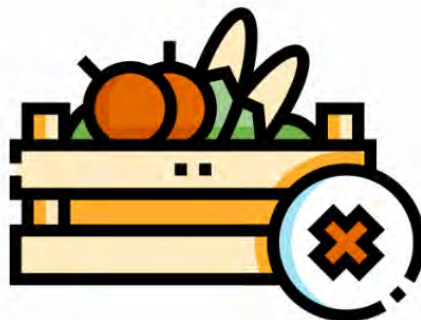


Recover was rated as the second greatest unmet food system need.

Participants reflected that more needs to be done to educate on and engage the community in actions such as composting, coordinated food collection, restaurant recovery efforts, etc.



Participants consistently expressed a very strong desire for **more education/opportunities to learn across all sectors of the food system**, especially related to finding and preparing healthy food, and understanding and engaging in recovery efforts.

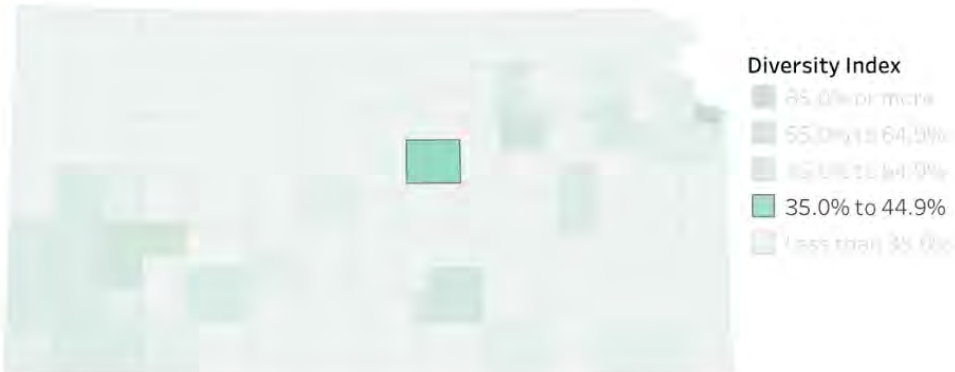


Saline County Demographics

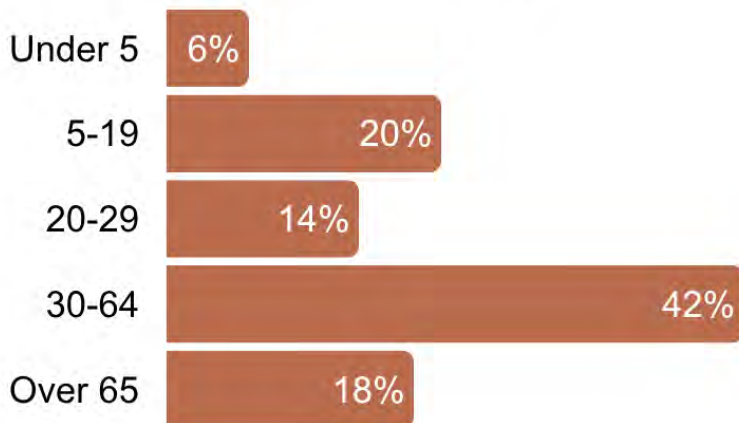
In the last decade, Saline County has become more diverse in race and ethnicity - the county's diversity index score rose from **37.3%** (2010) to **39.7%** (2020).

Diversity Index by County: 2020

Kansas: 45.4%



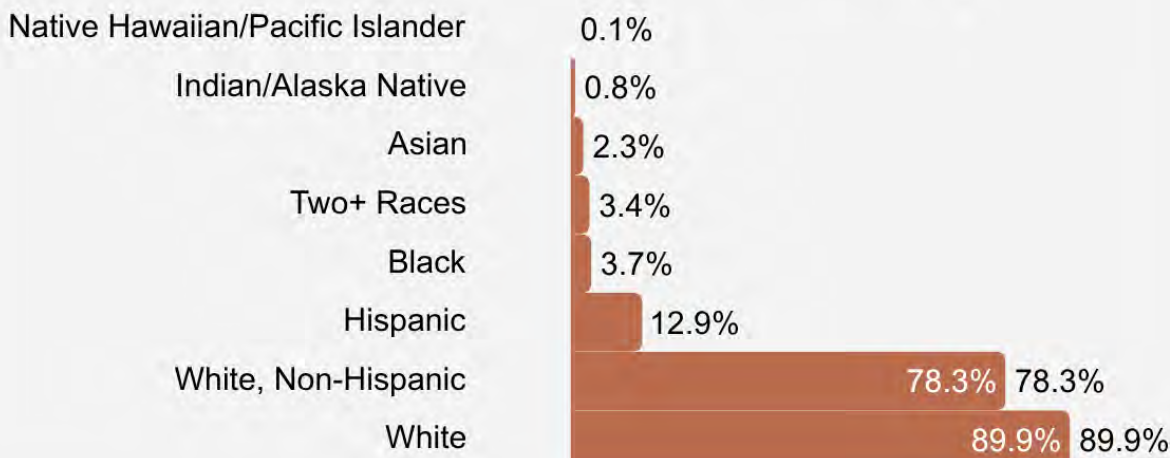
Age



About Salina:

- The largest and densest city in Saline County
- Home to about 85% of Saline County residents
- Located in Central Kansas and is considered a central convening point at the junction of I-70 and I-135.

Race/Ethnicity



County Demographics

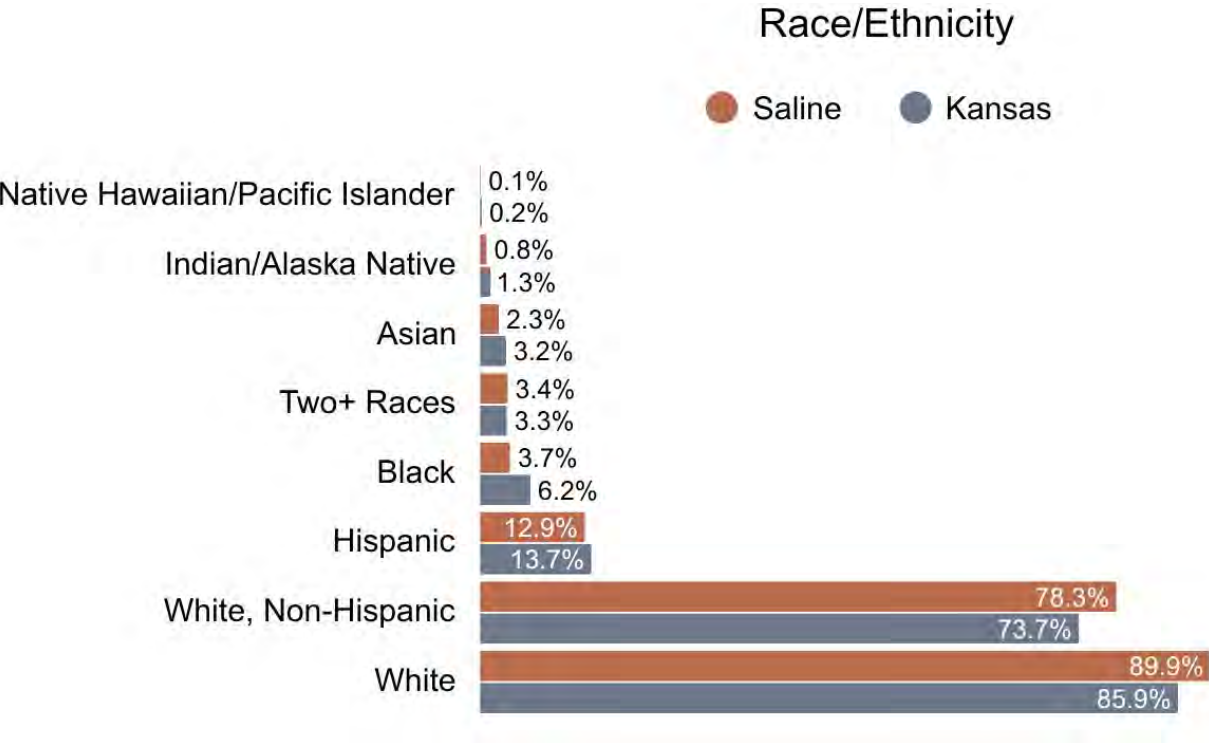
Understanding the demographic makeup of Saline County is important to understanding the context of the county’s food system. The county’s population is comprised of urban and rural residents, varying income levels, and is rising in racial and ethnic diversity, which all shape the local food system.

Population

A total of 54,303 people live within the 720 square miles of Saline County. In 2023, 46,432 people live within the 26 square miles of Salina. The county’s population density is approximately 75 people per square mile while Salina’s population density is much higher at 1,774 people per square mile. **Salina is the largest and densest city in Saline County and is home to about 85% of Saline County residents.**

Race/Ethnicity

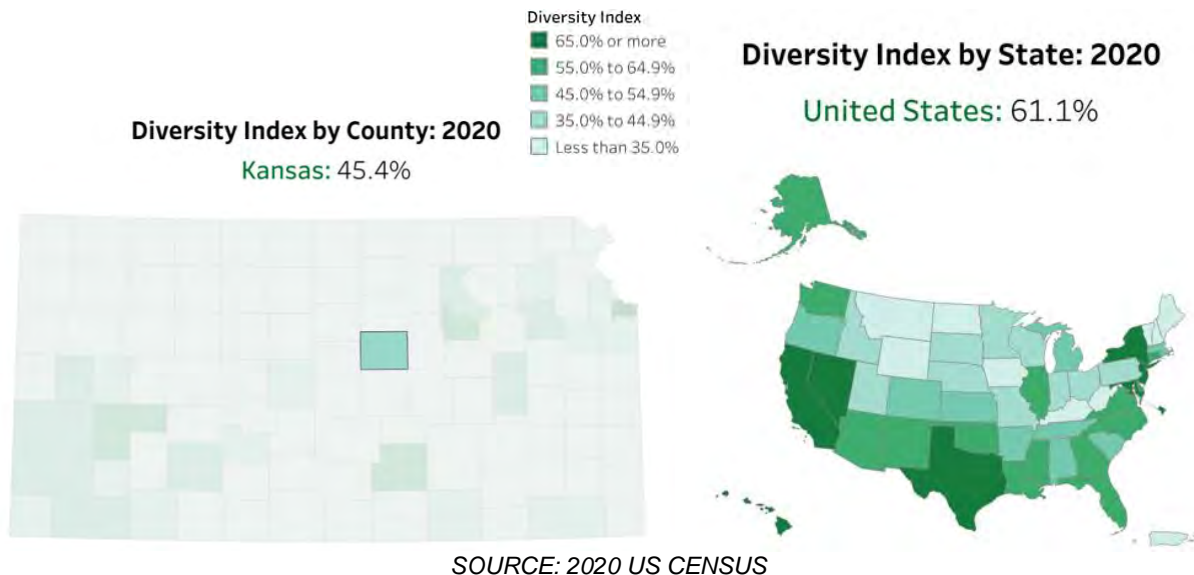
Saline County residents are **predominantly white and non-Hispanic**. About 13% of the county’s population is Hispanic, which is a similar percentage in the state of Kansas and lower than the U.S. overall.



SOURCE: 2023 US CENSUS POPULATION ESTIMATES

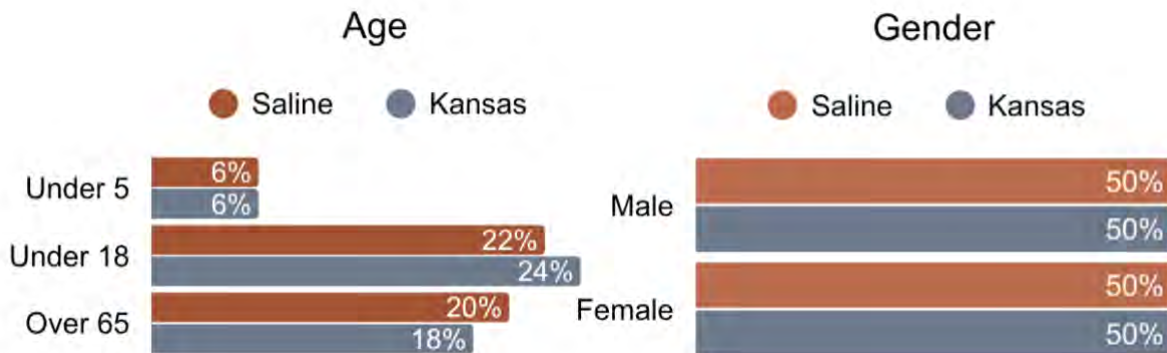
The diversity index is a measure that shows how likely it is two people from an area would be a different race or ethnicity. The index score of 0 means there is 0% chance two people from an area would be a different race and ethnicity. The index score of 100 means there is a 100% chance two people from an area would be a different race and ethnicity.

In 2020, Saline County’s diversity index score of 39.7% is slightly lower than it is for Kansas and the U.S., meaning there is less diversity in the county compared to the state and the country overall. However, in 2010, Saline County’s diversity index score was 37.3% - indicating that **the county’s population has become more diverse in race and ethnicity.**



Age/Gender

The age and gender distributions for Saline County and Kansas are similar. Saline County has slightly more residents over 65 – meaning there may be an **increased need for food access for older adults.**



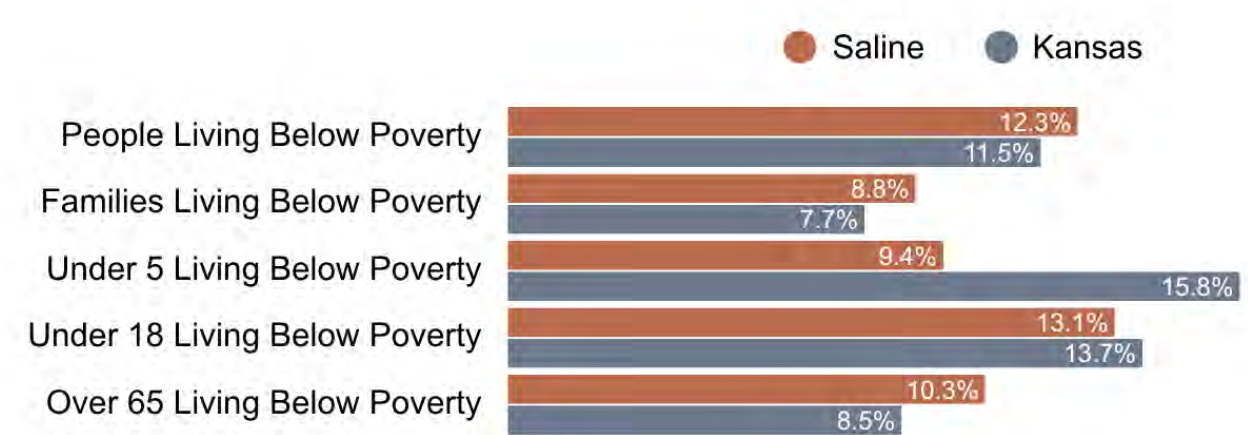
SOURCE: 2023 US CENSUS POPULATION ESTIMATES

Economy

In 2023, the median household income in Saline County was \$63,316, which is notably **lower compared to Kansas and the U.S. overall** (\$72,639 and \$78,538 respectively).

Saline County has significantly fewer young children under the age of 5 living in poverty than Kansas and the U.S. overall. However, **there are more households living below poverty** and yet **slightly more households above the ALICE* threshold in Saline County** than the state overall.

<i>Economic Indicators</i>	<i>Saline</i>	<i>Kansas</i>	<i>U.S.</i>
<i>Median Household Income</i>	\$63,316	\$72,639	\$78,538
<i>Households Living Below Poverty Level</i>	15.0%	12.0%	N/A
<i>Households Above ALICE Threshold</i>	60.5%	61.0%	N/A
<i>ALICE Households</i>	24.5%	27.0%	N/A

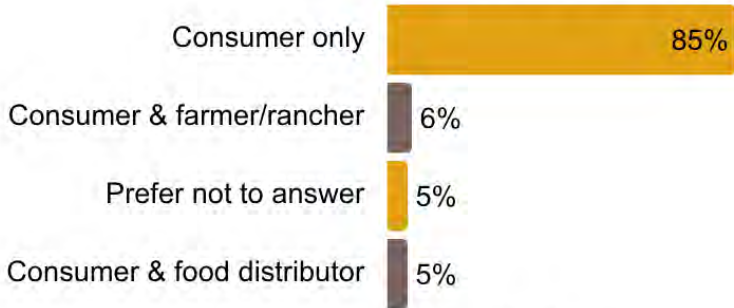


SOURCE: 2019-2023 AMERICAN COMMUNITY SURVEY; 2022 UNITED FOR ALICE

*United for ALICE provides a secondary data indicator that accounts for the cost of living specific to an area, referred to as the ALICE (Asset Limited, Income Constrained, Employed) threshold. Households that are below the threshold live above the federal poverty level but below the basic cost of living are considered ALICE households.

