The Challenge of Increasing Access to and Consumption of Healthy Foods in Kansas:
How Might More Stakeholders Work Together More Often in Pursuit of the Common Good?

DISCUSSION BRIEF
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Who created this document?

With the aim of improving the health of all Kansans, the Kansas Health Foundation has offered a prestigious, year-long leadership development experience since 1999. The goal of this Fellows program has been to develop a growing cadre of individuals throughout Kansas who are trained, informed, health-conscious and effective in exercising leadership for the purpose of creating healthier Kansas communities.

Participants in the Kansas Health Foundation Fellows VII cohort during 2012-13 contributed to the creation of, discussed, refined and finalized this brief, which was initially designed to capture the group’s own insights and summarize multiple views on healthy foods. A professional writer, working with a team of program organizers, helped conceptualize and summarize the information, so it could be more easily discussed. The purpose of the document was to complement the Fellows’ intensive leadership development experience and assist them in exploring the civic leadership challenges associated with enhancing access to and consumption of healthy foods in Kansas.

The group’s 22 participants came from a variety of organizations throughout the state and the Fellows cohort included individuals from the public, private and non-profit sectors. Professional interests represented included public health at the state and county level, philanthropy, health policy, social services, children’s health, nutrition, community food systems, community wellness, state and local government, grocery and meat marketing, public school systems, grant-writing/consulting and public universities.

What is a discussion brief? What should it be used for?

In creating this brief, the Fellows cohort hopes to stimulate deeper, more meaningful conversations about civic leadership and making progress on access to and consumption of healthy foods in Kansas. It should not be read as an objective research, issue or policy brief. The document focuses primarily on subjective information, especially the art of capturing and naming differing interpretations and opinions that exist surrounding the issue and important questions that may need to be asked.

This brief should be utilized as another tool, among many, for helping groups of Kansans better understand the civic challenges associated with increasing access to and consumption of healthy foods and to more effectively comprehend their own views and the views and values of others. It is believed this resource may be useful in an educational setting or it may be appropriate for use by an experienced facilitator in community or organizational discussions.

Participants discussing this document should be encouraged to explore multiple points of view, wrestle with the tough trade-offs and tackle the unanswered questions explored in the various sections of the brief, particularly the concluding questions on the final page. One possibility for any group is that the views and values captured in the discussion brief may in fact be alive and represented in the room. If so, it is hoped that this document can, at least, be a vehicle for creating a healthier civic culture through enhancing mutual understanding. Perhaps, in some cases, it will even be useful in helping make progress easier on a matter crucial to the health of all Kansans.
INTRODUCTION: The Complicated Reality in Kansas
The need for healthy foods binds us together as Kansans.

Regardless of what other roles or identities we have in our daily personal, professional and civic lives, we must eat. What we consume – be it by conscious choice, habit or necessity – represents a key determinant, along with physical activity and many other factors, in how healthy we may be throughout our lives.

This discussion brief, developed from the insights of participants in Kansas Health Foundation Fellows VII, aims to provide a common framework for understanding and discussing this complex issue. It represents a summary of the issue based on the responses to six core questions – as well as individualized follow-up questions – that each Fellow provided. Rather than focusing on the individual answers, it aims to capture patterns and broad areas of agreement and disagreement.
## TRENDS

### Related to Access to and Consumption of Healthy Foods in Kansas:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Trend</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tr>
<td>Larger, more productive farms.</td>
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<td>Food spending consumes less of an average household’s budget than ever before; but a number of threats could increase prices.</td>
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<td>Significant amounts of food are wasted.</td>
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<td>Changing habits of consumption: people eat out more often and buy more processed foods than in the past.</td>
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<td>Low rates of fruit and vegetable consumption.</td>
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<td>Rising rates of obesity threaten individual health and have increased the state’s health care costs.</td>
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<td>Significant numbers of Kansans, particularly children, face the threat of food insecurity.</td>
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<td>“Food deserts” in rural and urban areas geographically isolate some consumers from healthy foods.</td>
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<td>Many Kansans do not understand the unhealthiness of their diets.</td>
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Mirroring the rest of our nation, the current reality of access to and consumption of healthy foods in our state is awash in complexity and confounding contradictions.

