



DIRECTOR'S NOTE

REBECCA MCFARLAND
DISTRICT EXTENSION DIRECTOR

Frontier District Friends and Supporters,

Every day, we make a difference in the lives of those who live and work across the district by connecting university expertise to communities. Our dedicated team delivers research-based solutions that provide tangible benefits to communities. Through our deep understanding of local needs, we ensure our programs effectively address the most pressing challenges residents face. This unique connection offers community members direct access to university expertise, facilitating a collaborative approach to problem-solving.

We also value our partnerships with local organizations, businesses, and community leaders. By collaborating, we can leverage resources and address complex issues more effectively. These partnerships foster a sense of shared responsibility and commitment, amplifying our impact and ensuring that the solutions we provide are relevant and sustainable.

I hope you enjoy reading about how we are positively impacting the lives of Kansans every day!

District Director
Rebecca McFarland

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COMMUNITY VITALITY

Helping Local Leaders Turn Discussion into Direction

In today's rapidly changing environment, individuals, organizations, workplaces, and communities are navigating an increasingly complex set of challenges. Economic uncertainty, shifting workforce expectations,



Anderson County Development Board working together to think strategically

new models of remote and hybrid work, and the rapid pace of technological changes are all reshaping how people live, work, and make decisions. It is more important than ever for groups to have opportunities to come together, think strategically, and engage in productive conversations that lead to thoughtful, future-focused action. To help meet the need, K-State Extension is building a team of facilitators who support organizations, boards, and community groups in working through complex issues with greater clarity and shared purpose.

Facilitation helps groups move beyond simply exchanging ideas to build shared understanding, identify common priorities, and develop solutions that are better informed, more broadly supported, and more sustainable over time. By encouraging open communication, managing conflict constructively, and keeping conversations focused and inclusive, facilitators help ensure that meetings and community engagement efforts are productive, meaningful, and results-oriented.

This work was demonstrated in January when District Director Rebecca McFarland and a colleague facilitated a visioning session for the Anderson County Development Agency Board. Prior to the meeting, board members responded to a series of questions in six areas: regional priorities, industry and project focus, partnerships and collaboration, infrastructure needs, policy and advocacy, and measuring success and long-term impact. Those responses were compiled in advance and shared during the meeting to provide a strong foundation for discussion and to help participants focus on common themes and emerging areas of need. Through the facilitative process, the board identified four priority areas to guide future planning and decision-making. The next phase of the process will focus on organizing the ideas generated during the session and developing two to three goals for 2026 based on those priorities.



Groups were encouraged to do a hands-on activity to help focus on future goals and planning for the next stages

By helping the board move from broad discussion to shared priorities and clear next steps, the facilitation process creates momentum for more strategic, aligned, and actionable planning. This effort also illustrates how Extension's facilitation capacity can strengthen local organizations and communities, helping them address challenges, set direction, and work toward long-term success.

In addition to McFarland, **Janae McNally**, Adult Development and Aging, and Family Resource Management Agent, is also a trained facilitator. If you or your organization, business, or community group is interested in facilitation, contact Rebecca at **785-229-3520** or rmcfarla@ksu.edu.

AGRICULTURE & LIVESTOCK

Ensuring a Safe Food Supply in Kansas and Beyond: Producer Trip to the Biosecurity Research Institute and National Bio and Agro-Defense Facility

Agriculture is the largest economic driver in Kansas, and Kansas farmers, ranchers, and agribusinesses work tirelessly to feed the world. These individuals play a vital role in protecting our food supply by maintaining the highest standards of quality and safety.

Recently, **28 farmers, ranchers, and Extension agents** from the Frontier District and neighboring counties, visited the Biosecurity Research Institute (BRI) and the National Bio and Agro-Defense Facility (NBAF) in Manhattan, Kansas. During their visit, they engaged with leading experts in agricultural defense. The BRI and NBAF collaborate to safeguard the U.S. food supply, support economic growth, and position Kansas as a global leader in biosecurity and vaccine development.

Dr. Stephen Higgs, BRI Director, associate vice President for research, Peine Professor of Biosecurity, and University Distinguished Professor in diagnostic medicine and plant pathology, spoke to the group during their visit. He provided insights into the BRI's research, education, and training programs, which focus on improving the understanding of diseases affecting humans, livestock, plants, and food systems. The training program the BRI offers, prepares a skilled workforce to respond to biological threats to agriculture.