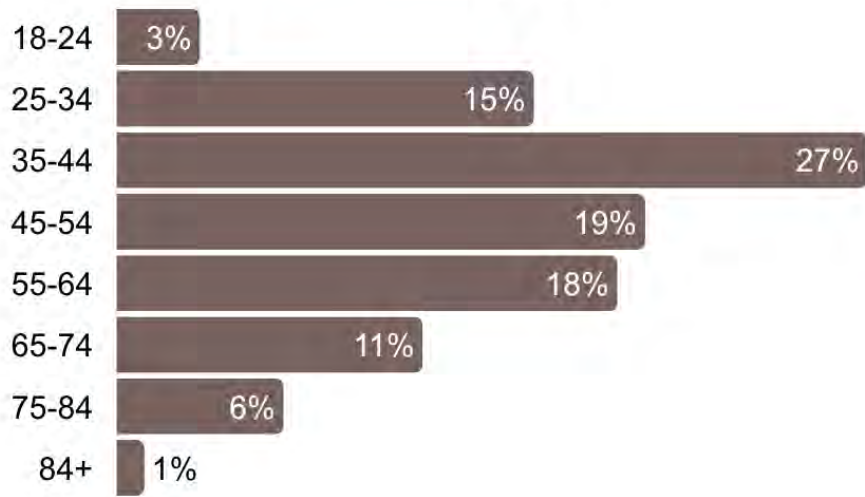
Survey Demographics

Food System Role

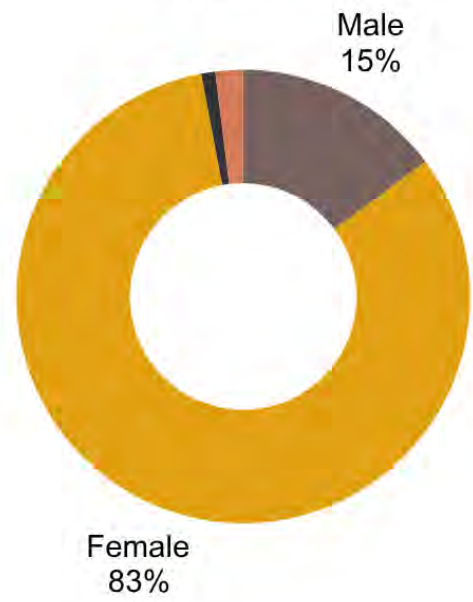


Of the 478 participants 85% were consumers and residents of Salina.

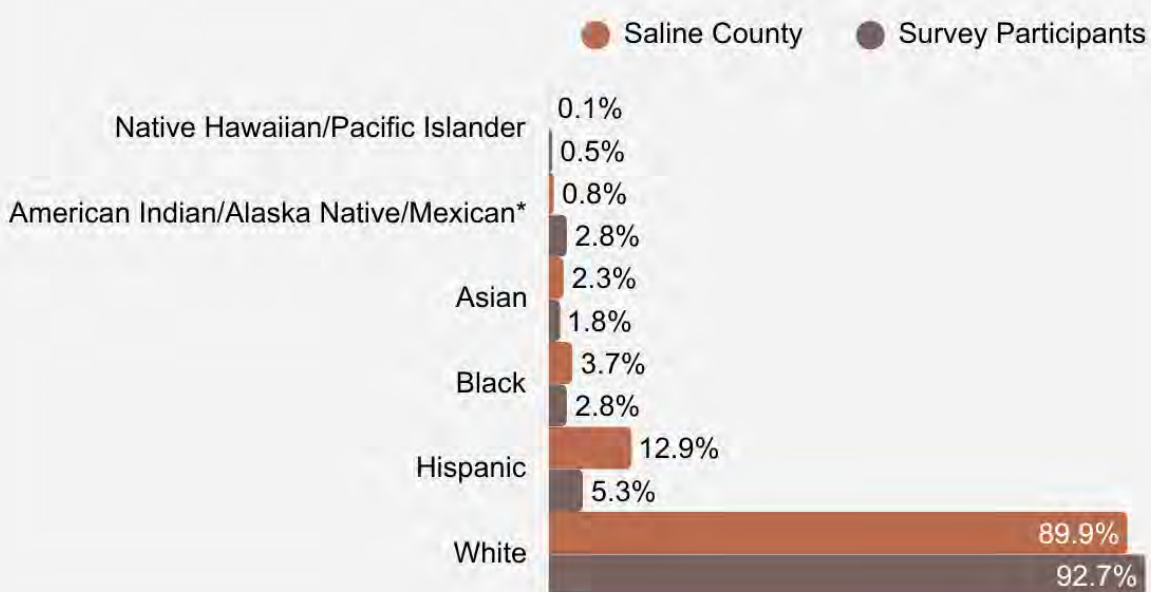
Age



Gender



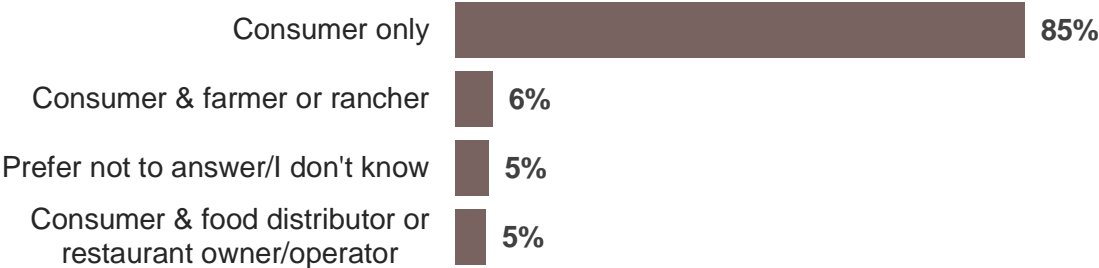
Race/Ethnicity



Survey Demographics

Most survey respondents of the community survey were **only consumers** (85%) and **residents of Salina** (85%), which aligns with the population data for Saline County mentioned above.

ROLE N=478

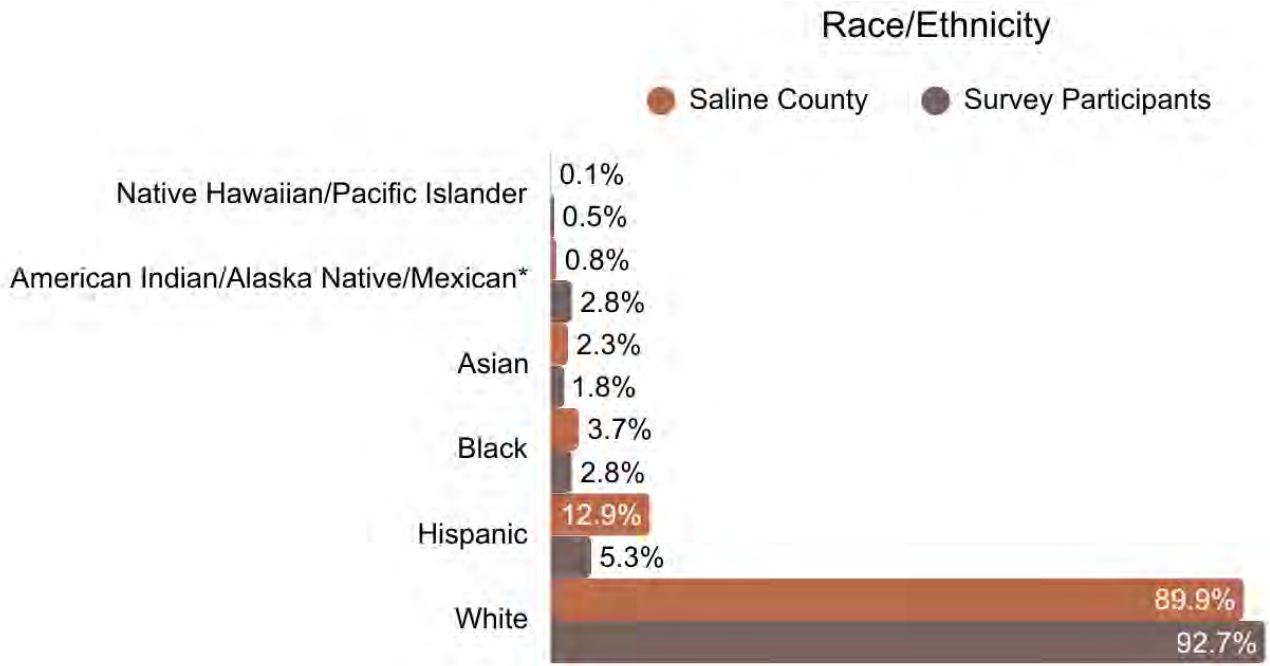


COUNTY OF RESIDENCE N=478



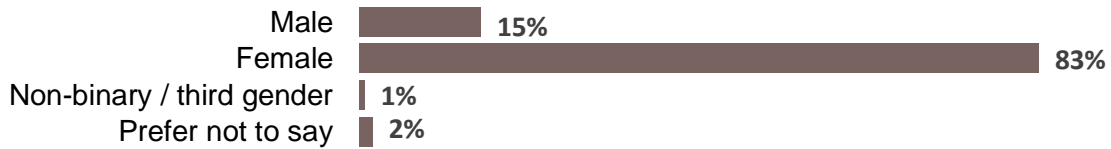
The percentage of survey respondents who are White was slightly higher than the percentage of White residents (93% vs. 90%). Men and Hispanic people are underrepresented in this survey. The disproportionately high percentage of survey respondents in the “American Indian/Alaska Native” category is likely due to this survey’s addition of “Mexican” in that answer category. Typically, Mexican is not listed in any race or ethnicity category. However, in recent years, CARE has found that many survey respondents will specify their race as “Mexican.” With the intention of increasing inclusivity and reflecting the changing climate of the U.S., Mexican was included in the American Indian/Alaska Native race category in this survey’s race/ethnicity question.

RACE/ETHNICITY N=398



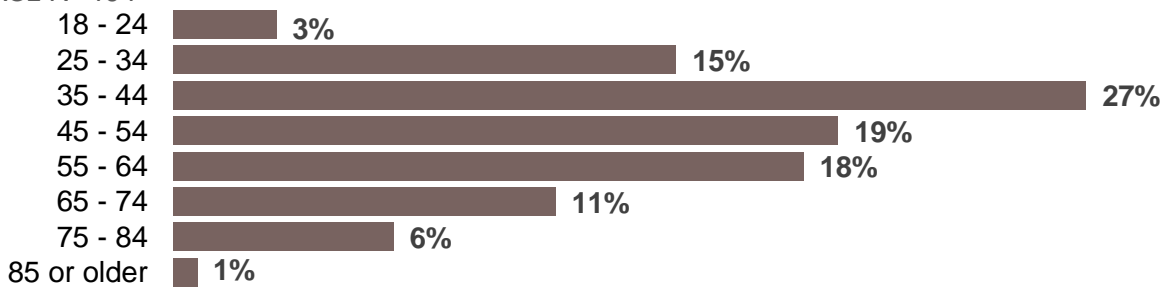
SOURCE: 2023 US CENSUS POPULATION ESTIMATES

GENDER N=402

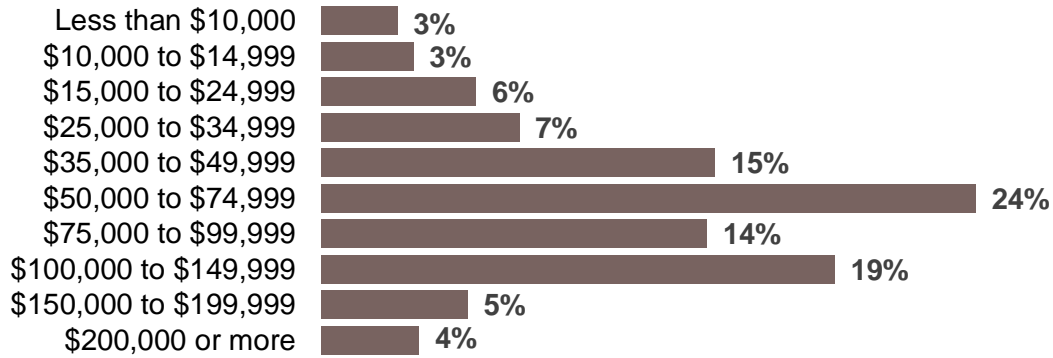


About two-thirds are ages 35-64 (64%), a quarter make \$50k-70k a year in their household, and a third make \$75k-150k a year in their household.

AGE N=404

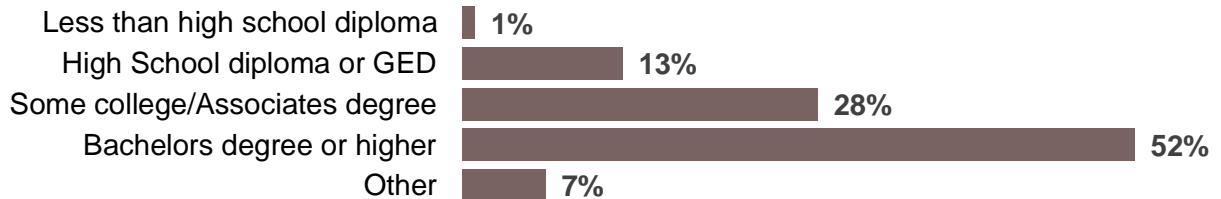


INCOME N=386



Over half have a Bachelors degree or higher. Most have never served in the military. For the 23 respondents that have served, most are not active in some way (78%) – over a third are disabled or injured.

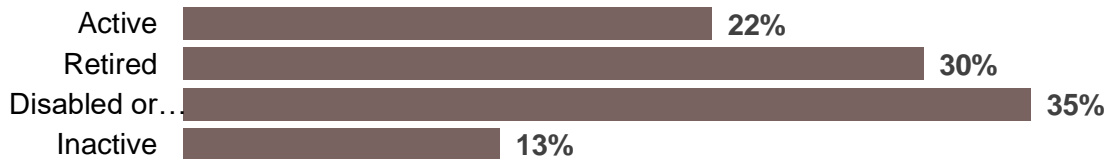
EDUCATION N=401



MILITARY SERVICE N=401



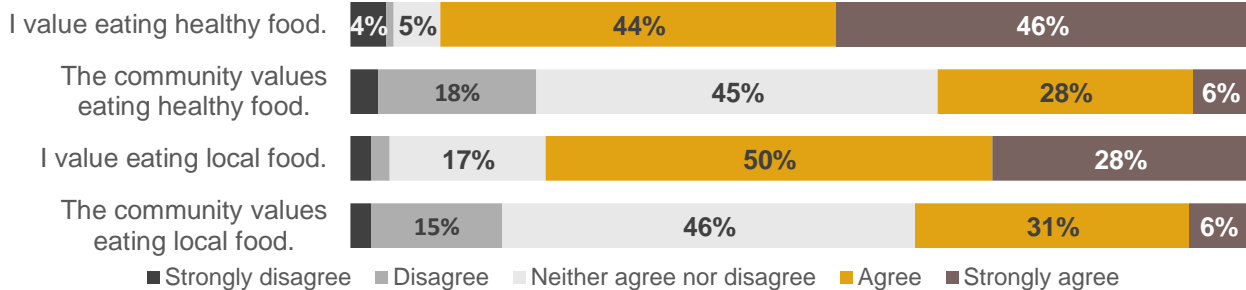
CURRENT STATUS N=23



General Survey Findings

Most respondents value **eating healthy food (90%)** and **local food (78%)**. However, there were more **mixed opinions when asked about their community's values**. About a third of respondents indicated their community values eating healthy food and values eating local food (34% and 35%, respectively).

COMMUNITY VALUES N=478



Respondents prioritize cost the most when making food purchases, which supports other survey data on cost as a major barrier to healthy food. For every four respondents, three selected cost as a top priority during food purchases. About one in every three respondents selected **health/nutritional benefits** as a main priority. One in four respondents reported **product quality** as a main priority.

TOP TWO PRIORITIES WHEN MAKING FOOD PURCHASES N=472

	N	%
<i>Cost of food</i>	352	75%
<i>Health or nutrition benefits</i>	165	35%
<i>Product quality</i>	120	25%
<i>Convenience</i>	83	18%
<i>Freshness/shelf life of food</i>	76	16%
<i>Availability of food</i>	61	13%
<i>Knowledge of how to prepare food</i>	46	10%
<i>Locally grown</i>	21	4%
<i>Foods that match your culture and traditions</i>	7	2%
<i>Other</i>	5	1%

*Other responses include: affordable availability of items for Mediterranean Diet, celiac safe/gluten free, low carb, organic

Almost all respondents use their own vehicle to buy food (92%) and **most did not report transportation as a barrier (89%)**. Notably, **one in ten respondents do experience transportation barriers when getting groceries**.

HOW DO YOU USUALLY GET TO WHERE YOU MOST OFTEN BUY FOOD? N=466



*Other responses include: delivery service, electric mobility scooter, bicycle, trailer

DOES A LACK OF TRANSPORTATION EVER MAKE IT DIFFICULT TO GET GROCERIES? N=467



Half of respondents struggle with food costs for the month.