American farms are growing larger and more productive, producing abundant supplies of food. And Americans also spend a smaller share of their incomes on food than ever before.

At the same time, a number of factors — increased fuel costs, regulations, higher grain costs, droughts and worldwide increased demand — threaten to bring food prices, which have been on the rise, even higher.
Americans spend their food dollars far differently than they have in the past. In 1929, Americans spent nearly a quarter of their income on food, nearly all of it on food for at-home consumption. Just two years ago, Americans spent $440 billion on food eaten outside the home, about 40 percent of their food expenditures.

How Americans spend their food dollars is important, because in a mature U.S. food market – one that sees domestic food needs grow only when the population expands – “consumption growth for one food product increasingly comes at the expense of another.”

The industrialization of the U.S. agriculture system that began to take shape in the early 1900s – and rushed ahead full tilt after World War II – has corresponded with the development of astounding gains in the standards of living and life expectancies present in a more prosperous, urbanized America. Fueled by specialization, inexpensive energy, synthetic fertilizers, chemical pesticides and the application of science and technologies, advances in preservation and refrigeration, food production became “more predictable, reliable and repetitive,” effectively “providing enormous amounts of foods for minimal amounts of labor” at more affordable prices to consumers.

There are clear signals that all is not well when it comes to the American diet itself. Despite gains in productivity, millions of families in the country also face the prospect of not having enough to eat at some time during any given year. At the same time, a rising tide of obesity saddles millions of Americans with deadly chronic diseases and is dramatically increasing the amount the nation spends on health care.

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Furthermore, the actual use of food by Americans could hardly be deemed efficient. The U.S. wastes billions on uneaten food every year, as much as 40 percent of all foods. That’s the equivalent of $165 billion, according to a report from one environmental group. Almost all of that waste — very often healthy fresh fruits and vegetables — occurs at the household or food service and restaurant level.

Many Kansans also face the risk of not having enough to eat.5

1-in-4 Kansas children live in a food insecure household.

1-in-7 Kansas households face the prospect of not being able to obtain enough food, with households headed by single mothers particularly at risk.

Nearly 50% of food-insecure households are earning incomes that are too high for receiving aid from major federally funded food assistance programs.


In some parts of the state, residents also find themselves geographically isolated from access to retail food outlets that offer healthy options. Several dozen census tracts in the state have been identified as “food deserts” by the U.S. Dept. of Agriculture’s Economic Research Service, meaning they have significant low-income populations and low-access to a supermarket or large grocery store. In all, only about 62 percent of the state’s census tracts had healthy foods retailers within a half-mile of their boundaries based on a 2009 census by the Centers for Disease Control.

That Kansans continue to make dietary choices that put them more at risk for obesity and chronic diseases such as diabetes, heart disease and cancer, seems beyond question. Healthy diets rich in fruits and vegetables provide essential vitamins, minerals and fiber, help people maintain healthier weights and have been shown to reduce the risk of cancer and other chronic diseases. But few Kansans eat a healthy diet and the state has some of the lowest rates of fruit consumption in the country. Only about 10 percent of Kansas adults and adolescents ate two or more servings of fruit and three or more servings of vegetables each day in 2009, according to the CDC.

A majority of Kansans may not even perceive or be able to acknowledge how unhealthy their diets actually are. It’s a trend that is true of the nation as a whole, where people tend to rate themselves as being far healthier than justified by their diets. One recent report found 8-in-10 U.S. adults described themselves as “extremely healthy” or “very healthy,” but only 1-in-5 actually had a “most healthy diet.” Nearly two-thirds were overweight or obese.6

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According to a recent report by the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, a trend of ever-increasing obesity could mean that hundreds of thousands more Kansans could face type 2 diabetes, coronary heart disease and stroke, hypertension, arthritis and cancer linked to obesity over the next 20 years.

30% of Kansans are obese making it the 16th most obese state in the nation.

35% of Kansans are overweight and the % of Kansans above their ideal body weight has increased markedly over the past 15 years. The report estimates that by 2030 Kansas could be one of the most obese states in the country.

A trend of ever-increasing obesity could mean that hundreds of thousands more Kansans could face type 2 diabetes, coronary heart disease and stroke, hypertension, arthritis and cancer linked to obesity over the next 20 years.