The National Bio and Agro-Defense Facility is a state-of-the-art facility operated by the United States Department of Agriculture. It is specifically designed to protect American livestock from serious foreign animal diseases. NBAF is the only facility in the country equipped with biosafety **level 4** containment, allowing it to safely house large livestock. It provides round-the-clock diagnostic testing to quickly detect and manage disease outbreaks, which is crucial for preventing large-scale livestock losses. Strategically located next to Kansas State University, the BRI, and the Kansas Department of Agriculture fosters close collaboration among scientists, veterinarians, and producers.

Attendees of tours found the experience both educational and engaging, with many expressing that they gained a deeper understanding of the essential work being conducted at these facilities. One producer remarked, **"That was very eye-opening".**



Stephen Higgs biosecurity Research Institute director, associate vice president for research, Peine Professor of Biosecurity

CROP PRODUCTION

2025 Prescribed Burning Program

The Frontier Extension District and the Anderson County Conservation District co-hosted a Prescribed Burn School on February 11 at the Anderson County Community Building in Garnett. The event drew an impressive turnout of **59 producers** from more than eight counties. Every generously sponsored the meal and provided books for participants attending the event. Their support and commitment to agricultural education helped make the event a success and greatly enhanced the experience for those in attendance. The purpose of this meeting was simple: prescribed burning of native grasses has been a part of Kansas landscapes for centuries, ranging from small patch burns to fires spanning thousands of acres. On average, Kansas producers burn roughly 2 million acres annually to maintain healthy and productive rangeland. However, recent years have seen a decline in burned acreage. This trend is concerning because prescribed fire plays a critical role in controlling invasive brush species, reducing dangerous wildfire fuel loads, improving native plant health, increasing forage production and quality, and ultimately enhancing livestock performance and stocker cattle gains. Former Range Specialist at Kansas State University, Clenton Owensby, stated that research shows that producers needed to burn at least **6 out of every 10** years to prevent brush species from overtaking pastures and diminishing grass production.

Attendees learned about the purpose and benefits of prescribed burning, including safe weather conditions, required equipment, burn planning and execution, fire behavior, hazards and safety considerations, liability issues, and Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) regulations.

The overall goal of the school was to equip landowners and producers with the knowledge, confidence, and practical tools needed to safely and effectively conduct prescribed burns while improving the health and productivity of their grasslands. Based on participant feedback, the event was a tremendous success. Of the **46 surveys** collected, **100% of respondents** indicated the meeting was a worthwhile use of their time, while **94%** reported feeling more confident in their ability to carry out prescribed burns on their own operations. Handwritten comments further highlighted the program's impact, including one attendee who stated, **"Of the meetings I've attended in the last 28 years, this was the best one, hands down!"**



K-State Extension's weekly burn report, which runs from early March through the end of May, uses satellite imagery to estimate statewide burned acres:

2025 – 1.85 million acres

2024 – 1.37 million acres

2023 – 1.2 million acres

2022 – 1.89 million acres

Nutrition, Food Safety & Health

Fighting Childhood Obesity Starts Early: Nutrition Education for Lifelong Health

According to the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation State of Childhood Obesity report, **15.3%** of Kansas youth ages **6 to 17** have obesity, placing Kansas **33rd** among **50 states** and Washington, D.C.

Early childhood is a crucial time for shaping positive food preferences and establishing lifelong healthy habits. Healthy eating patterns support growth and development, help children achieve and maintain a healthy body weight, and reduce the risk for chronic conditions such as high blood pressure, heart disease, type 2 diabetes, and certain cancers.

To encourage and promote positive nutrition behaviors, Frontier District Nutrition, Food Safety, and Health Agent Chelsea Richmond partnered with **ECKAN** Head Start in Anderson County to deliver hands-on nutrition programs for **15 preschool youth** on a quarterly basis over the past year. ECKAN offers Head Start and Early Head Start programs for low-income families with young children from prenatal to age five. This collaboration reflects a shared commitment to helping young children build the skills and confidence that support a strong foundation of lifelong healthy habits.

During each program, youth used their senses to explore and try new foods, became familiar with a variety of fruits and vegetables, utilized their creativity, and enjoyed a healthy snack. Activities included making shaker pudding, creating a rainbow out of colorful bell peppers and cauliflower, and building flowers and dragonflies out of a variety of fruits.