DO YOU EVER HAVE A HARD TIME STRETCHING FOOD BUDGET TO THE END OF THE MONTH? N=467



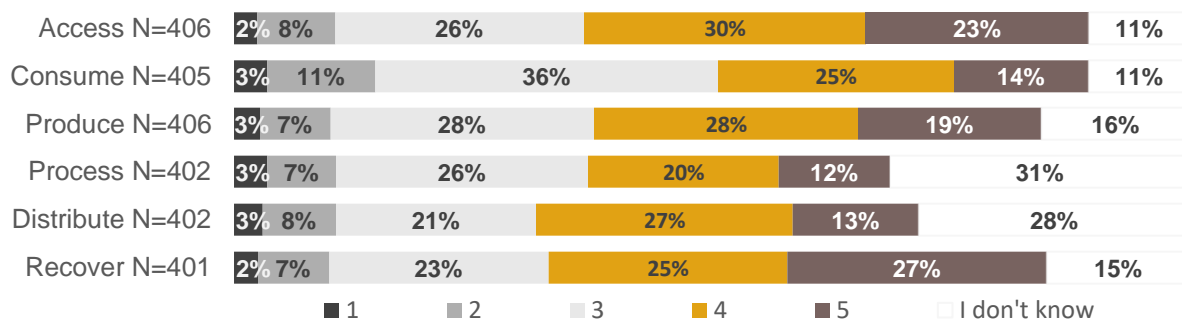
Respondents most frequently reported that **ensuring access to healthy food in all neighborhoods/communities** is the most important food system goal for Saline County (42%). One in every three felt that **decreasing food insecurity among children/youth** is the most important goal.

WHICH FOOD SYSTEM GOALS ARE MOST IMPORTANT FOR SALINE COUNTY? N=407

	N	%
<i>Ensure access to healthy food in all neighborhoods/communities</i>	169	42%
<i>Decrease food insecurity among children/youth</i>	139	34%
<i>Keep food production, sales, and consumption local</i>	116	29%
<i>Promote overall health and wellness</i>	113	28%
<i>Create a more supportive system for local food producers and entrepreneurs</i>	107	26%
<i>Decrease food insecurity among adults</i>	94	23%
<i>Provide education regarding food and agriculture</i>	79	19%
<i>Reduce food waste</i>	70	17%
<i>Provide youth education regarding farming and ranching</i>	59	15%
<i>Encourage local entrepreneurship for creating local food outlets</i>	47	12%
<i>Promote conservation practices to improve local growing conditions</i>	45	11%
<i>Improve the emergency food system in case of such things as pandemics, natural disasters, etc.</i>	41	10%
<i>Increase composting and recycling initiatives</i>	31	8%

<i>Address concerns regarding the impact of climate change on the food and agriculture system</i>	19	5%
<i>Reduce racial inequities in food access</i>	18	4%

Respondents were asked to rate “how great of an unmet need the following areas are in Saline County on a scale of 1-5,” with 1 being there is no need in this area, and 5 being this area is in extreme need. **Respondents most frequently reported a strong need (a 4 or 5 on the scale) in two areas: Access (53%) and Recover (52%).** The figure below visualizes their responses across all areas.



For each area identified as a great unmet need (a 4 or 5 on the scale), respondents were asked to share their thoughts in an open-text box. In their responses across all areas, **the strongest themes found were the need for more affordability, education, and strengthening local food systems.**

In general, participants cited **cost as a major barrier**, especially when it comes to **purchasing local, healthy, nutritious foods**. They explained that processed foods and fast food are easier to access due to affordability and convenience, **especially for families.**

Participants consistently expressed a very strong desire for **more education on various topics across all areas**, including learning more about nutrition, food preparation, food preservation, growing food, composting, gardening, farming, meal planning, and reducing food waste.

Notably, **participants also consistently expressed a desire for a stronger local food system and more accessibility for purchasing and selling local foods.** Suggestions included utilizing as many local food sources throughout the different sectors as possible, cultivating a social culture that prioritizes local food production and purchases, increasing support for producers, increasing affordability for local foods, and providing more opportunities to purchase and sell local foods.

Findings from All Methods By Food System Sector

This section of the report is broken down into the six sectors of the food system. Each subsection includes secondary data, data from the community survey, and notes from the listening sessions. The sections for Produce and Process/Distribute also include interview summaries. The main secondary data source in this section is the 2022 United States Department of Agriculture Census of Agriculture, which provides data that is the most recent and most closely aligned with the purposes of this assessment.

Growing, raising, or catching food, like farming or ranching.

47% of survey respondents felt that the Produce sector of the food system was a strong need in their community.

Prairieland Market is extremely valuable to producers.

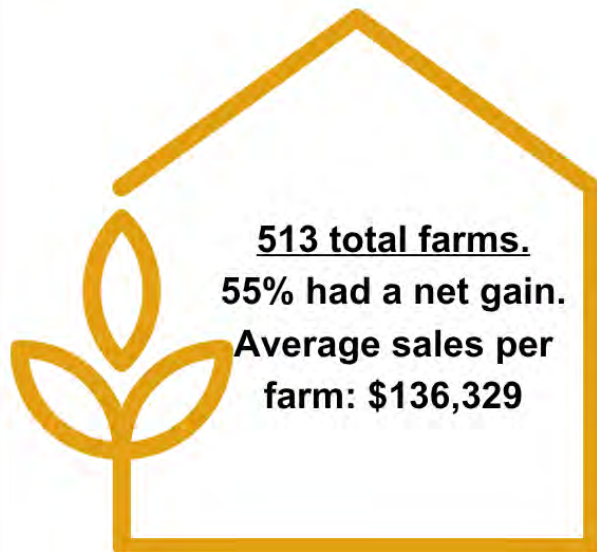
Most farmers:

- are White,
- are Male,
- are 45-74 years old,
- have 10+ years of experience in the industry



Consumers & producers are concerned about:

- the high cost of food production
- impact of the environment/weather on food production
- keeping food production local.



Producers want more support such as:

- better pay
- consistent customer demand
- having more opportunities to sell their foods and products
- more partnerships with local restaurants and grocery stores
- policy changes

Key Findings

- Most farmers are white, male, between the ages of 45-74, and have over a decade of experience in the field.
- 55% of Saline County farms had an overall net gain, but the average net gain for Saline County farms is less than half of the average for Kansas farms.
- Both the average total sales and average net cash farm income per farm in Saline County is about one third of the average for the state.
- 3% of Saline's farms sell directly to consumers.
- 47% of survey respondents felt that the Produce sector of the food system was a strong need (N=406).

Secondary Data

Key Facilities

- Schwan's Company – Salina Pizza Manufacturing and Distribution Facility
3150 Centennial Rd / 3019 Scanlan Ave, Salina, KS
Large-scale frozen pizza production plant manufactures popular brands such as Tony's and Red Baron. Also includes frozen storage and national distribution operations. A major employer in the area.
- Farmer Direct Foods, Inc. (Homestead Milling)
5641 E Mariposa Rd, New Cambria, KS
In addition to processing, this facility mills and packages specialty flours for retail and wholesale markets.
- Cargill Grain Elevator
1112 N Halstead Rd, Salina, KS
Operates as a grain storage and merchandising hub, facilitating the purchase, storage, and sale of major grains like wheat, corn, and soybeans.

Food Production Capacity – Natural Resources

Land Availability and Use, and Irrigation

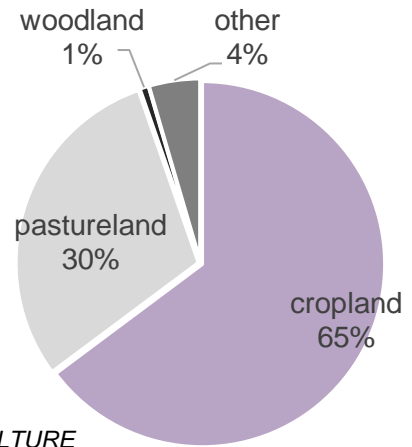
There are 460,947 acres of land in Saline County and 68% of that is farmland – meaning **over two-thirds of the land in Saline County is used for farming**. About 65% of that farmland was specifically cropland – again, meaning about **two-thirds of farmland is used for crops**, as shown in the pie chart below. Then of that cropland, 90% of it was harvested cropland. Of the 513 farms in Saline County, **only 5% used irrigation**.

Farmland Use, 2022

<i>Cropland, 2022</i>	<i>Saline</i>
<i>Land in Farms in Acres</i>	314,203
<i>Total Cropland in Farms in Acres</i>	203,613
<i>Harvested Cropland in Acres</i>	182,881

<i>Irrigation, 2022</i>	<i>Saline</i>
<i>Number of Farms Using Irrigation</i>	26
<i>Land in Irrigated Farms in Acres</i>	43,797
<i>Irrigated Land in Acres</i>	3,632

SOURCE: 2022 USDA CENSUS OF AGRICULTURE



Farming

In 2022, there were 513 farms in Saline County. The average farm size was 612 acres, and the median farm size was 160 acres.

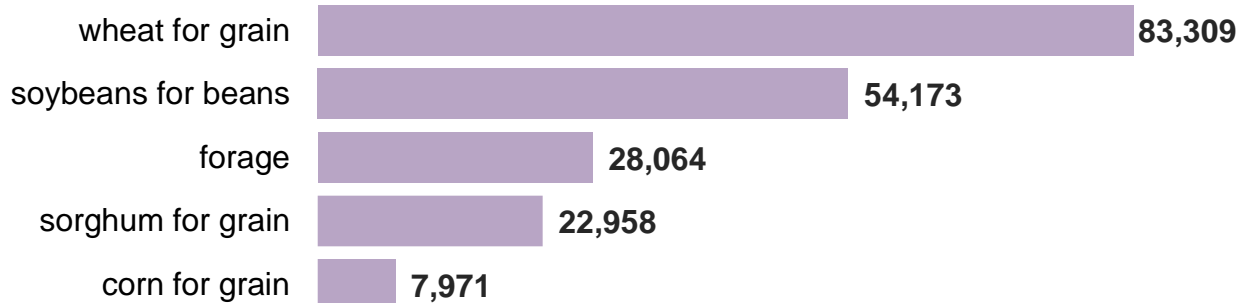
<i>Farming, 2022</i>	<i>Saline</i>
<i>Number of Farms</i>	513
<i>Average Farm Size in Acres</i>	612
<i>Median Size of Farms in Acres</i>	160

SOURCE: 2022 USDA CENSUS OF AGRICULTURE

Farm Production

In 2022, Saline County’s primary crop was wheat, followed by soybeans. There were only three farms that harvested vegetables for sale and one farm that harvested fruits for sale.

Top Crops in Acres, 2022



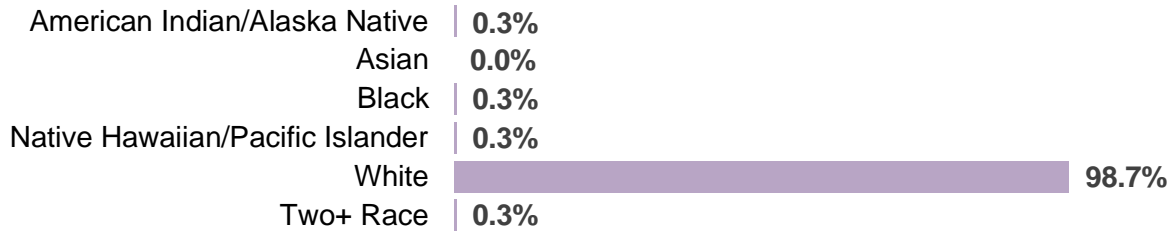
SOURCE: 2022 USDA CENSUS OF AGRICULTURE

Farm Operators and Producers

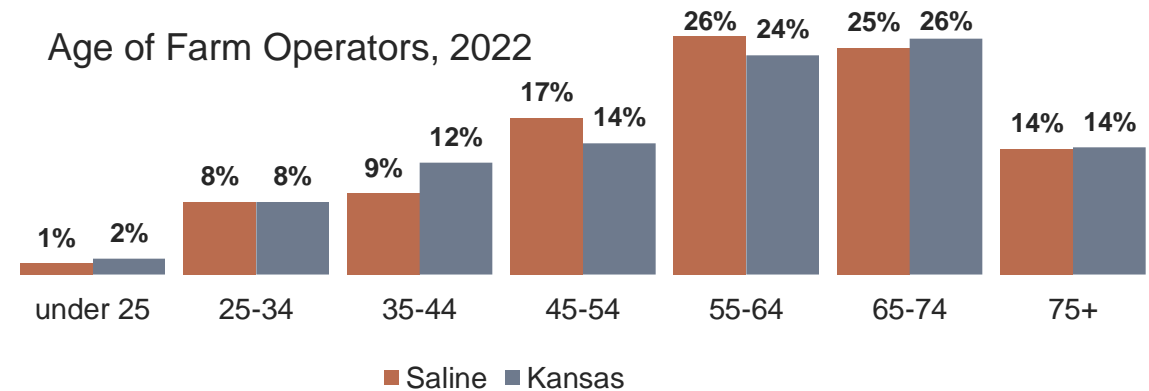
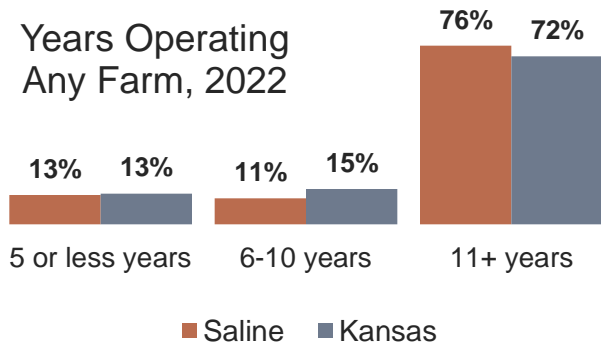
There are 902 producers in Saline County. Most farmers are male, between the ages of 45-74, and white. There are slightly more farmers with 11+ years of experience in Saline County (76%) than in Kansas (72%).



SOURCE: 2022 USDA CENSUS OF AGRICULTURE



SOURCE: 2022 USDA CENSUS OF AGRICULTURE



SOURCE: 2022 USDA CENSUS OF AGRICULTURE

Farm Sales

In 2022, according to the Census of Agriculture, the amount of total farm sales in Saline County was \$69,937,000, which makes up less than 1% of total farm sales for Kansas. Of the total farm sales in Saline, 80% was crop sales and 20% was from livestock, poultry, and products. **Saline County and Kansas had a similar number of farms that had net gains.** Of the 513 farms in Saline County, **55% had net gains**, and of the 55,734 farms in Kansas overall, 53% had net gains.

When comparing the averages per farm for Saline County and Kansas, the data suggest Saline County's farms are vastly different. The average total sales per farm in Saline County was \$136,329, which is **less than one third of the average for the state**. Saline County's farms also have a lower average net cash farm income per farm than Kansas overall – Saline farms' average net cash farm income is **about a third of the average for Kansas**. The average net gain per farm in Saline County of \$72,563 was **less than half (43%) of Kansas' average** per farm of \$170,524.

Fifteen farms sold directly to consumers, which makes up about 3% of farms in the county. Data for which farms provide this service is not readily available. In 2022, the value of food that farms sold directly to consumers was \$33,000, which is **less than 1% of total farm sales in the county**. One farm sold directly to retail markets, institutions, and food hubs for local or regionally branded products, though specific information on which farm is not readily available.

	Sales (\$1,000), 2022	Saline	Kansas
Total Sales		\$69,937	\$23,985,145
Crops		\$56,197	\$8,416,015
Grains, Oilseeds, Dry Means, Dry Peas		\$49,576	\$7,773,549
Livestock, Poultry, And Products		\$13,740	\$15,569,130
Cattle/Calves		\$12,926	\$13,596,819

SOURCE: 2022 USDA CENSUS OF AGRICULTURE

	Total Income (\$1,000), 2022	Saline	Kansas
Sales (Market Value of Products Sold)		\$69,937	\$23,985,145
Farm-Related Income		\$6,829	\$1,175,748
Total Farm Production Expenses		\$64,813	\$21,531,020
Net Cash Farm Income		\$14,168	\$4,071,834
Agri-tourism		\$240	\$17,411
Number of Farms with Net Gains		285	29,443

SOURCE: 2022 USDA CENSUS OF AGRICULTURE

<i>Per Farm Average, 2022</i>	<i>Saline</i>	<i>Kansas</i>
<i>Sales (Market Value of Products Sold)</i>	\$136,329	\$430,350
<i>Farm-Related Income</i>	\$24,132	\$39,525
<i>Total Farm Production Expenses</i>	\$126,341	\$386,318
<i>Net Cash Farm Income</i>	\$27,618	\$73,058
<i>Net Gains</i>	\$72,563	\$170,524

SOURCE: 2022 USDA CENSUS OF AGRICULTURE

Survey Data

Survey Respondents' Thoughts: Produce

Participants that identified the Produce sector as a need were asked to share their thoughts on the area in an open-text box.

- Education.** Respondents frequently expressed a strong desire for more education. Specific topics requested education on gardening, fishing, hunting, growing/raising food, agriculture, canning, garden expansion, composting, greenhouses, aquaponics. A couple participants specified a need for youth-centered education.
- Local.** Respondents reported a focus on prioritizing local produce and farming. Several comments specified that having more and accessible community gardens that provide education on gardening would be helpful to address this area.
- Cost/Affordability.** There were concerns regarding cost again. Specifically, participants noted that cost is a barrier, and “there’s not enough opportunity to affordably buy the food [that local farms] grow.”
- Other.** Several comments explained concerns regarding farming. One called farming “a dying art.” Another stated, “we have a lot of farmland surrounding Salina, but very little of it is used to grow specialty crops like produce, which we eat.”

Interview Summaries

Interviews were conducted by FACT members using the following set of questions developed in collaboration with CARE. CARE conducted qualitative analysis of all recorded comments from interviewees. Four farmers, ranchers, and/or local producers were interviewed.