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* According to a recent report by the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation.
Toward a Working Definition of "HEALTHY FOODS"
In order to advance access to and consumption of healthy foods in Kansas, those pushing for progress must have some sort of understanding of what constitutes “healthy foods.”

There is no exact, shared definition of “healthy foods” among the participants in Kansas Health Foundation Fellows VII, much less the wider civic culture in Kansas. It may be virtually impossible to reach a complete, common understanding of a term that is open to many different interpretations. However, without some sort of definition of what healthy food is, it will be difficult to have a productive conversation about how we might change the current reality as it relates to access to and consumption of healthy foods in Kansas.

Despite the ambiguity of the term “healthy foods,” there appears to be a solid basis for common ground to create a “working definition” based on the insights of Fellows VII participants. This “working definition” will not satisfy all factions – or perhaps any faction – wholly, but it presents a starting point for understanding the common ground that exists among the various factions with a stake in the Kansas food system. It is also a “working definition” in the sense that it is specific enough that if multiple stakeholder groups mobilized around it, they could work together to advance it and make progress on the issue of access to and consumption of healthy foods in Kansas.

At the heart of the definition is the idea that healthy foods are nutrient-dense fruits, vegetables, whole grains, low-fat dairy and lean meat and proteins, which are high in vitamins and minerals. There is also a considerable – though certainly not exclusive – focus on fresh, whole, minimally processed foods. Certain dried, canned or frozen foods, such as beans and vegetables, could represent healthy options when fresh is not available or as cost-effective. It is also important to note that processing can enhance the safety of healthy foods (such as milk pasteurization) or preserve already healthy foods for use over longer periods of time.
Produced, prepared, handled and consumed in ways that are safe.

Nutrient-dense fruits, vegetables, whole grains, low-fat dairy and lean meat/proteins.

A ‘WORKING’ DEFINITION
HEALTHY FOODS:

Part of a balanced diet that helps keep weight at healthy levels and fights chronic disease.

Preference for fresh, whole, minimally processed foods. Canned, frozen, or dried foods may be healthy options.

High in vitamins and minerals; low in sodium, added sugar and fat.
The healthy foods described on the previous page represent the basis of a diet that is low in fat, added sugar and sodium, helps fight chronic disease, allows for the maintenance of healthier weights and is balanced based on expert recommendations, such as those published by the USDA. They would also be tasty, reduce hunger, digest easily, increase energy and provide net nutritional benefits that outweigh the costs of their calories. Healthy foods would also be produced, prepared, handled and consumed in ways that are safe for the individual. This definition also acknowledges that some otherwise healthy foods would not be safe for individuals with food allergies to them.

Some individuals or factions are quick to point out that just about any foods, consumed in moderation, can be part of a healthy diet. However, based on information available, we can reasonably conclude that the area in which Kansas diets fall the shortest at present is in fruit and vegetable consumption. Therefore, a working definition of healthy foods would tend to focus most heavily on whole fruits and vegetables, since they are the areas that are the most deficient and may need the most attention.

However, there are differences the working definition of healthy foods cannot reconcile.

1. **PROCESS ISSUES**
   
   It does not settle the debate between factions who focus on whether the end product is healthy vs. those who are extremely concerned about the process through which food is produced.

2. **TRANSPORTATION ISSUES**
   
   This definition does not distinguish between a tomato produced in a community garden within Kansas and one trucked in from a farm in California.

3. **ENVIRONMENTAL/SAFETY ISSUES**
   
   It also does not distinguish between whether pesticides were used to grow it or it was produced organically.

4. **SCIENCE & TECHNOLOGY ISSUES**
   
   It also does not resolve issues over the use of science and technology, including the use of genetically modified organisms or GMOs, that can be the source of fierce divisions.
Process Issues: For community-scale production advocates who believe the process of food production is crucial to the healthiness of the end product, as well as improving the health of individuals, the environment and food production workers, a definition that does not significantly take into account process is liable to feel insufficient.

It should also be noted that Kansans can only eat so much. If they choose to eat more fruit and vegetables than at present, those healthier foods may – and hopefully would – replace less healthy foods in their diets. Such changes in consumer perception and behavior, though, could have economic implications for industries that presently produce, process, market and sell food, particularly less healthy food.

