

## **URBAN EXTENSION EXCHANGE**

**Connect. Engage. Advance.**

Polk County, Iowa • Johnson County, Kansas • Wyandotte County, Kansas  
November 28, 2018

### **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

#### **OVERVIEW**

Iowa State University Extension and Outreach, Polk County in partnership with K-State Research and Extension, Johnson and Wyandotte Counties hosted the 2018 Urban Extension Exchange. The goal of the event was to connect and engage with other similarly-sized county extension offices to learn operations, expand professional networks, facilitate idea sharing and highlight best practices to advance the overall mission of Extension in Iowa and Kansas. The learning opportunities afforded in this exchange support what we want: A Strong Iowa.

Johnson and Wyandotte counties were considered for the Exchange because the three participating counties were similar based on overall county population:

- Polk County, Iowa: population 481,830
- Johnson County, Kansas: 591,178
- Wyandotte County, Kansas: 163,831

Although the overall county populations were similar, when considering the entire metro area, the populations were vastly different:

- Des Moines, Iowa metro population: 645,911
- Kansas City, Kansas and Missouri metro population: 2,159,159

The Urban Extension Exchange between Kansas and Iowa provided a significant learning opportunity for staff, although there were some disparities as it relates to population, geographic reach and resources. Event description and notable findings have been included in this report.

#### **EVENT DESCRIPTION**

The 2018 Urban Extension Exchange was hosted in Olathe, KS by the Johnson County staff. The event was held over the course of five hours with a working lunch. The day was split into three sessions:

- Session 1: Each county director provided a brief overview of local operations.
- Session 2: Staff participated in roundtable discussions by program area and they remained together over lunch to continue conversations.

- Session 3: A brainstorming activity involving “poster walk” was conducted where perceptions were listed under the following topics:
  - Diverse audiences
  - Urban audiences
  - Suburban audiences
  - Cross-program collaboration
  - Inclusion and how to engage
  - Marketing

## NOTABLE FINDINGS

Following the Urban Extension Exchange, ISU Extension and Outreach, Polk County staff provided overarching thoughts and general feedback on the event. The information gleaned from staff will allow the Council and county leadership to enhance the experience and evaluate the success of the event. The following information has been compiled into three categories: key overarching responses, potential action items, and future vision and areas of improvement.

### Overarching Responses

- Reassurance that our peers have similar struggles with the agricultural stereotype of 4-H, recruitment and retention of volunteers.
- Reassurance that as Extension employees we are making a difference in people’s lives.
- Iowa’s Master Gardener classes have a strong component from ISU faculty and are offered at convenient times for working trainees.
- All staff were fully engaged throughout the day with a barrage of “aha moments.”
- Polk County has almost twice the 4-H enrollment of Johnson County, Kansas.
- Extension work requires relationship building skills.
- Both Polk and Johnson County Extension are developing a marketing communications plan.

### Potential Action Items

- Administration & Marketing
  - Investigate [Nextdoor](#), a private social network for neighborhoods, as a possible additional digital marketing/communications platform.
  - Encourage continued staff involvement in community initiatives, coalitions and boards.
  - Continue to work on a succinct overarching message. This remains a challenge.
  - Develop training to enhance relationship building skills and training in marketing tactics for staff.
  - Create a diverse Polk County photo bank to be used when developing promotional and collateral materials.
- 4-H & Human Sciences
  - Officer training may be combined with another event for non-officer members such as project area presentations or parliamentary procedures.
  - Expand the use of volunteers like the ‘Foodies’ in Kansas who deliver nutrition programming.
  - Collaborate between 4-H and Human Sciences by combining nutrition and cooking skills with etiquette and table setting. This could culminate with an invitation to parents to an event where youth prepare a meal and then engage in table conversation.
  - Provide training for adults when 4-H is training officers.
  - Consider a possible Youth Exchange in the future.
- Horticulture & Master Gardener
  - Use space in Master Gardener gardens near youth programming facilities to coach and mentor youth gardeners.
  - Focus urban ag programming on wineries, breweries and local farmer’s markets.

## Future Vision & Areas of Improvement

- Agenda:
  - Roundtable discussions by program area were universally popular.
  - Conduct a more formal overview of each county as a launching point to better frame conversations.
  - Evaluate the brainstorming activity and adjust to allow staff an opportunity dive deeper into a particular area of interest or topic. In the initial exercise, staff broke into small random groups (not exclusively by program area) and remained in those groups throughout the activity. However, due to time constraints staff only had three minutes to add ideas to a topic before switching to the next topic. The ideas and thoughts generated during the brainstorm session allowed for greater understanding across program areas and facilitated the idea of “cross-program collaboration” but lack of time to further develop the discussion was an issue.
- Additional topic areas to add:
  - How do programs communicate across the organization?
- Prepare a “pre-read” packet for participating staff and provide program materials and photos to share.
- Provide talking points and “thought-starters” to help facilitate roundtable discussions.
- Find a way to have more time on site and maybe meet halfway or stay overnight.
- Future Urban Extension Exchange partners to consider:
  - Minneapolis metro
  - Omaha metro

## APPENDIX

- Group Photo
- Run of Show and Agenda
- News Release

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## Urban Extension Exchange *Connect. Engage. Advance.*

### RUN-OF-SHOW & AGENDA

*To connect and engage with other similarly-sized county extension offices to learn operations, expand the professional network, facilitate idea sharing and highlight best practices to advance the mission of Extension.*

### WEDNESDAY, NOVEMBER 28, 2018

6:00 am Staff meets at Polk County office.