A child created a dragonfly with fruits ranging from apples and berries- Photo by Chelsea Richmond



Youths created a rainbow out of colorful peppers - Photo by Chelsea Richmond

A favorite program focused on bell peppers and the different colors in which they grow – red, orange, yellow, and green. Youth created a “rainbow” out of the peppers and used cauliflower to form “clouds.” While sampling their snack, several preschoolers shared that they initially thought that the red peppers would be spicy. This led to a discussion about how some red peppers are spicy, while others, like the ones they were tasting, are mild and sweet. Although many had tried peppers or cauliflower before, several had not tried the peppers in all of the color varieties, especially orange and yellow.

Over time, the preschoolers reported trying new fruits and vegetables, including orange and yellow bell peppers, cauliflower, kiwi, and raspberries. By pairing early nutrition education with strong community partnerships, programs like this help children develop healthy habits that they can carry with them into adulthood.

HORTICULTURE & NATURAL RESOURCE

Enhancing Community Health Through Gardening in the Frontier District

The Frontier District faces challenges with food access, health, and community well-being. Over one-third of residents (**35.11%**) live in areas with low income and limited nutritional options, while **12.77%** experience food insecurity. Chronic health concerns exist, with **12.2%** diagnosed with diabetes, **37.4%** living with high blood pressure, and **36.4%** classified as obese. The scarcity of grocery stores, coupled with a high density of fast-food establishments, makes it harder to maintain healthy eating habits. Expanding home food production is a powerful strategy that can significantly enhance access to fresh produce and improve overall health outcomes. Home gardening offers numerous benefits, such as increased physical activity, improved nutrition, and stress relief. Individuals who garden are more likely to consume fresh fruits and vegetables, promoting healthier diets and significantly reducing the risk of chronic diseases.

Additionally, gardening fosters social connections and instills lifelong healthy habits in participants. To empower the community in preparing for the growing season, Horticulture and Natural Resources Agent Lauren Gammill led a garden planning program on January 22 at Neosho Community College. Crop Production Agent Ryan Schaub emphasized the importance of soil samples, while Gammill discussed essential topics such as location selection, space optimization, and effective pest management strategies, including the concept of companion planting.

On February 18, Gammill collaborated with Osage Garden and Produce for a seed-starting workshop at their greenhouse. Osage Garden and Produce business owner, Becky Siljenberg provided invaluable tips on starting seeds indoors, while Gammill presented information on various soil mixes, enabling participants to create their own blends to take home. As the growing season progresses, we anticipate potential challenges from pests and wildlife that could damage gardens and lawns. To address these concerns, Drew Ricketts, K-State Extension Wildlife Specialist, offered insights into effective wildlife damage management on

Lauren Gammill starting the “hands-on” portion to the Seed Starting Program

March 11 at the Princeton Community Building.

With summer approaching, Gammill is excited to offer workshops on tree planting and pruning, a dedicated program on tomatoes, and a tour of a local native prairie to highlight its significance in landscaping and gardening. By participating in these programs, community members can take proactive steps toward a healthier and more sustainable future. Providing timely, locally relevant education during the critical early growing season helps community members build essential skills, improve garden productivity, and adopt environmentally responsible practices. By increasing knowledge of soil health, pest management, and efficient production methods, these programs strengthen local food systems and enhance residents' ability to successfully produce their own food.



Becky Siljenberg presenting about seed-starting and what steps to take





4-H YOUTH DEVELOPMENT

Nurturing Future Aviators: Merging Excitement with Education

4-H is widely recognized for empowering young people by equipping them with essential life skills that extend beyond traditional classroom learning. It nurtures qualities such as confidence, teamwork, and perseverance, preparing youth to face and overcome various life challenges. Additionally, 4-H enables young people to discover their passions and pursue opportunities to explore their interests and potential career paths. This spring, fifteen youth from the Frontier participated in a three-day Aviation Day Camp where they had the unique opportunity to explore aviation, broaden their horizons, and ignite their passion for flight. On Day 1, campers engaged with local organizations like the Ottawa Municipal Airport, Aviation Explorers, and Dodson Aviation. They experienced thrilling flights that made the dream of soaring through the skies a reality. Participants toured Dodson's facilities, where they learned about various aviation services and potential career paths. Witnessing the campers' excitement after their flights and during the exploration of Dodson's was truly inspiring. They left the day with a wealth of local aviation opportunities ahead of them. Day 2 featured special guests from K-State University, including Grace Yang, who shared insights into the science and history of flight. Campers also learned from a 4-H member from central Kansas with drone flying experience. This day was not only educational but also connected campers to the broader world of aviation technology and innovation, inspiring them to consider their future roles in this dynamic industry. A notable moment occurred when a hesitant youth flew a drone for the first time. With encouragement, he gained confidence and expressed his intention to start a drone-based