Increased consumption of healthy food might also be of concern to meat producers, a major industry in Kansas, who may fear that increased fruit and vegetable consumption may come at the expense of their livelihoods. For instance, the “Meatless Monday” initiative has drawn criticism from livestock producers, who see it as singling out their industry. And the “pink slime” controversy involving the production of lean, finely textured beef, which prompted some retailers to stop selling it in 2012, prompted the closure of a plant in Garden City and the loss of 230 jobs.

In addition, this definition also requires large-scale production advocates, who contend that the U.S. food system is governed by the laws of supply and demand, to recognize the current reality is not meeting our aspirations – or the health needs of Kansans – and interested stakeholders must intervene in the system to make healthier foods more available.

Perhaps this could take the form of proactive changes in production methods that would foster greater access to and increased consumption of healthy foods. Or large food industries could play a greater role in changing consumer perception by encouraging healthier options. However, these adjustments would require moving beyond what is often a deeply held belief that the market is self-correcting and bold steps to increase access to and consumption of healthy foods are a commercial rather than a civic concern.

Transportation Issues: This definition also does not resolve differences over the extent to which fruits, vegetables and other foods should be locally, regionally or globally produced and transported. To some, local production provides environmental benefits and encourages the eating of produce in season. But others point to the efficiencies of a global distribution system that allows access to a wider variety of options than the local climate often allows.

Environmental/Safety Issues: The working definition also does not account for differing views of what constitutes safe (whether foods should be free of pesticides, food colorings, hormones, antibiotics, etc.). Rather, it focuses on all stakeholders working to advance a shared purpose – the production and consumption of healthy foods – in a manner consistent with their knowledge, beliefs and values. As our knowledge about foods and diet grows, this working definition will likely have to change.

Science & Technology Issues: There is also no attempt in this definition to deal with any of the controversies or benefits surrounding the utilization of genetically modified organisms, such as whether they should be labeled in a way that distinguishes them from other products.
SEVEN FACTORS
Affecting Access to and Consumption of Healthy Foods

{3}
Nailing down what constitutes adequate “access” that allows for sufficient consumption of healthy foods is another tricky area where there are many different opinions and perspectives.

However, a review and summary of answers from Fellows participants helps provide seven broad categories which offer a starting point for understanding exactly what conditions would have to be met to allow for more access to and consumption of healthy foods in Kansas.

In order to be able to consume healthy foods, consumers – particularly low-income consumers – need to be able to have adequate means to purchase them and do so at prices that aren’t unfavorable compared to unhealthy options. That means affordability represents a core aspect of accessibility and is needed to foster increased consumption.

But affordable food is of little use if consumers cannot reach it. As a result, healthy foods need to be located either in close proximity to where people live, particularly in urban areas, or there needs to be adequate transportation options for people to obtain and consume healthy foods.

However, even if healthy food is affordable and in close proximity, there still needs to be sufficient quantities of it for people to be able to actually purchase it when shopping or eating out. For that to happen, there must be adequate production of healthy options and food outlets must stock those options so that consumers may purchase them. Unless healthy foods are made widely available for purchase, it will be difficult for consumers to place a higher value on obtaining them.

For those products to be available, though, it will require an economic climate in which producers, processors and retailers can be economically successful in providing healthy foods to the public. As a result, financial sustainability or profitability, represents another key condition for determining where Kansans have access to and are able to consume healthy foods.
Yet the presence of food alone may not be enough to entice consumers to choose those options while shopping or dining out at a restaurant. Kansans must have the **awareness and desire** to seek out and consume healthy food options. To do that, people must understand the distinctions between healthy and unhealthy and be well-positioned to make informed, conscious choices about what they eat – and seek out those choices that would be healthier for them.

Even when people desire healthy options, other barriers may prove to discourage them from actually consuming healthy foods. As such, Kansans will need the **knowledge and capacity** to utilize healthy foods. This means that individuals will possess the planning, preservation, preparation and cooking skills that will allow them to maximize the use of healthy foods in their kitchens. Fostering that knowledge and capacity may also require changes in the belief systems of Kansans, who must make consuming healthy foods an **expectation or cultural norm**.