1. From your perspective as a farmer/rancher, what are the strengths of the food system in Saline County? The food system includes how people produce, process, distribute, access and consume food and recover food waste. What stands out as going well?
2. From your perspective as a farmer/rancher, what are barriers or challenges for the food system in Saline County? Again, thinking about how people produce, process, distribute, access and consume food and recover food waste.
3. What do you think of the current food system that supports food businesses (restaurants, grocery stores, etc.) in Saline County?
4. What do you need to help support your business and food production?
5. Are you interested in growing your business/ scaling up? If so, what would need to be in place to do so?
6. How would you describe the market for locally grown and raised products in Saline County? What could be done to improve it?
7. What's your perception of public understanding of where their food comes from and the importance of "local" food? Do you think people understand what "local" food means?
8. Are there any environmental factors (e.g. soil, water) that are impacting the food system as you see it? What are they if so?
9. Is there anything else you'd like to share with us?

Summaries of interview responses are below.

1. Strengths.

Farmers/ranchers highlighted Prairieland Market and the Salina Harvest Market as key strengths of Saline County's food system, providing reliable outlets for local produce and meat. Community members who know about local food options are enthusiastic supporters, though awareness is still growing. Producers also noted increasing interest in local foods, indicating there is potential for expansion. Local markets connect farmers to consumers and help consolidate and stabilize the food system, ensuring consistent access to nutritious, locally grown foods. One farmer stated, "Prairieland Market has been advantageous for the community by giving farmers a place to bring their produce/items and the general public access to produce that is nutritious and local. This helps consolidate the local food system while also decreasing system interruption."

2. Challenges.

Farmers/ranchers identified several challenges in Saline County's food system. There are limited market options and a need for more producer-focused outlets, as the current climate restricts sales opportunities. Additionally, consolidation in the broader food system affects pricing. Seasonal growth limitations and climate impacts prevent year-round production, which increase the reliance on shelf-stable items. Producers also face unpredictable demand, which can result in waste or unmet customer needs. Local processing facilities are lacking, forcing farmers to travel outside the county, and marketing their products is costly and difficult. As one farmer noted, "Processing

availability has eased up across the region, but we don't have any in Saline County... Advertising/marketing is also hard and expensive."

3. Thoughts on Current Food System for Food Businesses.

Farmers/ranchers reported that support for food businesses in Saline County, including restaurants and grocery stores, is limited. Processing facilities are lacking, so surplus products are often redirected to food banks or used for animal feed.

Local businesses face challenges integrating local foods due to reliance on large distributors and low commodity prices, though smaller independent businesses appear to have more capacity to source locally.

Financial and business support exists in some forms, such as funding from Local Food Works, but training (in areas like organic farming, business planning, or marketing) is limited. According to one farmer/rancher, there are "lots of opportunities to sell," but it is "not easy to find out... how to do this type of business." The same person explained, it would be "helpful to have some business development around planning and strategies. The Chamber used to have some, but now does not" and farmers may benefit from support regarding marketing resources and tips. Another farmer/rancher indicated a desire for "producers [to] partner with others on farm stands to increase the variety of products available."

Again, Prairieland Market was cited as a valuable business partner. However, partnerships with restaurants and grocery stores are more difficult to establish. One participant mentioned that "making direct sales/communication with current customers to give them ongoing access" may be helpful to garner support and provide to the community outside of the season.

Farmers highlighted the importance of repeat customers and community support through farmers markets, and emphasized that producers are generally willing to advise and collaborate.

4. Business & Food Production Support Needs.

Farmers/ranchers highlighted the need for sufficient compensation, consistent customer demand, and time to move their products efficiently. Infrastructure and regulatory support, such as processing equipment and inspections, are also important. One farmer/rancher noted they had to personally invest in equipment such as freezers and meat trailers. Another emphasized that a democratic government is essential for a thriving local food system, as economic instability can create uncertainty that can deter growth and success.

5. Needs for Growing/Scaling Up Business.

Farmers/ranchers expressed interest in scaling up their businesses, but several factors limit growth. Access to financial support, such as grants, is helpful but it has been stressful due to “the uncertainty of the current administration. In March, we were informed that the grant money could be reclaimed by the government. In May, they said it could not be reclaimed. We are in no position to give back the grant funds. It has been stressful and overwhelming at times,” one farmer/rancher explained.

Low pay rates make expansion challenging. One participant stated that greater integration of local foods by larger businesses could help. Growth also depends on expanding the customer base and increasing direct-to-consumers purchases. Capacity constraints, particularly for animal processing and self-processing limits, were also noted as barriers to scaling production.

6. Market for Locally Grown & Raised Products.

Farmers/ranchers described the market for locally grown and raised products in Saline County as modest but with potential for growth. Sales at local markets, such as Salina’s Tuesday markets, are lower compared to Hays’ Saturday markets. One farmer/rancher suggested that additional or better-timed markets could improve accessibility and sales.

Producers emphasized the importance of business partners like Prairieland Market again, which fairly compensates farmers and supports profitability through certain practices. One farmer/rancher described it as Prairieland Market “ask[ing] what we need to be paid and then add[ing] their premium on top of it. This ensures that the producer is being paid a living wage while also ensuring that they make a profit,” and noted that broader integration with more businesses could strengthen the local market. Despite Saline County’s larger population size, there is still modest. Some cited limited marketing and advertising opportunities as constraints. Additionally, the availability of local meat processing facilities was highlighted as a need to expand the market for locally raised products.

7. Community Perceptions of Local Food and Food Production.

Farmers/ranchers had mixed perceptions of public understanding of local food in Saline County. Some believe residents generally know where food comes from due to the area’s strong agricultural roots. Others believe there is a lack of understanding regarding the origin of the food and the higher prices for local food. One farmer/rancher noted that some residents hold high production standards for their foods, often without recognizing the challenges farmers face in meeting those requirements. Producers also noted that shoppers are increasingly interested in non-processed foods. Overall, while there is support for local food, understanding of production costs and what “local” truly means is limited.

8. Environmental Factors Impacting Food System.

Farmers/ranchers identified several environmental challenges impacting the local food system. Spray drift from nearby large-scale farms was a concern, as it can slow crop growth, delay harvests, and early sales. Another concern was regarding the unpredictable weather, particularly drought and lack of rainfall. Additionally, limited well water and soil nutrient loss that requires ongoing replenishment were noted as concerns. Access to affordable or adequate water may be a larger issue in the future.

9. Additional Comments

One rancher/farmer noted that farmers markets should focus on food rather than art, with easier setup and better consumer accessibility. Another highlighted the high costs of equipment and reliance on banks, suggesting a need for policy changes to support producers. Lastly, another farmer shared that things are a learning curve, even though they have selling retail requires a learning curve but offers better returns and more flexibility in reaching business goals.

Listening Session Summaries

This summary of comments is based on notes taken in breakout groups during the listening sessions. The notes are summarized by combining similar comments but maintaining all ideas with little additional narrative.

Strengths/Resources.

- The current availability of local food is valued and is evidence of “community-minded growers and agencies”.
- There seems to be an increased interest in eating and supporting local.
- Local food means you know where your food comes from.
- A number of organizations/efforts support local food such as:
 - Community gardens
 - Master Gardener program
 - Free seeds at the library
 - Regenerative agriculture through the Land institute
 - Hunting and fishing organizations and education
 - K-State Extension/4-H programs
- Close-knit group of producers (can also be a challenge)

Challenges/Barriers.

- Environmental issues such as weather, space/available land, pesticides, and animal health
- Transportation issues
- Lack of places to sell local products
- Costs of production (including transportation, labor, time, etc.)
- Pricing – local may be more expensive (partly because of costs for production)

- Government regulation
- Lack of labor/workers
- Need is being met currently but no changes in number of producers to ensure an increase in surplus
- Lack of education to promote production and increase interest
- Close-knit group (also a strength)

Additional Support, Services, Actions Needed.

- Education/information for consumers about need for more local food growers to ensure supply
- Connection to resources/ information for producers regarding:
 - where they can sell their products
 - options for transportation to get to sales outlets
 - introductory classes for food production and raising animals
 - ways to mitigate prohibitive costs
- More government support at state, city, and county level
- More encouragement from local eateries to buy and serve local food
- Ability to provide local produce for weekend food backpack program
- Increased access to organic/ natural growing methods and prevention of cross contamination (pesticides)
- Promotion of the importance of family farm survival
- Adequate incentives for the continuation of farming
- Increased visibility of local food production

Process & Distribute

Process: Using equipment, energy, and tools to make agricultural products into food ingredients or food products.

Distribute: Gathering products from farmers and food processors, storing them, and transporting them to stores or restaurants.



Saline County is a major producer of grains and livestock, but most large-scale processing occurs outside the county due to a lack of processing facilities available.

The following themes were found in survey responses:

Process

Local

There was continued interest in keeping food production local. Respondents pointed to a shortage of local farms, processors, mills, and butcheries.

Education

Respondents expressed a need for more education related to gardening, food preparation, and preservation (especially for youth). They were interested in community classes and school partnerships.

Cost/Affordability

Many noted that equipment is too expensive, especially for hobbyists and small-scale food producers. Respondents suggested community-based models, including equipment loan libraries, community kitchens, and community gardens.

Distribute

Local

Respondents emphasized the need to support local farmers. Local producers often lack access to storage, processing, and sales channels. There is community-wide desire to develop a stronger local distribution system.

Cost/Affordability

Cost is the biggest barrier to buying locally produced food is cost. There is a strong interest in buying local, but it is more expensive. Respondents believe that sourcing foods locally would help reduce the cost.

Other

Respondents expressed interest in creating opportunities to donate local surplus food to reduce waste and provide relief for those with limited food access.

Key Findings

- Salina has several large food distribution businesses (Frito-Lay, Schwans) but the food isn't necessarily considered local or produced to fill local needs.
- Food processing and distribution on a smaller scale for local producers can be prohibitively expensive for both the producer and consumer, including restaurants and other food outlets.
- Despite limitations for processing and distribution, many local producers have found ways to ensure their products are available through Farmers Markets, Smoky River Meats, and other local outlets. Prairieland Market is a highly valued asset to the food system, according to residents/consumers and producers.

Secondary Data

A lack of federally inspected facilities in Saline County makes meat processing a challenge. However, several facilities within the county handle grain and small-scale meat processing. Notably, Smoky River Meats allows local producers to sell meat through retail, wholesale, and direct-to-consumer. It is an important addition to the local meat infrastructure, supporting both food security and economic development.

The food distribution system in Saline County includes a mix of regional and local warehousing, wholesale supply companies, and retail distribution centers. Major manufacturers and wholesalers, such as Schwan's and Frito-Lay, support economic development and employment, but are national supply chains and not focused on distribution of locally produced foods. Schwan's is one of the largest food employers in Salina, and its plant plays a significant role in regional frozen food logistics. Local food banks and charitable food networks throughout the county coordinate emergency food distribution.

Key Facilities

- Smoky River Meats
2559 S 9th St, Salina, KS 67401
The only USDA-inspected meat processor in Saline County, providing custom slaughter and processing for beef, pork, and other livestock.
- Farmer Direct Foods, Inc. (Homestead Milling)
5641 E Mariposa Rd, New Cambria, KS
Specializes in milling identity-preserved wheat into whole grain and artisan flours. Supports local farmers by providing value-added grain processing for food-grade products.
- Land Institute Grain Research Facility
2440 E Water Well Rd, Salina, KS
Focuses on grain research and pilot-scale processing to support sustainable agriculture development.

Retail Food Environment

The retail food environment in Saline County is a mix of traditional grocery stores, specialty markets, and farmers markets. They provide residents a range of food products and play a critical role in food availability and affordability within the community.

According to the U.S. Census Bureau’s County Business Patterns, in 2022, there were 8 food retailers in Saline County, 5 of which were grocery stores/supermarkets. There were 36 full-service restaurants, 53 fast food restaurants, and 0 fruit/vegetable markets. Specific details and locations were not found in the datasets utilized for this assessment.

Farmers markets in Saline County provide important venues for local producers to sell fresh fruits, vegetables, and meats directly to consumers. They offer a variety of local produce and promote community engagement. The Salina Farm & Art Downtown Market operates seasonally from May through October on Saturday mornings and is held in the City Lights Stage parking lot. The Salina Farmers Market also operates seasonally from May through October on Saturday mornings, and is held in the Central Mall southeast parking lot. The Harvest Farmers Market operates year-round on Tuesday evenings and is held in the Emmanuel Church parking lot. All farmers markets in Saline County are SNAP retailers.

Survey Data

Almost all respondents reported grocery stores/supermarkets as a primary food source. Over one in three respondents reported restaurants as one of their primary food sources, and a similar number of respondents reported fast food/takeout as a one as well.

FOOD SOURCE N=476

	N	%
<i>Grocery store/supermarket</i>	461	97%
<i>Local restaurants</i>	167	35%
<i>Fast food/takeout</i>	160	34%
<i>Farmer's market</i>	59	12%
<i>Community garden/personal garden</i>	39	8%
<i>Charitable food assistance</i>	29	6%
<i>Dollar store</i>	14	3%
<i>Other</i>	10	2%
<i>Convenience store</i>	8	2%
<i>Gas station</i>	2	0%
<i>Prefer not to answer</i>	2	0%

*Other responses include: family farm for meat and eggs, grow my own, home raised meat, HungryRoot (online food subscription service), Prairie Land Food Coop, senior center, farmer markets.

Survey Respondents' Thoughts: Process

Participants that identified the Process sector as a need were asked to share their thoughts on the area in an open-text box. The following themes were found in their responses.

- **Education.** Respondents emphasized the need for more education related to gardening, food preparation, and preservation. Several specified that need for youth education around these skills. There was interest in community classes, school partnerships, and incubator kitchen programs.
- **Cost/Affordability.** Cost was again cited as a major barrier. Many noted that equipment is too expensive, especially for hobbyists and small-scale food producers. Several suggested community-based models, including equipment loan libraries, community kitchens, and community gardens.
- **Local.** There was continued interest in keeping food production local. Respondents pointed to a shortage of local farms, processors, mills, and butcheries.
- **Other.** Respondents showed concern about the quality of food, specifically around additives, chemicals, and over-processing. Some participants cited larger structural issues, including regulatory burdens on small farmers, reliance on industrial agriculture.

Survey Respondents' Thoughts: Distribute

Participants that identified the Distribute sector as an unmet need were asked to share their thoughts on the area in an open-text box. The following themes were found in their responses.

- **Cost/Affordability.** Cost came up as the biggest barrier to consuming locally produced food. While there's strong community interest in eating local, many residents noted that these options are often more expensive than non-local grocery items. Some believe that sourcing foods locally would help reduce the cost.
- **Local.** Many respondents emphasized the need to support farmers and producers, especially those operating on a smaller scale. Local producers often lack access to storage, processing, and sales channels. Suggestions included direct-to-consumer models, increasing the shelf-life of items, more local sales

opportunities, and partnerships that would help distribute more efficiently and keep food within the region. Participants expressed desire in developing a stronger local distribution system that includes grocery stores, farmers markets, restaurants, transportation, and donation. Respondents explained they want to see more farmers markets and improved access to local grocers.

- **Other.** Some respondents stated a need for infrastructure improvements that reduce transportation time and keep food fresh for longer. Others expressed interest in creating opportunities to donate local surplus food to reduce waste and provide relief for those with limited food access.

Interview Summaries

Interviews were conducted by FACT members using the following set of questions developed in collaboration with CARE. CARE conducted qualitative analysis of all recorded comments from interviewees. Five food business owners, operators, and/or managers were asked the following questions.

1. From your perspective as a food business owner/manager, what are the strengths of the food system in Saline County? The food system includes how people produce, process, distribute, access and consume food and recover food waste. What stands out as going well?
2. From your perspective as a food business owner/manager, what are barriers or challenges for the food system in Saline County? Again, thinking about how people produce, process, distribute, access and consume food and recover food waste.
3. How important do you think “local” food is to most people in the community? Do you think people understand what “local” food means (as in, locally grown or raised)?
4. Have you provided locally grown or raised food as an option to customers/consumers? If yes, what challenges have you faced in providing it?
5. What’s your experience with the demand for or importance of healthy food in the community?
6. What do you think of the current food system that supports food businesses (restaurants, grocery stores, etc.) in Saline County?
7. What groups or people in Saline County appear to have the most difficulty accessing or affording healthy food?
8. Is there anything else you’d like to share with us?

Summaries of interview responses are below.

1. Strengths.

Food business owners/managers highlighted several strengths, including access to TJ Poultry, milled flour in McPherson, a “young core of people who are reestablishing a focus into the Salina County food system,” and increased marketing for locally grown

foods. A couple mentioned there are little to no issues with supply and pricing, and there is no shortage of farmers and gardeners available. Specifically, farmers markets and Prairieland Market were named as strong community hubs for local produce and composting. Overall, there is a strong desire to strengthen local food connections.

2. Challenges.

Challenges include limited local resources and a heavy reliance on large distributors, leaving restaurants and food businesses with few options for local sourcing. One owner/manager pointed to the disconnect between local producers and restaurants, stating there is “no need to source locally or seasonally... [and] ordering and inventory has become... streamlined, [restaurants] are unwilling to source from other vendors. So producers don’t even try to work with restaurants anymore.” Streamlined ordering systems make it easier to default to corporate suppliers rather than invest in local relationships. Despite Prairieland Market accepting EBT, cost remains a major barrier as local food is often priced higher which limits customers on purchasing local foods. Other challenges included difficulties in managing composting logistics, time and transportation barriers for donations, and weather-related impacts on local production. One owner/manager suggests a central compost area, similar to the recycling center, may be beneficial. Additionally, producers sometimes cannot meet production requirements to justify Prairieland Market’s purchasing from them.

