

Food Hub Development in the Rural Midwest

Project Titles: Food Hub Development in the Rural Midwest

Coordinators: Katie Nixon

Location: Kansas City, Kansas

SARE Grants: \$22,493

Duration: 2017-2019

To read the full project reports, go to <https://projects.sare.org/> and search for project number FNC17-1093.

In 2015, a small farm cooperative in the Kansas City area had a dilemma. Fresh Farm HQ (FFHQ) Cooperative Association was helping small and medium sized farmers access wholesale markets in the Kansas City area, but with more than 18 produce distribution companies already operating in the area, they needed to differentiate themselves; they needed to change.

They had ten local farmer members with more than 160 years of combined growing experience; they boasted more than 180 acres in vegetable production and 35 high tunnels and greenhouses that extended the growing season; they were selling 45 different local products to corporate food service companies, grocery stores, institutions, and restaurants throughout the Kansas City metro area. Considering all this, they took a good look at their marketing, and with support from a \$22,493 NCR-SARE Farmer Rancher grant, they commenced work on brand building, food safety, and traceability.

After meeting with multiple brand and marketing consultants who recommended that FFHQ change their name and brand to something that would better align them with the Kansas City region, members voted on a new name, the Kansas City Food Hub. This name change proved to be a major advantage.



With support from SARE, Ken Barber, Katie Nixon, and several other farmers formed the 15-farm member Kansas City Food Hub in order to improve their distribution in the Kansas City metro area.

“We did not realize how disastrous our previous name (Fresh Farm HQ (FFHQ) Cooperative Association) was until we adopted the new brand: Kansas City Food Hub,” explained food hub member, Katie Nixon. “The new name and professional material that was developed out of this effort raised the profile of the organization. When the project started we had ten member of the cooperative, we now have fifteen member, with three pending to sell through the 2019 season.”

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With the grant funds, they pursued technical assistance partnerships to learn more about USDA Food Safety requirements, and then prepared for USDA Good Agricultural Practices (GAP) certification. After initially considering getting GAP certification as a group (GroupGAP), members pursued individual GAP certification due to cost savings.

The group also implemented traceability protocol through the use of Local Food Marketplace (LFM). LFM's software helped them create a printable label that traces products back to the original farm. They even launched a website and produced materials that would showcase their cooperative in the regional market. All of these efforts have made for a stronger cooperative.

“We are strengthening the middle market in the Kansas City region for these growers,” said Nixon. “Our progress is informed by multiple perspectives and a deep well of expertise in our membership and partners that are demonstrating the viability of our cooperative approach.”

For more information on Minning's NCR-SARE Farmer Rancher grant project, visit the SARE project reporting website. Simply search by the project number, FNC17-1093, at <https://projects.sare.org/>, or contact the NCR-SARE office.

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