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**7 FACTORS AFFECTING SUFFICIENT ACCESS TO AND CONSUMPTION OF HEALTHY FOODS:**

{1} Affordability  {2} Proximity/Transportation  {3} Availability  
{4} Sustainability/Profitability  {5} Consumer awareness/demand for healthy foods  
{6} Consumer capacity to utilize healthy foods  {7} Cultural norm or expectation
Choosing what to eat is a deeply personal act.

All of us have individual preferences and dislikes and for most of us, our daily diets are more than just a simple nutritional transaction. Food is also closely tied to our culture and identity; it is a pleasure and consuming it is often associated with acts of celebration.

OUR EATING HABITS ARE INFLUENCED, AT THE VERY LEAST BY:

1. PRODUCTION
   - What our system produces and why;

2. ENVIRONMENT
   - The food that surrounds us in stores, restaurants and at home and how we are encouraged or influenced to interact with that food;

3. CULTURE
   - What others expect of us in terms of consuming foods and what we expect from ourselves based on cultural and social expectations.

The nature of our food supply chain inherently produces factions with different values, priorities, loyalties and potential gains and losses from changes to the current reality. The food system is in a reality of a mix of biological, economic, social and political systems that interact with and influence each other. Production decisions may heavily influence what types of food are available to be consumed and how affordable they might be. Even with our best efforts to make conscious individual choices, the setup of the food environment by retailers or in our homes may push us toward certain food choices – and away from others. Culture and societal expectations also encourage us to eat certain foods and avoid others, based on our identities and the groups we identify with. While all of us are consumers of foods, some people have distinct and separate interests and viewpoints based on their own unique role in the system. The food supply chain itself, for instance, can be divided into a number of different factions and sub-factions with unique perspectives (See Faction Map 1).
There are a variety of different groupings of individuals who may have differing views and insights on the issue of access to and consumption of healthy foods. The Kansas Leadership Center often calls these groups with common values, loyalties and interests by a special name -- factions.

Being able to identify factions and make educated guesses about their values is an important part of preparing to lead. By mapping out the distinguishing characteristics of various factions around the issue of healthy foods, one may be able to better understand his or her own view, the views of others and where interests might connect.

But we are fractured by far more than the roles we play in the system. The very way we think about the nature of our food system, how foods should be produced and how we should relate to food have risen to become topics of significant debate (See Faction Map 2).
Factions Related to Production

Faction Map 2

Faction Map 2 shows an example of two different groupings related to production and distribution: community scale and large scale. Additional opinions were sought out to create this map and augment the views of the Fellows cohort. This kind of engagement with other voices may sometimes be necessary to more fully understand the views of others.

This map can be used as a model to identify the many other factions around this issue and to explore their views, values and characteristics more fully and deeply. The third box on the next page provides a framework to follow in outlining the pertinent information for each group one might like to discuss.
PARADIGM: COMMUNITY SCALE

CHARACTERISTICS:
Smaller scale, distributed locally or regionally. Produces only a small fraction of the food Kansans consume. Includes small organic, local or mixture of the two. Previously embraced by Americans with a desire to opt out but now has a foothold in mainstream (farmers markets, community gardens, community supported agriculture or CSAs).

PRIMARY VALUES:
transparency, connectedness, naturalness, wholesomeness, uniqueness, autonomy

HOW IT VIEWS ITSELF:
Sees itself reconnecting people with their food and producing health benefits that are better for producers, communities, workers and the environment.

HOW IT VIEWS OTHER FACTIONS:
Sees large-scale system having negative effects on individual, health, the environment, the well-being of workers and peoples’ relationships with food. Believes large-scale production is too heavily dependent on availability of cheap fossil fuels, which may be less accessible due to global competition and artificial fertilizers. Believes more diversified food production would help protect the system against shocks such as contamination, droughts, climate change and political unrest.

POTENTIAL LOSSES AT STAKE:
May have to adapt modes of operating to produce more food for the general public.

VIEWPOINT ON HEALTHY FOOD:
Sees need for increased focus and support for community-scale agriculture to produce more healthy food; seeks prioritization of healthy fare over cheap, profitable and marketable unhealthy foods.