3. Community Perceptions of Local Food and Food Production.

Perceptions of local food vary widely across the community. Some businesses see strong support and loyalty from customers who value fresh and local food, while others estimate that only a small niche truly prioritizes it. Many noted that residents often misunderstand what “local” means, with some associating it with regional or even statewide products rather than county-grown goods. Economic pressures also shape attitudes, as many families prioritize affordability over sourcing. Still, food business owners are finding ways to educate customers during interactions and by highlighting practices like whole-animal use and scratch cooking. Overall, while appreciation for local food is growing, understanding remains inconsistent and often tied to individual upbringing, income, or values.

4. Experiences With Providing Locally Grown or Raised Food.

Most businesses reported sourcing some local products, but consistency, cost, and volume were ongoing challenges. Some noted difficulty finding and connecting with farmers, expressing interest in a centralized list or network of local producers. Others described struggles with product availability due to short Kansas growing seasons, making it difficult to design seasonal menus. Restaurants with corporate backing found it easier to integrate local products but still faced supply limitations. At Prairieland Market, providing local food is central to their mission, but they face challenges with aging farmers nearing retirement and the lack of successors to continue operations.

Overall, while businesses are committed to sourcing locally when possible, barriers in supply, cost, and infrastructure limit broader adoption.

5. Demand/Importance of Healthy Food In The Community.

Demand for healthier food is rising, with more customers requesting fresh, minimally processed, or specialized dietary options. Businesses reported growing interest in gluten-free, vegetarian, and other health-conscious options, which has led to menu expansions and new product offerings. Some owners emphasized the role of community education, including nutrition classes and customer-driven requests, in shaping demand. Others observed that healthy food still appeals primarily to a smaller niche (about 20%) but noted that this group is highly committed. Post-COVID, there has been a noticeable increase in interest in local and healthy food, fueled in part by supply chain disruptions that encouraged people to buy locally.

6. Thoughts on Current Food System for Food Businesses.

Views on the broader food system were mixed. Some praised the financial support available through grants and Chamber of Commerce programs, while others felt small businesses face systemic disadvantages compared to large corporate restaurants with greater marketing reach and resources. Access to processing facilities and value-added infrastructure was described as very poor, forcing reliance on resources outside of Saline County. While some restaurants benefit from strong community support, many struggle to compete with the convenience and low prices of chain options. Workforce challenges, particularly after COVID, were also mentioned as barriers to growth and innovation. Several participants emphasized the need for stronger partnerships between farmers and restaurants, more government support for local food businesses, and better integration of local food into strategic community planning.

7. Populations with Limited Food Access.

Participants identified low-income families, working-class households, seniors, and young families as the groups facing the greatest barriers to healthy food access. Cost was cited as the main factor, with many families living paycheck to paycheck and opting for cheaper processed foods over more expensive fresh or local options. Knowledge gaps, such as lack of cooking skills or awareness of resources, also play a role, as do marketing pressures from large corporations. Some participants suggested that education—both in schools and for adults—could help improve food literacy and home cooking skills. Others emphasized broader structural issues, such as wage stagnation and systemic inequities in the food system, that make it difficult to ensure consistent access to healthy food.

8. Additional Comments.

Several business owners stressed the need for systemic changes to better support small businesses and local farmers, citing tax advantages enjoyed by large corporations

and the limited diversity of food options available in mainstream markets. Some reflected on differences between Salina and larger cities like Kansas City, where local food systems are more connected and collaborative, expressing a desire to bring that same energy to Saline County. Others highlighted positive community programs like local food donations and praised the visibility of resources in Salina compared to other cities. While not all had additional comments, those who did reinforced the themes of stronger infrastructure, community support, and policy changes as keys to strengthening the food system.

Listening Session Summaries

As noted previously, this summary of comments is based on notes taken in breakout groups during the listening sessions. The notes are summarized by combining similar comments but maintaining all ideas with little additional narrative.

Strengths/Resources.

- Agencies and businesses involved in processing/distribution are large employers
- Local resources include:
 - Kansas Food bank (including children's program)
 - Farmers Market
 - Schwans
 - FACT
- Salina Regional Health Center (for warehouse space)
- I-35 and I-70 connection
- The agricultural background of the community
- Neighborhood support
- The community is surrounded by local farmers
- Collaboration, communication, and shared resources amongst agencies/resources that are focused on local needs
- Land/ space to produce and store food, including grain elevators
- Project Salina

Challenges/Barriers.

- Lack of knowledge of all people/businesses/organizations involved in processing/distribution
- Lack of knowledge of where distribution is most needed
- Concerns related to starting/operating/sustaining a processing/distribution business or organization, including:
 - Transportation
 - Worker shortage, including drivers and farmers
 - Hard to start/lack of capital to start and grow

- Equipment needs/ repair
- Sustainability
- Cost
- Environmental concerns
- Lack of access
- Scale differentiation (large vs small)
- Inconsistent support/resources, including from city/county/region and USD 305
- Distribution of unhealthy food (including from Food Bank)
- Hard to find food distributors to smaller nonprofits
- Lack of storage

Additional Support, Services, Actions Needed.

- Education/communication of resources and “players”
- Distribution storage support, including local central warehouse
- Business support
- Farming succession planning
- Mobile distribution
- Building community partnerships/relationships to share resources/food and decrease final costs
- Local dairy
- Access to local food
- Proper distribution equipment (e.g., refrigerators, vehicles)

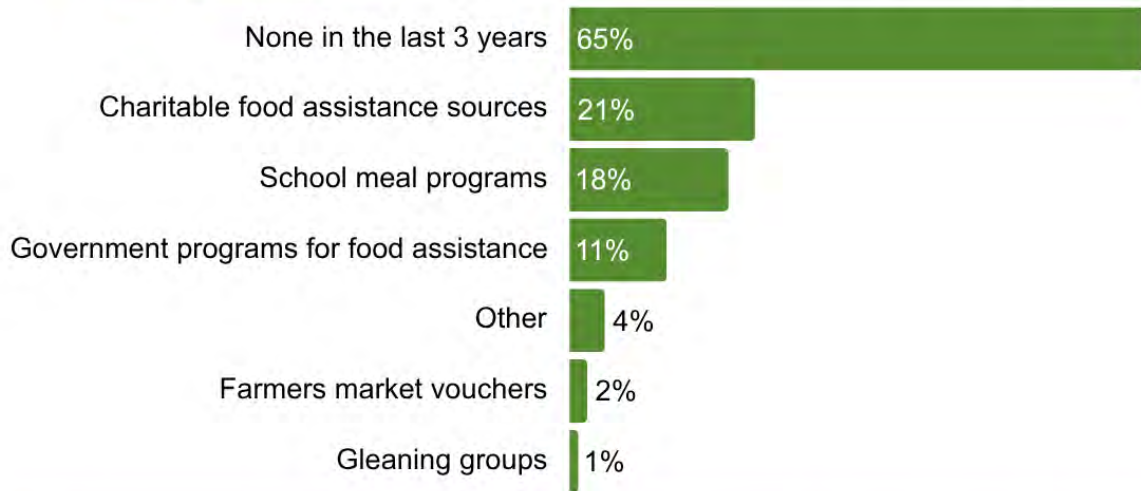
Being able to get enough healthy, affordable food that fits your culture and needs.

53% of survey respondents felt that the Access sector of the food system was a strong need in their community.



288 respondents did not participate in any food relief programs in the last 3 years.

Food Relief Programs Used in the Last 3 Years



1 in 2 respondents identified **persons with low income** as one of the highest populations of concern.

Top 3 Barriers to Getting Food

1. Cost of food (77%)
2. Lack of selection of healthy food (33%)
3. Barriers to growing our own food/garden (18%)

Top 3 Needs for Getting Food

1. Lower food cost (83%)
2. Greater access to healthy food options (46%)
3. Better access to stores/food options across all neighborhoods (28%)

Key Findings

- Access is considered the greatest need in Saline County based on survey responses.
- Cost was the primary concern related to access with lack of availability of healthy food being mentioned frequently as well.
- Half of survey respondents said they struggle to stretch their food budget across the month.
- Equal access to food across the county is an issue, with Northern Saline County called out as an area of concern.
- Saline County appears to be improving related to food access but the need is still great, especially among those with lower incomes or in certain neighborhoods/areas.

Secondary Data

Income plays a major role in food security and food access overall. Secondary data cited earlier in this report, regarding higher rates of poverty and more ALICE households in Saline County than in Kansas, may indicate a need for increased food access.

Additional secondary data suggests similar needs. According to Feeding America, in 2023, 14% of Saline County experienced food insecurity in that past year, similarly to Kansas and the country. For children, the food insecurity rate is notably higher at 19%, which is also similar to the percentage for Kansas and the U.S. overall.

While there are fewer households receiving SNAP with children in Saline County than in Kansas (46% vs 50%), there are more students eligible for the free lunch program at school in Saline County (48% vs 42%).

The Food Environment Index accounts for factors contributing to a healthy food environment, such as income, physical distance from a grocery store, and food insecurity, on a scale of 0 (worst) to 10 (best). In line with the secondary data cited above that depicts a relatively healthy county, the 2025 Food Environment Index reveals that **food access is fairly high for the county and on an upward trend**. In 2017, the Food Environment Index score for Saline County was 7.4. In 2025, the index score has rose to 8.0, and is higher compared to Kansas' score of 6.8 and the U.S. score of 7.4.

However, data from the community survey detailed later in this report **suggests there is still a strong need for increased food access**. In summary, respondents explained the limited physical access to grocery stores in northern areas of Salina/Saline County and identified cost as a major barrier for many residents.

<i>Food Access</i>	<i>Saline</i>	<i>Kansas</i>	<i>U.S.</i>
<i>Community Spending on Food</i>	12.9%	12.7%	12.6%
<i>Food Insecurity Rate</i>	14.3%	14.0%	14.5%
<i>Child Food Insecurity Rate</i>	19.0%	18.4%	18.4%
<i>Households Receiving SNAP with Children</i>	46.1%	49.5%	47.2%
<i>Students Eligible for Free Lunch Program</i>	47.9%	41.6%	43.6%
<i>Avg Monthly WIC Participation Per 1,000</i>	16.2	16.0	22.4*
<i>Food Environment Index</i>	8.0	6.8	7.4

SOURCE: 2025 CLARITAS CONSUMER SPENDING DYNAMIX, 2025 COMMUNITY HEALTH RANKINGS; 2023 FEEDING AMERICA, 2019-2023 AMERICAN COMMUNITY SURVEY; 2023-2024 NATIONAL CENTER FOR EDUCATION STATISTICS; 2023 KANSAS DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND ENVIRONMENT (*2017)

While government food assistance programs may be available to some, there are many food insecure residents who do not meet eligibility requirement. Several Saline County community organizations provide relief for food insecure residents, which may be particularly helpful for ineligible individuals and families. For example, sources of charitable food assistance provided in Saline County includes:

- Food banks (e.g., The Emergency Aid Food Bank)
- Food pantries, community meal sites (e.g. Salina Rescue Mission, Salina Grace, Salvation Army, Emmanuel Four Square)
- Food boxes (e.g. Pantry Program, Senior Commodity Box, Food 4 Kids Backpack Program)
- Blessings boxes
- Meals on Wheels
- School meal programs (e.g. free and reduced lunch, summer meals program)

Survey Data

Respondents were fairly evenly split regarding their satisfaction with the number of food options in their neighborhood, with a slight lean towards satisfaction.

SATISFIED WITH THE NUMBER OF OPTIONS TO GET FOOD IN YOUR NEIGHBORHOOD N=457



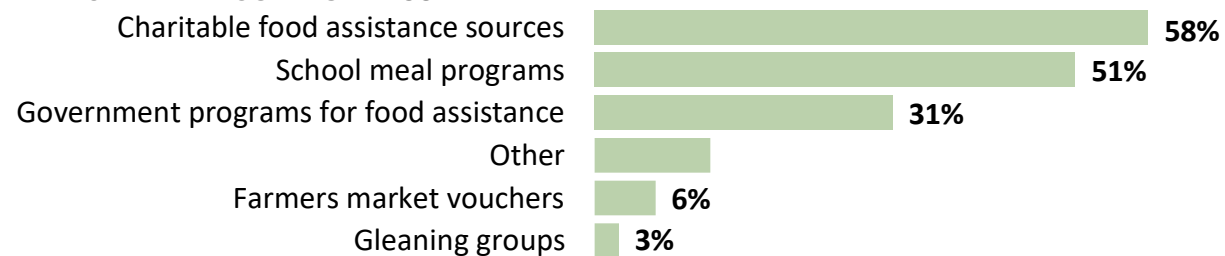
Respondents were provided a list of food relief programs and asked to select which programs they have participated in the last three years. About two thirds reported they did not participate in any of the programs listed. For the 156 respondents who did, over half (58%) reported they have utilized charitable food assistance sources.

PARTICIPATED IN ANY OF THE FOLLOWING PROGRAMS IN THE LAST THREE YEARS IN SALINE COUNTY? N=444

	N	%
<i>I have not ever participated in these programs</i>	288	65%
<i>Any charitable food assistance sources</i>	91	21%
<i>School meal programs</i>	79	18%
<i>Government programs for food assistance</i>	49	11%
<i>Other</i>	19	4%
<i>Farmers market vouchers</i>	10	2%
<i>Gleaning groups</i>	4	1%

*Other responses include: participated previously but has been over three years, commodities box, farmers market, meal reimbursement through CACFP, senior center meals, YMCA free grocery meals.

PARTICIPATED PROGRAMS N=156



Respondents were asked to identify two populations that most experience struggles with access to healthy foods. Nine of ten respondents identified low-income persons as one of two populations of highest concern. One in two respondents identified disabled residents as one of two populations of highest concern. Those who selected, “other,” 14 of them identified older/aging adults and 7 identified homeless persons as populations of highest concern.

WHICH TWO GROUPS HAVE THE HARDEST TIME ACCESSING HEALTHY FOOD? N=466

	N	%
<i>Persons with low income</i>	421	90%
<i>Persons with disabilities</i>	233	50%
<i>Families with children</i>	182	39%
<i>Other</i>	32	7%
<i>Veterans</i>	21	5%
<i>Persons of color</i>	9	2%

*Other responses include: people with limited transportation, families with children, people with mental health issues, those who do not qualify for food assistance government programs, large families

Cost remains a major barrier for food access. When asked to identify personal barriers to accessing food, respondents most commonly selected cost – more than three of four

respondents (77%) reported the cost of food as one of their greatest barriers. Following that, a third identified a lack of selection of healthy food as a great barrier.

THREE GREATEST BARRIERS FOR GETTING THE FOOD YOU NEED (NOT FAST FOOD OR CONVENIENCE FOOD) N=415

	N	%
<i>Cost of food</i>	320	77%
<i>Lack of selection of healthy food</i>	138	33%
<i>Barriers to growing our own food/gardening</i>	74	18%
<i>Lack of knowledge of how to cook/prepare food</i>	70	17%
<i>Poor quality of food</i>	67	16%
<i>Challenges accessing local foods, such as farmers market</i>	53	13%
<i>Schedule conflicts/limited hours of stores or charitable food assistance options</i>	32	8%
<i>Distance to nearest store</i>	29	7%
<i>Lack of selection of culturally diverse food</i>	28	7%
<i>Other</i>	28	7%
<i>Challenges related to charitable food assistance</i>	26	6%
<i>Stigma or embarrassment in accessing charitable food assistance resources</i>	25	6%
<i>Lack of transportation</i>	14	3%

*Other responses include: being able to reach items on store shelves, lack of affordable selection of healthy food items, and overabundance of selection of cheaply priced unhealthy food items, education on proper nutrition, income limitations, what used to be the wage cap is no longer stretching as far as it used to, lack of finances to purchase toxic free foods, lack of selection for special diets due to medical needs, more year-round farmers markets, organic options at decent cost, overworked/too stressed to cook healthy meals, time, price difference for local foods, can't pay bills and afford food.

When asked to identify community needs related to food access, cost arises as a strong concern again. Most respondents (83%) reported lowering the cost of food as one of the greatest community needs. Almost half (46%) reported greater access to healthy food options as a community need.

THREE GREATEST NEEDS IN COMMUNITY IN GENERAL RELATED TO FOOD ACCESS (NOT FAST FOOD OR CONVENIENCE FOOD) N=440

	N	%
<i>Lower cost of food</i>	367	83%
<i>Greater access to healthy food options</i>	202	46%
<i>Better access to stores/food options across all neighborhoods</i>	121	28%
<i>More education about healthy food options and preparation</i>	121	28%
<i>Greater access to local food options</i>	91	21%
<i>Reducing stigma for needing food assistance</i>	76	17%
<i>More transportation options to get to food sources</i>	64	15%
<i>More charitable food sources (e.g., food pantries/food banks/food boxes, etc.)</i>	59	13%

<i>Greater choice of food in stores</i>	56	13%
<i>Other</i>	8	2%
<i>Not applicable</i>	7	2%

*Other responses include: raise income qualifications to get assistance for healthy organic foods, food for families during summer/school breaks, more healthy food selection at charitable food sources, more subsidies for healthy foods/restrictions on SNAP usage for unhealthy foods, arranging transportation, wages remain the same but work hours decrease, grocery stores other than Dillons or Walmart.