4-H Youth Program took youths on a tour of the TWA Museum in Kansas City



Youths touring a private jet

drone-based agricultural spray business! The camp concluded on Day 3 with a visit to the TWA Museum, where campers explored the history of commercial aviation and recent advancements shaping the industry. A visit to Signature Aviation provided insight into the operational side of aviation services, reinforcing the knowledge gained throughout the camp. The program effectively empowered youth through well-organized activities and valuable experiences. Feedback from campers highlighted the camp's positive impact. One youth recalled their first flight, stating, **"It was my first flight, and I really loved getting to steer the airplane."** They also appreciated learning about free online resources to help them pursue a pilot's license. Moreover, campers reported significant boosts to their confidence and teamwork skills. One youth remarked, **"It builds my confidence a lot because I can meet new people and learn more about my future career goals."** These testimonials underscored the camp's effectiveness in preparing youth for future success while fostering a sense of belonging and community. The Aviation Day Camp showcased the transformative power of 4-H Youth Development programs. By bringing together local opportunities and partnerships, the camp successfully combined excitement and education, nurturing the next generation of aviators.

Adult Development and Aging and Family Resource Management

Wits Workout Classes Making an Impact

A growing body of research demonstrates that maintaining strong social connections and engaging in ongoing intellectual activity are critical factors in supporting brain health and cognitive vitality as individuals age.

Recognizing the importance of these protective factors, Adult Development and Aging Agent, Janae McNally, implemented the WITS WORKOUT program across the Frontier District during the winter months. Programs were intentionally delivered in accessible, community-based settings – including senior centers, senior housing facilities, and public libraries – to reduce barriers to participation and reach older adults where they naturally gather.

WITS WORKOUT is designed to promote lifelong brain health through structured cognitive exercises combined with interactive participation.

Each session encourages participants to actively engage in problem-solving, memory activities, and learning exercises while fostering meaningful

social interaction. This dual focus not only reinforces cognitive stimulation but also builds a sense of belonging – an essential component of overall well-being among older adults.

Two primary themes emerged consistently across participant responses. First, individuals expressed strong appreciation for efforts to provide programming that helps older adults remain active, engaged, and connected within their communities. Second, participants emphasized that the sessions were both informative and engaging, highlighting the program's ability to deliver meaningful educational content in an enjoyable, approachable format. By integrating cognitive engagement with opportunities for social interaction, the program addressed multiple dimensions of healthy aging and improved participants' quality of life.

100% of participants reported increased motivation to keep their minds engaged as they age and greater awareness of brain health. 84% indicated that participation encouraged them to challenge themselves by trying new activities.

94% reported feeling more connected to others in their community.

94% stated that the program increased their knowledge of strategies to support brain health.

**Participant
evaluations
collected**



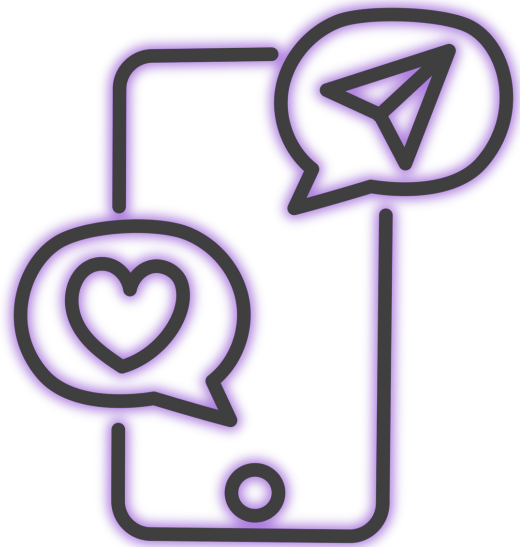
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UPCOMING EVENTS

- JUNE 10 - Prairie Tour and Information Meeting
- JUNE 12 - Q.P.R. Suicide Prevention Training
- JULY 3 - Office CLOSED
- JULY 13 - Franklin County Fair Kick-Off
- JULY 8 - 11 Osage County Fair
- JULY 14 - 19 - Franklin County Fair
- JULY 27 - 31 - Anderson County Fair
- AUGUST 11 - 15 - Overbrook Fair



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