6:15 am Depart Altoona in two vans. Paul and Marci will drive. Kalsa will serve as a back-up driver. Tiffany will be driving separately.

Address for Google Maps  
11811 S. Sunset Drive Ste 1500  
Olathe, KS 66061

Phone: 913.715.7000

10:00 am Arrive at the Johnson County Extension Office.

### Program Starts

10:15 am Welcome

10:20 am Introductions

10:25 am Kansas county perspective and overview

10:35 am Iowa county perspective and overview

10:45 am Breakout roundtable/discussion by program area

- 4-H
- Hort/MG
- Nutrition
- Families
- Office Professionals

Noon Break & Lunch

12:30 pm Breakout roundtable/discussion by audience:

- Diverse audiences
- Urban audiences
- Suburban audiences
- Cross-program collaboration

2:30 pm Depart for Polk County office

6:00 pm Approximate arrival at Polk County office

**Additional**

Staff Backgrounders

- Johnson County Staff
- Wyandotte County Staff
- Polk County Staff (11)
  - Tiffany Berkenes, 4-H Youth Program Specialist (State Field Specialist)
  - Nancy Eichmann, Horticulture Education and Master Gardener Program Coordinator
  - Megan Freel, 4-H and Family Life Educator
  - Madisen Gaskin, 4-H County Youth Coordinator
  - Paul Gibbins, Executive Director
  - Demi Johnson, Youth Nutrition Educator
  - Kameron Middlebrooks, Program Coordinator Community and Economic Development (State Field Specialist)
  - Marisol Molstre, Marketing Strategist
  - Michelle Schott, Extension Educator
  - Cassie Odland, Family and Nutrition Educator
  - Kalsa Parker, Customer Service Coordinator
  - Marci Vinsand, County Youth Coordinator

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

**CONTACT**

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## **Urban Extension Exchange focused on idea-sharing, best practices, Extension network**

*First of its kind event for ISU Extension and Outreach, Polk County staff*

**Altoona, IA (December 6, 2018)** – Nearly 30 Extension professionals from Iowa State University (ISU) Extension and Outreach, Polk County and K-State Research and Extension, Johnson and Wyandotte Counties participated in the 2018 Urban Extension Exchange held on November 28. Extension professionals from the three county offices met with the aim to connect and engage with other similarly-sized county extensions to learn about internal operations, expand the professional network, facilitate idea sharing and highlight best practices.

“ISU Extension and Outreach, Polk County is unique among our Iowa county peers where we are one of the largest counties by population serving urban, suburban and rural residents from broad and diverse backgrounds. As our office looks towards the future, it is important for Polk county staff to have opportunities to learn and gain knowledge from other Extension offices with similar reach,” said Paul Gibbins, executive director of ISU Extension, Polk County. “The Urban Extension Exchange provided Polk County staff the opportunity to gain insight and perspective that will help us better serve our residents.”

Coordinated by ISU Extension and Outreach, Polk County the Urban Extension Exchange was held at K-State Research, Johnson County in Olathe, Kansas. Extension professionals from all three counties participated in breakout sessions by program area and roundtable discussions based on audience and demographics. Areas of special focus included:

- 4-H and youth development
- Family and nutrition programming
- Master gardeners and horticulture
- Office management and marketing

“As I facilitated the roundtable discussion, it was interesting to hear how all three of our County offices handled some of the same challenges,” said Tara Markley, county extension director and community development agent for K-State Research and Extension, Johnson County. “The Exchange event allowed us to brainstorm potential solutions and gain insight to adapt and overcome some of these challenges.”

“My staff enjoyed hearing the varying perspectives of other Extension professionals and agents,” said Dr. Nozella Brown, county extension director for K-State Research, Wyandotte County. “Thoughtful, facilitated discussions like we had at the Urban Extension Exchange allow us to highlight what we’re doing well, learn something new and discover what may translate well into our own respective communities.”

ISU Extension and Outreach, Polk County office seeks to create similar events and partnerships among other Extension offices throughout the Midwest.

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To learn more about Iowa State University Extension and Outreach, Polk County visit <https://www.extension.iastate.edu/polk/>. To learn more about K-State Extension and Research visit <https://www.johnson.k-state.edu/> and <http://www.wyandotte.k-state.edu/>

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**About Iowa State University Extension and Outreach, Polk County**

Since 1916 ISU Extension and Outreach, Polk County has served its residents by connecting them to research and resources developed by Iowa State University. Knowledge and programs offered through the ISU Extension and Outreach, Polk County office have been specifically tailored to represent, enhance and meet the needs of Polk County residents and community. For 2018 ISU Extension and Outreach, Polk County will focus on these local issues: K-12 youth outreach; health, well-being, and nutrition; and community and economic development. ISU Extension and Outreach, Polk County is part of a 99-county campus serving all Iowans to create a strong Iowa.