When provided a list of options that may improve access for healthy foods, respondents overwhelmingly selected “more affordable healthy food options.” Cost is a major barrier for access to healthy foods in Saline County.

WHAT WOULD MAKE IT EASIER FOR PEOPLE IN COMMUNITY TO BE ABLE TO BUY AND EAT HEALTHY FOODS? N=475

	N	%
<i>More affordable healthy food options</i>	357	75%
<i>Universal free meals at school (including breakfast and lunch)</i>	151	32%
<i>Increased education about how to grow, prepare, or preserve own food</i>	111	23%
<i>More healthy food options in restaurants</i>	107	23%
<i>More healthy food options at grocery stores and markets</i>	88	19%
<i>More local food growth and production</i>	85	18%
<i>More farmers markets or Community Supported Agriculture CSA programs across all neighborhoods</i>	81	17%
<i>Decreased stigma for using food assistance</i>	54	11%
<i>Increased education on how to access food assistance</i>	47	10%
<i>More community gardens to grow your own food</i>	42	9%
<i>More charitable food assistance sources</i>	33	7%
<i>More mobile food sources, such as mobile pantries and mobile markets</i>	33	7%
<i>Wider choice of food in stores, including culturally diverse options</i>	31	7%
<i>Increased WIC and/or SNAP allocations</i>	29	6%
<i>More communal meal programs</i>	20	4%
<i>Extended hours at grocery stores/markets</i>	17	4%
<i>More meal or food delivery services</i>	16	3%
<i>Other</i>	14	3%
<i>Increased transportation options to places to buy food</i>	11	2%

Survey Respondents’ Thoughts: Access

Access was one of two areas identified as a need by over half of participants. The highest number of open-text responses provided by participants was in this area, most of which were regarding cost/affordability.

- **Cost/Affordability.** A top concern for respondents, especially regarding the high cost of fresh, healthy food options. Many reported that healthy and local food options are too expensive, for low-income individuals and families. Some specified that “processed/unhealthy/fast/junk” foods are more accessible as they cost less.
- **Physical Access.** Participants mentioned a lack of nearby grocery stores, especially in northern areas. Transportation was also cited as a barrier.
- **Other.** Several comments expressed concerns about the lack of ethnic and cultural foods available in Saline County, and for an affordable price. A handful of responses requested more communication regarding food options available, such as promoting the Senior Center meals, meals-on-wheels, local healthy foods, and farmers markets. Some explained that food access is particularly difficult for families, and a few wanted more education on gardening, digital coupons, and storing/preparing fresh foods.

Listening Session Summaries

As noted in previous food system areas, this summary of comments is based on notes taken in breakout groups during the listening sessions. Because the researcher was not part of each group to gather more context or meaning, the notes are summarized by combining similar comments but maintaining all ideas with little additional narrative.

Strengths/Resources.

- Community organizations that offer meals such as:
 - Meals on Wheels, including for unhoused
 - Salvation Army (now offering meals again)
 - Food banks and pantries, including mobile and pop-up pantries
 - Afterschool programs focusing on healthy foods and nutrition
- A lot of resources in the community, including:
 - OCCK
 - Food co-ops
 - Kitchen at Masonic Home
 - Assistance available in-store and online
 - Senior center for non-seniors
- Communication about available resources, including:
 - Word of mouth
 - Social media
 - Organizations, including schools, sharing info
 - FACT Community Resource Guide
 - Overlay maps (showing where sidewalks are, etc.)
- Have a central way to communicate
- City government

- Sales tax cut
- Helpfulness of individuals who are open to giving and give what can be used
- Good community accountability
- Hydration stations (meeting people where they are)
- Increased focus on children

Challenges/Barriers.

- Cost of food
- Resources aren't always available when and where needed, including:
 - Limited hours
 - Summer meals only available in June
 - Location (transportation can be an issue, public transportation isn't great)
 - Food deserts
 - Areas with low walkability (especially when carrying groceries)
 - May not be available or known to individuals who don't use traditional resources
- Lack of knowledge of where and how to access resources
- Information distribution
 - Need multiple mediums
 - Finding the best way for each population (lack of one uniform way to inform)
 - Fragmented efforts
- Income/eligibility requirements for programs
 - Guidelines are too strict
 - Too much to qualify but too little to meet needs
 - Too much red tape; "excessive stuff needed"
- Lack of coordination of resources
- Lack of culturally or medically appropriate resources (including labels only in English, food for persons with allergies, etc.)
- Stigma related to accessing resources
- Lack of appliances (including things like can openers, microwaves, etc.) to use donated food
- Double Up Food Bucks are gone

Additional Support, Services, Actions Needed.

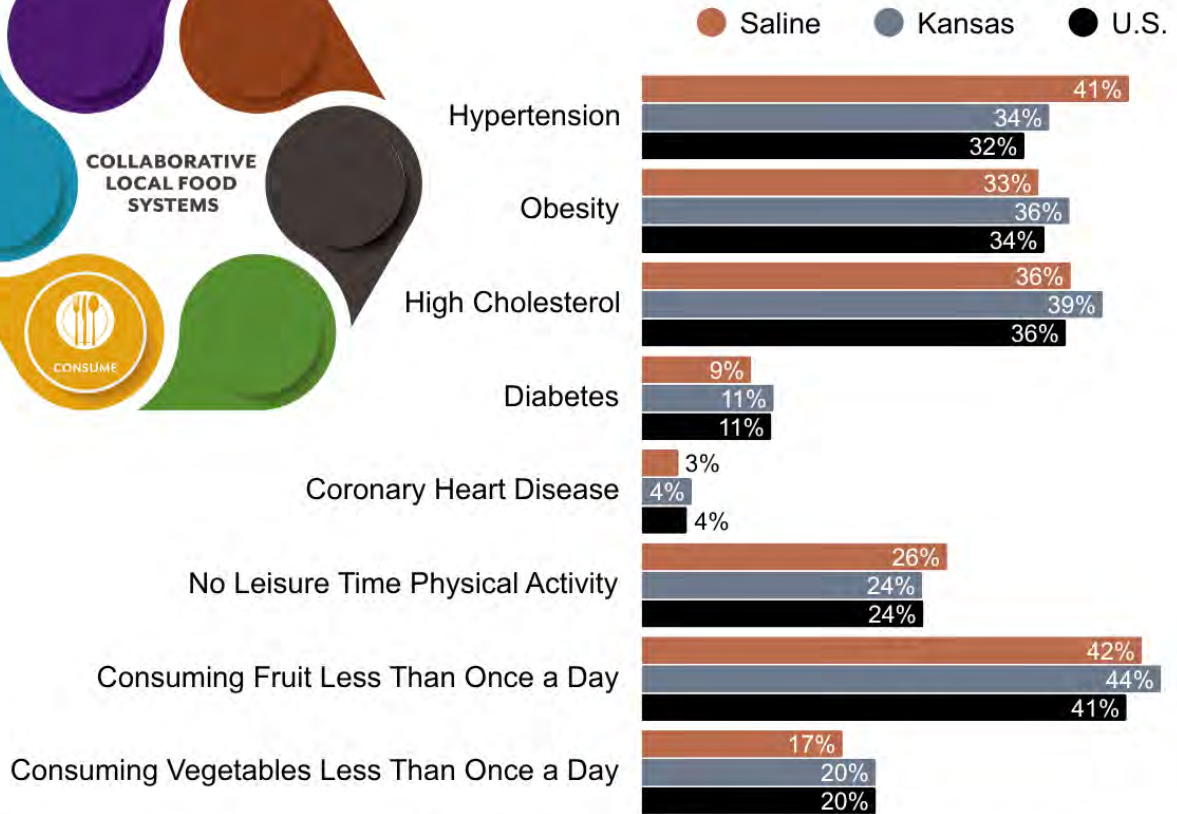
- Explore what's currently going on, including:
 - What's already being done, so as not to reinvent the wheel
 - What organizations are turning people away due to lack of resources
 - How many farmers markets currently exist
- Possible programs/efforts such as:
 - Mobile food bank option
 - Helping individuals to understand what "healthy" means, including consideration of differences in cultures

- More school food programs
 - Education/training on how to prepare food
- Address communication concerns/issues, including:
 - Multiple social media platforms
 - How do we get info to those that aren't on social media?
 - Better collaboration and communication, including "push notifications"
 - Increase frequent updates: "food 911"
 - More voices
- County sales tax cut
- Address issue with schedules that makes accessing resources difficult
- Make public transportation more convenient, including removing stigma regarding using public transportation and education on availability
- Increase community involvement, including creating awareness and comfort regarding resources available
- Increase honesty and truth/transparency

Buying, preparing, and eating food.



Adult Health



SOURCE: 2021 KANSAS DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND ENVIRONMENT; BEHAVIORAL RISK FACTOR SURVEILLANCE SYSTEM

The following themes were found in survey responses about the Consume sector:

Cost/Affordability

Participants reported that healthy foods are not affordable. There are concerns about being overly reliant on convenience foods and processed meals due to it being lower in cost and more available.

Education

There is a strong desire for more education around nutrition; preparing/cooking fresh and healthy foods, especially on a budget and for families; growing food; preserving food; and meal planning.

Other

Time is a concern due to work and family duties. Physical access can be a barrier for some in certain areas of town, especially those without housing and without transportation.

Key Findings

- Saline County has a wealth of resources to help those who need food assistance.
- Saline County also has a good number of options for buying local food, but would benefit from more.
- Survey and listening session respondents identified education as a major need in helping resident learn about healthy food options, how to prepare, how to grow, etc.
- Despite having a number of resources, cost is still an issue, especially with healthy food, and access to healthy food can be limited in certain areas of the city and county.

Secondary Data

Health and Eating

Saline County faces a range of health and nutrition challenges that reflect both statewide and national trends.

According to the 2021 Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System, compared to Kansas, Saline County has higher rates hypertension in adults, but lower rates of obesity, high cholesterol, diabetes, and coronary heart disease in adults. There are slightly fewer Saline County residents that participate in leisure time physical activity.

The 2020–2025 Dietary Guidelines for Americans recommends people consume fruits and vegetables as part of their diets to reduce risk for chronic diseases, such as cardiovascular disease, type 2 diabetes, some cancers, and obesity. However, eating behaviors in the United States continue to reflect significant nutritional challenges, with a large portion of the population falling short of recommended fruit and vegetable intake. In 2021, 42% of adult residents in Saline County consume fruit less than once a day, and 17% consume vegetables less than once a day, which are slightly lower percentages when compared to Kansas overall.

Survey Data

Survey Respondents' Thoughts: Consume

- **Education.** Many respondents expressed a strong desire for more education around nutrition; preparing/cooking fresh and healthy foods, especially on a budget and for families; growing food; preserving food; and meal planning.

- **Cost/Affordability.** Similar to the area of Access, affordability is a strong concern for many. Participants reported that groceries are not affordable, especially healthy foods, citing that cost is a barrier. Additionally, there were concerns about being overly reliant on convenience foods and processed meals due to it being lower in cost and more available.
- **Other.** A few comments explained that time is a concern due to work and family duties. Others mentioned physical access can be a barrier for some in certain areas of town, especially those without housing and without transportation.

Listening Session Summaries

As noted in previous sections, this summary of comments is based on notes taken in breakout groups during the listening sessions. Because the researcher was not part of each group, the notes are summarized by combining similar comments but maintaining all ideas with little additional narrative.

Strengths/Resources.

- Local resources/organizations, including:
 - Churches
 - Senior Center
 - Meals on Wheels
 - Weekend/summer lunch program (many locations)
 - Farmers Markets
 - Kansas Food Bank
 - Prairieland (ready-to-eat meals as an example)
 - Local college pantries/lending closets
 - FACT
 - Community gardens
 - Blessing boxes
 - Community meal sites
 - Community resource guide
- Local transportation
- Project Salina (businesses collect within their offices)
- Partnerships (mail carriers, grocery stores, Souper Bowl of Hope)
- Variety of places that give and places to pick up
- Individuals who donate
- Supportive social services

Challenges/Barriers.

- Cost of food in general
- Education needed regarding available resources

- Lack of access to resources for some populations or during certain times, including:
 - Senior citizens have issues during winter/severe or inclement weather due to transportation
 - Language and literacy barrier regarding recipes and instructions
 - Rural kids have less access to summer meal programs
 - Weekend/summer lunch programs are good but need to fill more gaps at more locations
 - Food deserts, including North Salina
- Access to Blessing Boxes:
 - Some may not want to go to a church for Blessing Box
 - Blessing boxes could be more spread out across the community
- Amount from Food Bank can be an issue when using public transportation
- Lack of /knowledge/ability/comfort in using/preparing food (“I can get it. Now what?”), including:
 - Not having appropriate appliances, tableware
 - No clean space to prep
 - Clean, comfortable space to eat (such as table, counter)
 - Lack of cooking “know how”
 - Extra work to cook/prep
 - Lack of additional needed ingredients (e.g., spices, oils, etc.)
 - Food storage (at home or during transport)
 - Knowledge of kitchen and food prep safety
 - Stigma related to food insecurity can create less motivation to learn about or even access food
 - SNAP-Ed nutrition education is gone
- Less healthy and/or processed food options are more convenient:
 - Easier to prep and/or eat right away
 - Lower cost
 - Concern about whether school lunches are healthy
- Increased supply issues – there are bare shelves in some stores
- Charitable food services too fragmented
- KU-Salina lacks food pantry lending closet
- City, County, hospital plans don’t currently include food

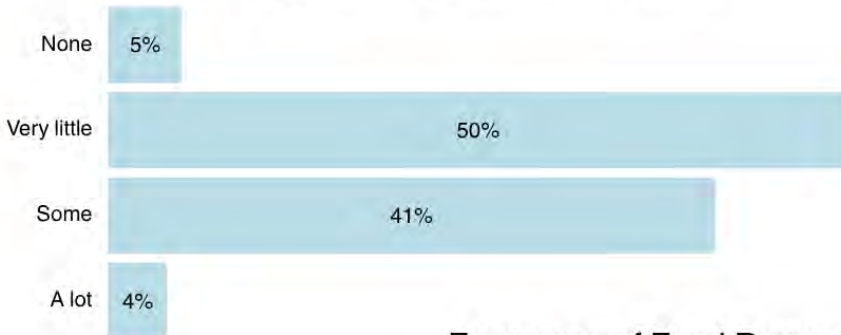
Additional Services, Support, Actions Needed.

- Additional programs/resources, including:
 - Mobile food bank distribution to homebound/mobile food deliveries
 - Better/more locations for Blessing Boxes (including West side of town)
 - School lunch extended into the weekend and for holiday break
 - Food is Medicine program
 - Community kitchen to prep food in
 - Pickup from restaurants of food to be distributed
 - SNAP accepted at Farmers Markets
 - Lending closet for cooking items

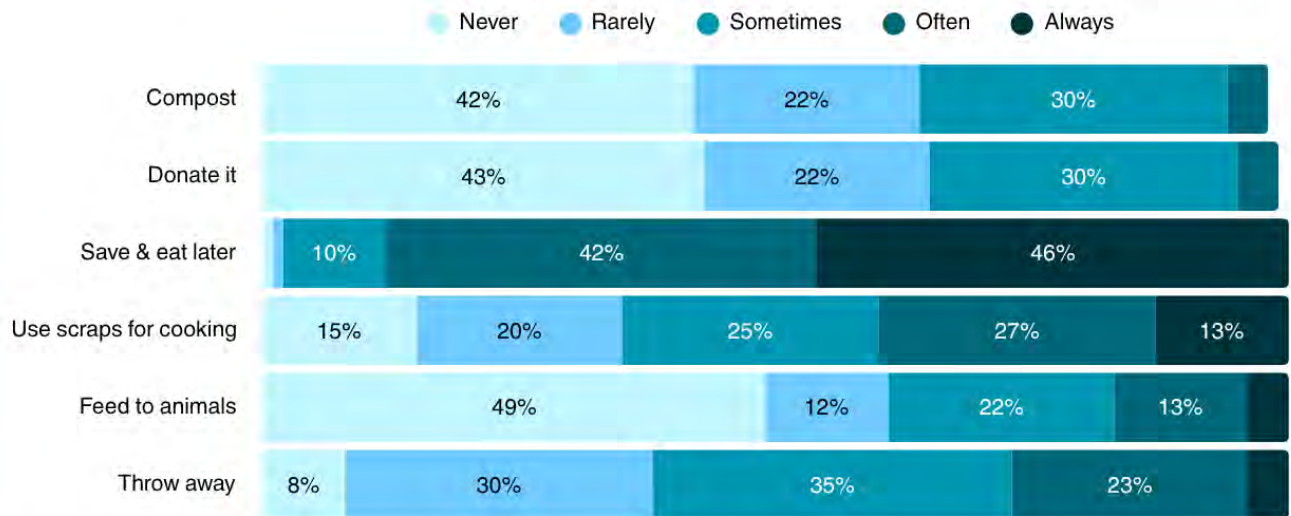
- Meal plans at Food Bank
 - Cooking classes in a variety of locations and modes
- Networking for food resources
- Food share - multifamily cooking together
- Salvation Army back on their feet serving meals, etc.
- Communication between agencies and organizations (e.g., send to United Way and Live Well Saline County to distribute to lists)
- Coordinate news, events, community info (no longer the newspaper but multiple sources)
- Have people send info to United Way and Live Well Saline County to send out to their distribution lists

Finding ways not to throw extra food away, such as sharing it with others, feeding it to animals or composting (also known as food waste management).

Food Waste within Past 2 Weeks



Frequency of Food Recovery Method Used



The following themes were found in survey responses about the Recover sector:

Donation/Redistribution

Respondents suggested surplus food from homes, restaurants, schools, and grocery stores should be redistributed to others with food insecurity and otherwise limited food access.

Education

Respondents expressed a need for more education on ways to recover food. Topics included:

- Composting
- Extend the period of safe consumption for food
- Safely store food, plan meals, creatively reuse leftovers
- General knowledge about what options are available to reduce food waste.

Key Findings

- Recovery was identified as the second greatest need (after access) by survey respondents.
- Survey respondents most often said they have very little food waste at the end of the week. But if they do, they're most likely to feed it to animals, compost, or donate it.
- Nearly half (48%) of those who don't currently participate in any recovery actions said they'd be interested in composting.
- Education related to recovery was repeatedly mentioned as a way to address the need in this area.
- Listening session attendees noted the need for more collaboration in getting unused food to those who need it, including the involvement of grocery stores, restaurants, and charitable resources.

Secondary Data

Due to limited availability of public data on “recover” there are no secondary data in this section.

Survey Data

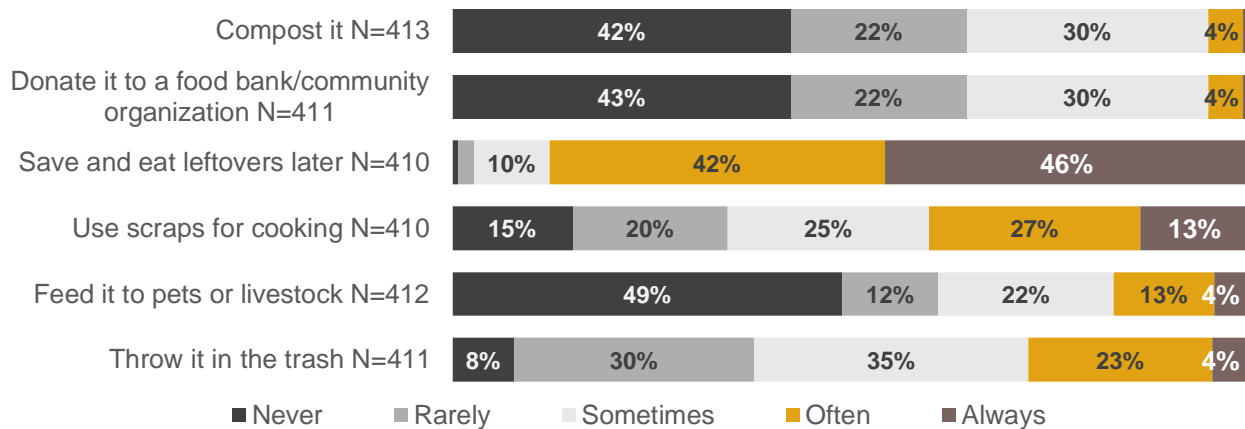
In terms of food waste, most indicated they usually had very little or some food waste in the span of two weeks (92%).

HOW MUCH FOOD WASTE DO YOU TYPICALLY HAVE WITHIN TWO WEEKS? N=440



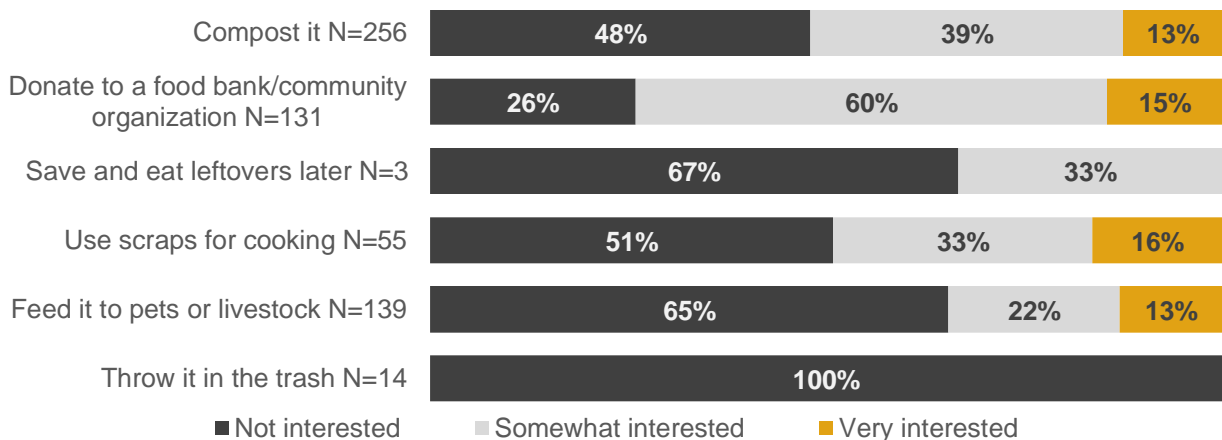
When asked about participation in methods of reducing food waste, saving and eating leftovers later was the most frequently used method – 88% reported they often or always utilize this method with leftover/unused food in their house. Respondents were least likely to compost, donate to a foodbank/community organization, or feed it to pets/livestock.

HOW OFTEN DO YOU TYPICALLY HANDLE LEFTOVER OR UNUSED FOOD IN YOUR HOUSEHOLD IN THESE WAYS?



For those who answered “Never” to any of the methods, they were prompted to answer an additional question, “How interested would you be in doing this?” The figure below visualizes their responses.

HOW INTERESTED WOULD YOU BE IN DOING THIS?



Survey Respondents’ Thoughts: Recover

- Education.** Respondents highlighted the need for more education on ways to recover food. Topics included learning how to compost, extend the period of safe consumption for food, safely store food, plan meals, creatively reuse leftovers, and a general knowledge about what options are available to reduce food waste.
- Donation/Redistribution.** Many people felt that surplus food from homes, restaurants, schools, and grocery stores should be redistributed to others with food insecurity and otherwise limited food access. Suggestions included donation drop-off sites, more partnerships with food banks and shelters, gleaning and food

rescue programs, and utilizing social media to share food with other community members.

- **Composting & Community Solutions.** Composting was a recurrent theme throughout the responses and other themes in this area of need. As mentioned earlier, respondents expressed a strong desire for more education on composting and opportunities to compost. Some mentioned community composting sites and one even suggested offering composted soil for residents to purchase as an alternative to soil at “big box stores.” Respondents also expressed interest in learning safety practices for feeding animals.

Listening Session Summaries

Strengths/Resources.

- Good amount of resources/supports, including:
 - Money (grants, funders, etc.)
 - Regional farmers markets
 - Community food boxes
 - Current Recovery efforts with Food Bank and food pantries
 - Central food recovery location
 - Sunrise Presbyterian and Christ Cathedral work with Saline Grace for two lunches a week
 - Food Not Bombs is starting up (focus on vegan natural food and recovery)
 - Ark Church Fall give-away
- Caring nature of Saline County, including desire to share and to help
- Help goes to a variety of places and supports a variety of food to share
- Rescue Mission will sometimes take expired food
- Panera used to donate to local groups and could be a model for other businesses
- Geographic location of Kansas
- Knowing the right person can help

Challenges/Barriers.

- How much support will come from nonprofits and businesses
- Need greater awareness/communication regarding:
 - Options for recovery
 - What is composting and how to do it
 - “Big 911”
 - What you can/can’t donate or give away
 - How to fully use food
 - Understanding “best by”/consume by/expiration dates

- Food safety
- Blessing Boxes and other resources
- What others/neighbors are doing for recovery
- Avoid seasonal giving only, increase year round
- More coordination to avoid overlap in services/efforts, including:
 - Connecting those who recover food with those who are in need
 - Organized collection
 - Community composting for spoiled food
- Create buy-in in community, including with businesses/organizations to reduce waste and inadequate recovery
- Promote using low visual appeal foods/selling seconds
- Address transportation (individual and community)
- Need a guide to resources

Additional Support, Services, Actions Needed.

- More focused attention
- Focus on places where people are
- More fund management/grant writers
- Education/communication needed regarding:
 - Waste and what is food recovery
 - Food safety
 - What is a Blessing Box and where are they?
- Determine what success looks like
- More middlemen needed
- More coordination and communication needed, including
 - Connect critical community partners to share info/ resources (e.g., HR staff, non-profits, city/ county commissioners, school counselors)
 - Get businesses involved
 - Creating community compost – trash companies don't pick up or separate
- Streamline system re: expiration; create a community standard
- Provide transportation to services



Possible Priority Areas

ACCESS

- Emerged as the top priority across all methods.
- Most problematic aspects include:
 - cost of healthy food, availability and promotion of local food
 - the ease and low cost of relying on less healthy options.
- Healthy food options can be lacking.
- Need to ensure access to healthy, culturally diverse food options across all areas of the county.

RECOVERY

- May be considered the second priority.
- Noted lack of coordinated efforts to recover and distribute food to those who need it.
- Noted lack of knowledge recovery topics.
- There appears to be a will to do more in this area.

EDUCATION

- Frequently mentioned across the food system.
- Education needs included:
 - where to find and how to prepare nutritious food.
 - how to compost.
 - where to access local resources for food insecurity and MORE.
- The need for education may indicate:
 - a lack of knowledge of community resources that exist.
 - OR a need to address barriers to access those resources despite community members knowing about their availability.
- Issues raised regarding education included:
 - where to find and how to prepare nutritious food.
 - how to compost.
 - where to access local resources for food insecurity and MORE.
 - Assessment results also highlighted that education needs to be where the people are
 - There's a need to meet people where they are geographically, culturally, or knowledge-wise.

Possible Priority Areas

COST

- There are some best practices that could be reviewed to possibly implement to address this area.
- Cost cuts across many of the food system areas could have a valuable impact if addressed.

LOCAL FOOD

- Repeatedly identified as being important.
- Responses indicate Saline County residents could use more places to access local foods (e.g., farmers markets, sales through existing grocery stores, community gardens, etc.), more restaurants/businesses committed to serving/selling it, and more vocal support for producing and using local food across the community.

COLLABORATION

- Collaboration needed to:
 - address food insecurity/hunger
 - increase recovery options
 - support use of local food
- Participants highlighted the wealth of resources in the community but also pointed out the need to come together to ensure all of the residents are included.

SUSTAINABILITY OF LOCAL FOOD PRODUCTION

- Noted as a need in Saline County.
- Suggested needs:
 - Efforts to encourage new generations of farmers.
 - Efforts to support local food distribution and use.
 - Possible grants or financial support for those who grow or produce food locally were suggested as needs.

Key Findings to Consider for Action

Looking at the key findings across all methods and all food system areas, the following rose to the top as possible priorities for FACT to address. FACT can look at the specific data to see the various data points that support the following priorities. Additionally, FACT can assess for themselves the feasibility and effort involved in addressing the items listed below using a pay-off matrix to determine where their efforts may have the largest impact or offer a quick win.

Possible Priority Areas

ACCESS emerged as the top priority across all methods (survey, stakeholder interviews, listening sessions, review of national data sets). The aspects of access that appear most problematic are cost of healthy food, availability and promotion of local food, and the ease and low cost of relying on less healthy options. Additionally, healthy food options, including produce, can be lacking in some areas of the community. Ensuring access to healthy, culturally diverse food options (including produce) across all areas of the county was identified as a need and could be addressed a number of ways that overlap with the other priorities.

RECOVERY could be considered the second priority with community input underscoring the lack of coordinated efforts to recover and distribute food to those who need it, lack of knowledge about such topics as composting, and a lack of community resources to support recovery (e.g., community compost site), and even options for preserving food (e.g., canning). There appears to be a will to do more in this area.

EDUCATION across the food system was mentioned frequently. Issues raised regarding education included such things as where to find and how to prepare nutritious food, how to compost, where to access local resources for food insecurity, etc. The need for education may point to lack of knowledge of community resources that exist, or may reveal a need to address barriers to access those resources despite community members knowing about their availability. Issues raised regarding education included such things as where to find and how to prepare nutritious food, how to compost, where to access local resources for food insecurity, etc. Assessment results also highlighted that education needs to be where the people are – in other words, there's a need to meet people where they are geographically, culturally, or knowledge-wise.

COST was a key element of the lack of access for many people. Although reducing costs directly may not be within the power or resources of most individuals or organizations, there are some best practices that could be reviewed to possibly implement to address this area. As noted above, there are different dimensions to the issue of cost including cost of healthy food (versus cheaper, less healthy options), availability issues in certain areas that make costs higher or may make transportation to

less convenient locations necessary, or discounted options for customers. Cost cuts across many of the food system areas and could have a valuable impact if addressed.

LOCAL FOOD was repeatedly identified as being important and responses indicate Saline County residents could use more places to access it (e.g., farmers markets, sales through existing grocery stores, community gardens, etc.), more restaurants/businesses committed to serving/selling it, and more vocal support for producing and using local food across the community.

COLLABORATION to address food insecurity/hunger, increase recovery options, and support use of local food was another area highlighted as needed in Saline County. More specifically, participants highlighted the wealth of resources in the community but also pointed out the need to come together to ensure all of the residents (including outside of Salina) are included.

SUSTAINABILITY OF LOCAL FOOD PRODUCTION was also raised as a need in Saline County. Efforts to encourage new generations of farmers, efforts to support local food distribution and use, and possible grants or financial support for those who grow or produce food locally were suggested as needs.

Appendix A

Listening Sessions Data and Themes

Summary of Listening Sessions

Two listening sessions were held in Saline County on August 20th, 2025. One session was in the afternoon at 1:30pm at the Salina Public Library with about 25 people in attendance. Another session was in the evening at 6:30pm at Church of the Cross with about 15 people in attendance.

Overall Themes/Most Important Points

Across the various food system sectors, some common themes emerged and are detailed below.

Strengths.

- Area is surrounded by local farmers
- Large employers
- Farmers Markets
- Focus on local food becoming more prevalent
- A number of agencies/organizations that distribute food (including churches, Meals on Wheels, food pantries, etc.)
- Strong desire to address food system needs
- Willingness to collaborate

Needs.

- There are a lot of resources in the community but...
 - Need better communication about the range of resources
 - Need better collaboration to fill gaps
 - Need continued/increased funding to meet needs
 - Need better transportation/walkability to get to resources
 - Need better accessibility outside of regular “business hours” or times of year
 - Need more availability of culturally appropriate foods and labels in more languages
 - Need to be mindful of meeting people where they are (geographically, knowledge-wise)
- More communication/education is needed regarding such common issues as:
 - Where to get healthy, affordable food
 - How to prepare and cook food
 - Resources available in the community for those in need
 - The availability and value of local food

- Effective recovery methods (e.g., composting, selling seconds, etc.)
- Production/processing/distribution
 - Transportation issues are a problem
 - Restaurants inconsistent about using local food
 - Increasing costs
 - Need new generations of farmers/ranchers for sustainability
 - Shortages/limited stock are frequent (e.g., store shelves bare)
 - Not sure chain stores are tailoring stock to Saline Co needs
- Increase recovery efforts
 - Increase awareness about how to be involved in recovery (e.g., composting, food collection and distribution, guidelines about expiration dates, etc.)
 - More coordinated food collection
 - Increase buy-in in community about the value of recovery
 - Work with local restaurants re: implementing recovery efforts

NOTE: The issue of fewer resources being available in areas outside of the city of Salina was mentioned. It didn't rise to the level of being included as a theme. But it's noted here that most of the participants in the listening sessions were from the city of Salina, so needs in the rest of the county may not have been reflected as well.

Large Group Discussion Comments

The following comments are not themed so as to maintain participants' voice but they echo the themes from the small group break outs listed above.

What idea or theme stood out to you most from today's discussion, and why?

- A bunch of passionate people are here
- Those who are disadvantaged are having more issues – poor getting poorer, middle class struggling more; going to need more resources; middle class don't have access to a lot of the resources others might so we need to consider what safety net is there for people who lose jobs, etc. – ALICE shows this.
- Education, education, education – on resources, needed in so many areas
- Resources need to be available at the right times – working people, students, shift workers, etc.
- Don't always know how to cook healthy food – don't know how to make it good, how to deal with food waste – prepared food is easy; education needed about how to prepare
- Losing SNAP Ed – losing colleagues and resources for families, need to still reach those people
- As people donate to food pantries, be mindful of what resources are needed to open a can, etc. Would be good to donate quality items (not just cheap dollar store stuff that breaks)
- Look at populations are underserved – they fall through the cracks because they're not vocal – reach them where they're safe
- Have multiple resources in multiple languages – 14 languages in the community

- Produce – make people feel safe but not pitied; you’re part of our community
- What are we doing to our environment – what are we not doing to be responsible landowners; listen to farmers to figure out how to produce and maintain environment
- Keeping generational farms alive
- What would look like to have an “adopt a farmer” to get new farmers
- We have food deserts – still supply issues for dollar general, etc.
- How much we rely on other states and other countries to get our food
- There are tons of grants to support food recovery, food banks, etc. but need to pay attention to volunteers needed; volunteer time is falling off
- Dollar general – how do they determine what they put in the store? Its not determined locally so it may not fit what Salina needs; they often aren’t fully stopped. So when people rely on that store, people can’t get what they need and may stop going there
- How can we work with local restaurants to provide food and produce to the community rather than waste it (rescue food)
- In Wichita – they have ICT food rescue and people get alerts about where food is able to be rescued
- There’s a strong desire to help and strengthen our community – execution is lacking. We have a lot of strengths
- When you look at your community of people, they may feel the same – but the administration for city may not be on the same page (nothing re: food on city plan)
- There’s a push to buy local, advertise local, this is encouraging to see all the things going on and trying to make progress
- Communication kept coming up
- Need for reliable central communication e.g., food bank distribution used to be regularly posted in Salina paper
- Need for more collaboration
- For production – you have to be passionate about it, it’s hard to do
- Wish there was an organization like this for housing – FACT is a good model for how a lot of organizations and people can come together to address issue
- Overall lack of support or sustainable plans from city government
- Neither county or city has food as part of their plan
- Great that there are so many people from different parts of the community. Speaks to strengths of Salina
- FACT really got the survey out to people

Produce

Listening Session Notes by Question

What specific challenges or barriers do individuals and the community face?

- Weather*/ environment
- Space/ land

- Places to sell
- Pricing- local may be more expensive
 - Is why more
- Costs to process
- Government regulation*
- Labor
- Pesticides
- No surplus of producers- nothing in place to increase surplus
- Expensive
- Lack of help
- Environment
- Animal health
- Lack of education
- Resources
- Space/ land
- Lack of interest
- Time
- Close-knit group (also a strength)

What strengths or resources make a difference for individuals and the community?

- Local food
- Local= community-minded growers/ agencies*
- Meet the need currently/ but no changes
- Plethora of options for food assistance
- Transportation
- Uptick about the importance of eating and supporting local
- Local= knowledge- where your food is coming from
- Community garden
- Community gardens
- Master Gardeners classes
- Free seeds at the library
- The Land Institute
 - Regenerative agriculture
- Hunting organizations
- Fishing clinic (Lakewood Park)
- 4-H programs
- K-State Research and Extension

What additional services, support, or actions are needed?

- More resources and education for consumers and growers about need for more local food growers in case something happens
- More local government support at state, city, and county level
- More encouragement from local eateries to buy and serve local food

- Have more information for growers on where they can sell their products and transportation to get there
- Ability to provide local produce is weekend food backpack program
- Increased access to organic/ natural growing methods and prevention of cross contamination (pesticides)
- Importance of family farm survival and adequate incentives for the continuation of farming
- Hard to get into if you don't already know someone
- Need more introductory classes for food production and raising animals
- Ways to mitigate prohibitive costs
- Increased visibility of what is out there

Process & Distribute

Listening Session Notes by Question

What specific challenges or barriers do individuals and the community face?

- Who are they?
- Transportation
- Regional support
- Worker shortage
- Hard to start
- Equipment needs/ repair
- Lack of access
- How does it get where it's going?
- Knowledge of where to distribute- who needs it?
- Scale differentiation (large vs small)
- Environment
- Inconsistent resources
- Cost to do it
- Sustainability
- USD 305 lack of support
- Capital to start growing
- City/County support
- Food bank gives out a lot of unhealth food
- It's hard to find food distributors to smaller nonprofits
- Storage- food bank is very aware of space
- Distance
- Labor
 - Drivers
 - Farmers

What strengths or resources make a difference for individuals and the community?

- Large employer

- Food bank
- FACT
- I-35 and I-70 connection
- Agricultural background
- Neighborhood support
- Surrounded by local farmers
- Local oriented (agencies, support)
 - Collaboration
- Farmer direct
 - Great resources
- Meat processor in McPherson
- Farmer's Markets
- Communication amongst places
- Shared resources
- Land/ space to produce store, etc.
- Schwans
- Highway
 - I-70
 - I-135
- Kansas Food Bank (mentioned twice)
 - Children's program
- SRHC
 - Warehouse space
- Project Salina
- Grain elevators

What additional services, support, or actions are needed?

- Knowledge/ communication
- Distribution storage support
- Relationships
- Business support
- Farming succession planning
- Education of resources
- Access needed
- Mobile distribution
- Community partnerships to decrease final costs
- Storage
- Local dairy
- Sharing resources, food
- Access to local food
- Local central warehouse
- Proper distribution equipment (e.g., refrigerators, vehicles)

Access

Listening Session Notes by Question

What specific challenges or barriers do individuals and the community face?

- Double bucks gone
- Mostly English in labels
- When is it available?
- Time of day
- Hour stores are open
- Food desert
- Transportation
- Cost
- Lack of culturally appropriate resources
- Lack of knowledge
- Coordination of resources
- Information distribution
 - Low walkability, especially with groceries (food desert)
 - Multiple mediums
 - Finding the best way
- Food deserts
- Transportation
 - Public transportation not great
- Lack of one uniform way to inform
 - Fragmented (mentioned twice)
- Income
 - Guidelines are too strict
 - Too much to qualify but too little to meet needs
 - (reducing) stigma
- Hours of operation at food agencies
- Summer meals only available in June
- Lack of appliances
- Not super walkable
- Lack of knowledge
- Allergies
- People who need food don't know where to go
- Restrictive regarding cultural needs (menu)
- Individuals not using traditional resources
- Excessive stuff needed
 - Red tape

What strengths or resources make a difference for individuals and the community?

- Community orgs that offer meals
- Meals on Wheels

- Word of mouth info
- Social media
- Available to use various assistance programs in store and online
- A lot of great organizations
 - Getting the info to folks
- Filter info through the schools
- City government
- Overlay maps
 - Are there sidewalks, etc.
- Being talked about
- Social media
- Cut sales tax
- Meals at Salvation Army again
- Having additional food banks/ pantries
 - Mobile pantry and pop-up events
 - More options
- OCCK
- FACT Community Resource Guide
- Giving what can be used
- Open mindset
- Making foods more usable
- Food coops
- Lots of resources available in town
- After-school programs
 - Focus on healthy foods, nutrition
- Good community accountability
- Senior center for non-seniors
- Meals on wheels for larger population (unhoused)
- Have a central way to communicate
- Hydration stations
 - Meet people where they're at
- Increased focus on children
- Kitchen available at Masonic Center

What additional services, support, or actions are needed?

- How do we get info to those that aren't on social media?
- Schedules make accessing resources difficult
- Mobile food bank option?
- Multiple social media platforms
- More voices (how many farmers markets are there)
- Helping individuals to understand what "healthy" means
 - Differences in culture
- More school food programs
- County/ cut sales tax

- Finding out what organizations are turning people away due to lack of resources
- Making public transportation more convenient
- Removing stigma regarding using public transportation
 - Education on availability
- Better collaboration and communication
 - Push notifications
- The wheel- what's already being done?
- Increases honesty and truth/ transparency
- Increase frequent updates: “food 911”
- Increased community involvement
- Increased community awareness and comfort regarding resources available
- Education/ training on how to prepare food

Consume

Listening Session Notes by Question

What specific challenges or barriers do individuals and the community face?

- Language and literacy barrier regarding recipes and instructions
- Charitable food services too fragmented
- Rural kids have less access to summer meal programs
- KU-Salina lacks food pantry/ lending closet
- Weekend/summer lunch programs good, but need better coverage to fill gaps, more locations
- SNAP-Ed nutrition education is gone
- Clean space to prep
- Clean space to eat (table, counter)
- Appliances, tableware
- Cooking know-how
- Healthy foods not convenient
- More work to cook/prepare
- Comfortable space
- Lack of proper ingredients (spices, oils, etc.)
- Can get it, but now what
- Less healthier food easy to eat right away
- Food storage during travel or when at home
- Food insecurity stigma = less motivation to learner even access
- A question whether school lunches are nutritious
- Seeing pattern with increased supply issues things not on shelves typically there
- Food desert, grocery stores are siloed
- Buying, preparing, eating
- Cost of food
- Easier to buy processed food, also cheaper and easier to prepare than scratch
- Access to food, i.e., locations, food deserts
- North Salina needs options

- Blessings box locations could be shifted to more spread out/ dispersed
- Knowledge of kitchen safety and food prep and food safety
- Working with city, county hospital on plan docs to include food- doesn't now
- Awareness of resources (education)
- Amount of food the food bank gives at one time can be a barrier for using public transportation
- Blessing box locations may be a barrier for people (they don't want to go to a church)

What strengths or resources make a difference for individuals and the community?

- Local transportation
- Local churches
- Senior citizens have issues over winter due to transportation + severe/ inclement weather
- Senior center and Meals on Wheels
- Weekend/ summer lunch program (many locations)
- Farmer's markets
- Having food bank
- Prairieland does good job with offering ready-to-eat meals
- Local colleges have pantries/ lending closets
- Saline Co FACT
- Community gardens
- Blessing boxes
- Food bank
- Community meal sites
- Project Saline (businesses collect within their offices)
- Partnerships (mail carriers, grocery stores, Souper Bowl of Hope)
- Variety of places that give and places to pick up
- Individuals who donate
- Support of social services
- Community resource guide is good

What additional services, support, or actions are needed?

- Food bank mobile distribution to home bound
- Better/ more locations for blessings boxes
- School lunch into the weekend and extend for holiday break
- Food is Medicine program
- Networking food sources
- Community kitchen to prep food in
- Food pickup from restaurants to be distributed
- Farmers markets take SNAP
- Lending closet for cooking items
- Food share- multifamily cooking together

- Meal plans at food bank
- Salvation Army back on their feet serving meals, etc.
- Communication between agencies and organizations
- How can we coordinate news, events, community info (no longer the newspaper but multiple sources)
 - Have people send to United Way and Live Well Saline County to send out to distribution lists
- Mobile food deliveries
- Cooking classes in a variety of locations and modes
- Blessings boxes- west side of town

Recover

Listening Session Notes by Question

What specific challenges or barriers do individuals and the community face?

- Awareness- knowing there are other options
- What is composting? How to do it?
- Avoid seasonal giving- increase year round
- How to create buy-in within community? (Restaurants, stores, etc.)
- If not composting, what else?
- Selling seconds
- Size/volume- especially in smaller communities
- What you can/can't donate/ give away?
- Using low visual appeal foods
- How to fully use our food
- Knowing what best by/ expiration dates mean
- Use by dates- consume by dates
- Education about food safety of blessings boxes
- Communication
- Amount of stores/ places
 - Large amount of waste
- Organized collection
- Transportation (individual and community)
- Inadequate recovery
- Collection (mentioned twice)
- Knowledge
- Communications
- Awareness of compost from neighbors
- Need a guide to resources, coordination
- Collaboration is a need- lots of resources, overlap of services
- When food spoils, some communities have composting
- Expiration dates are a challenge- What can still be used? Throwing away good food

- Where to go to access recover to who's doing it? More education to connect people in need with those who recover.

What strengths or resources make a difference for individuals and the community?

- Lots of money (grants, funders, etc.)
- Regional farmers markets
- Community food boxes and food bank
- Desire to share
- Wider communication
 - "Big 911"
- Desire to share
- Current recovery efforts with food bank and food pantries*
- Central food recovery location
- Desire to help
- Lots to share variety fo food and food prepared
- Geographical location of Kansas
- Having a "right person"
- Food bank
- Everything on the paper
- Saline County has a caring nature
- Help goes to a large variety of places
- Rescue Mission will sometimes take expired food
- Two lunches a week- Sunrise Pres and Christ Cathedral
 - Work with Saline Grace
- Food not Bombs is starting up- focus on natural food and recovery (vegan)
- Panera used to donate to local groups
 - Get more businesses to do this
- How much will come from nonprofits and businesses
- Ark Church with fall give-away
 - Really valuable

What additional services, support, or actions are needed?

- More focused attention
- Fund management talent
- More grant writers
- Waste education
 - What is "recovery"
- Food safety education
- What does success look like?
- Where are the "blessing" boxes
- What is a "blessing box"?
- More middlemen

- How do we make connections with critical community partners to share info/ resources. Ex. HR staff, non-profits, city/ county commissioners, school counselors.
- Streamline system re: expiration- community standard
- Focus on places where people are- recovery meal
- Transportation to services
- Community compost needed- trash companies don't pick up separate
- Get businesses involved
- Communication and coordination- really needed

Appendix B

Grocery Stores

Cash-Wa Direct
1647 Sunflower Road
Salina, KS 67401
785-643-9365

Farmer Direct Foods - Homestead Milling
5641 E. Mariposa Road
New Cambria, KS 67470
816-809-9879

Lava Angus Processing
1475 K106 Hwy
Minneapolis, KS 67467
785-823-0633

Prairieland Market
118 S. Santa Fe Ave
Salina, KS 67401
785-827-5877

Smoky River Meats
215 W. Kirwin
Salina, KS 67401
785-827-1311

Vita Villa
2041 S. Ohio
Salina, KS 67401
785-827-7547

Restaurants

The Renaissance Cafe
210 N. Center
Assaria, KS 67416
785-667-5535

The Alley
115 E. Ash
Salina, KS 67401
785-515-2565

Ad Astra Books and Coffee
135 N. Santa Fe
Salina, KS 67401
785-833-2235

Five Guys Burgers & Fries
3015 S. 9th
Salina, KS 67401
785-822-0675

Hong Kong Buffet
2515 Marketplace
Salina, KS 67401
785-820-8683

Mokas Café
902 E. Crawford
Salina, KS 67401
785-825-6100

Longhorn Steakhouse
2590 S. Ninth
Salina, KS 67401
785-823-2201

Jalisco Mexican Restaurant
2601 Market Place
Salina, KS 67401
785-833-2388
Blue Beacon Travel Plaza
2125 N. Ninth
Salina, KS 67401
785-827-9275

McAlister's Deli
2661 Market Place
Salina, KS 67401
817-458-1415

Paramount Bar
219 N. Santa Fe
Salina, KS 67401
785-827-0992

Imperial Garden Express
844 E. Crawford
Salina, KS 67401
785-827-8688

Bayard's Café
540 S Broadway Blvd.
Salina, KS 67401
785-825-4351

Tucson's Steakhouse Saloon & Grill
2750 S. Ninth
Salina, KS 67401
785-820-9595

Freddy's Frozen Custard
2420 S. 9th
Salina, KS 67401
785-827-0900

Hickory Hut Barbeque
1617 W. Crawford
Salina, KS 67401
785-825-1588

Carlos O'Kelly's
2259 S. Ninth
Salina, KS 67401
785-826-1501

Dagney's Ice Cream
105 E. Iron
Salina, KS 67401
785-833-2125

Russell's Restaurant
649 Westport Blvd.
Salina, KS 67401
785-825-5733

Papa John's Pizza
1650 S. Ohio
Salina, KS 67401
785-827-7575

Taco Bell
1700 W. Crawford
Salina, KS 67401
785-825-6414

Taco Bell
2305 S. Ninth
Salina, KS 67401
785-823-2854

Gambino's Pizza
2000 S. 9th Street, Ste. A
Salina, KS 67401
785-577-8440

District Eat and Play
2259 S. 9th Street
Salina, KS 67401
785-515-2329

Chick-fil-A
2245 S. 9th Street
Salina, KS 67401
785-820-8007

Chili's Grill & Bar
2255 S. Ninth
Salina, KS 67401 7308
785-820-8300

Salina Country Club
2101 E. Country Club Road
Salina, KS 67401
785-827-0388

Cozy Inn
108 N. Seventh
Salina, KS 67401
785-825-2699

Papa Murphy's
2365 S. Ninth
Salina, KS 67401
785-827-7900

Martinelli's Little Italy
158 S. Santa Fe
Salina, KS 67401
785-826-9190

Sonic Drive-In
310 S. Santa Fe

Salina, KS 67401
785-825-9614

Perkins Restaurant & Bakery
3050 Riffel Drive
Salina, KS 67401
785-404-2150

Dairy Queen
321 N. Ninth
Salina, KS 67401
785-823-6109

The Voo
249 N. Santa Fe
Salina, KS 67401
785-833-2006

Applebee's Neighborhood Grill & Bar
2875 S. Ninth
Salina, KS 67401
785-827-8385

Pancho's
3029 Riffel Drive
Salina, KS 67401
785-309-0909

Spangles
1720 W. Crawford
Salina, KS 67401
785-827-7040

Candiles Tacos & Tequila
109 N Santa Fe Ave
Salina, KS 67401
785-515-2179

Seraphim Bread
145 S. Santa Fe Ave
Salina, KS 67401
785-502-5133

Blue Skye Brewery & Eats
116 N. Santa Fe
Salina, KS 67401
785-404-2159

Starbucks
257 S. Santa Fe
Salina, KS 67401
785-404-1006

Old Chicago Pizza & Taproom
214 S. Santa Fe
Salina, KS 67401
785-404-1499

Barolo Grille
112 S. Santa Fe
Salina, KS 67401
785-833-2272

Taco Bell
1040 E. Iron
Salina, KS 67401
785-826-9866

YaYa's Euro Bistro
251 S. Santa Fe
Salina, KS 67401
785-515-2422

Freddy's
916 E. Crawford
Salina, KS 67401
785-833-8123

Sonic Drive-In
2615 S. Market Pl.
Salina, KS 67401
785-825-8663

About CEI

For over 40 years, the Community Engagement Institute has been dedicated to research/evaluation, facilitating learning, developing innovative solutions and building capacity with organizations across the state of Kansas. We look forward to partnering with you to support, design and implement the vision, purpose and goals of your organization.