PARADIGM: LARGE SCALE

CHARACTERISTICS:
Dominant mode of producing and distributing food. Aims to meet growing demand for food around the world by producing the greatest amount for the greatest number of people at the most affordable prices.

PRIMARY VALUES:
productivity, efficiency, affordability, predictability, reliability, uniformity and convenience

HOW IT VIEWS ITSELF:
Believes producers, ranchers, distributors, etc. are... driven by a desire to produce and distribute nutritious food for the public and vested interest in protecting the environment and feeding consumers well.

HOW IT VIEWS OTHER FACTIONS:
Sees community-scale ag as an attractive niche and good for the local economy, but inadequate for feeding a world population that will grow from 7 to 9 billion by 2050. Doesn’t see community scale providing certain nutritious foods year-round and making healthy food accessible and affordable to all those who need it.

POTENTIAL LOSSES AT STAKE:
Fears resistance to science and technology (such as genetically modified organisms); concerned about attitudes that may discourage or be opposed to meat consumption.

VIEWPOINT ON HEALTHY FOOD:
Demand for it will be driven by the market. Worries that healthy food is being driven by misinformation, activist agendas and not by scientifically proven measures of healthfulness.

PARADIGM: OTHER

CHARACTERISTICS:

PRIMARY VALUES:

HOW IT VIEWS ITSELF:

HOW IT VIEWS OTHER FACTIONS:

POTENTIAL LOSSES AT STAKE:

VIEWPOINT ON HEALTHY FOOD:

Another viewpoint to consider when identifying and discussing factions are individuals or groups focused on whether the end product of food produced for Kansans is healthy and available, especially to those most in need. This grouping tends to be not as concerned with how food is produced -- be it large scale, organic or local production methods -- but mostly interested in seeing healthy food be widely available and consumed by more Kansans.
ANOTHER WAY TO LOOK AT FACTIONS IS THROUGH DIFFERING FOCUS AREAS RELATED TO ACCESS AND CONSUMPTION

**FOCUS:** Healthy food for the needy.  
**DESCRIPTION:** Those in poverty and/or at risk of being food insecure need the most attention when it comes to increasing supplies and consumption of healthy food.

**FOCUS:** Healthy food for consumers as a whole.  
**DESCRIPTION:** Insufficient access to and consumption of healthy food is a problem facing a spectrum of consumers.

**FOCUS:** Healthy foods in schools.  
**DESCRIPTION:** School children who lack access to or consume too little healthy foods should be the primary focus of intervention.

**FOCUS:** Promoting access and consumption statewide.  
**DESCRIPTION:** Efforts to promote more access to and consumption of healthy foods will differ significantly across regions.
FOCUS: Limiting access to and consumption of unhealthy foods and drinks.

DESCRIPTION: Healthy food choices and the drinking of water won’t be appealing unless unhealthy choices, such as sugary foods or drinks, are discouraged or restricted in some manner.

FOCUS: Government must take a lead in doing the work on increasing access to and consumption of healthy foods.

DESCRIPTION: Additional funding for programs that allow low-income populations to consume more healthy food; support to small farmers who produce community-scale fruits and vegetables.

FOCUS: Government should stay out of the issue.

DESCRIPTION: Most Americans already think government does too much and it should not be the “food police” or play a more active role in encouraging certain kinds of eating behavior. Individuals and families should be able to make their own choices.

FOCUS: Other stakeholders must take up the issue.

DESCRIPTION: Businesses, non-profit groups and consumers themselves all have investment in the problem and finding solutions, but there seems to be less clarity about what their roles should be.

OTHER FACTIONS
MOVING FORWARD:
Many Different Visions for Making Progress
Even if there were generally accepted working definitions of sufficient access for the consumption of healthy foods, there are starkly different interpretations of the current reality and the bold steps that could be taken in Kansas to make discernible progress on the issue.

For one thing, some of the strongest advocates for healthy foods in Kansas see the state being a long way off from providing sufficient access to healthy foods, while large-scale production advocates often see healthy foods as being largely accessible already. Public health advocates who favor restrictions on unhealthy foods may see access to healthy foods lagging but believe sufficient access is more closely in reach.

A more conflictual interpretation argues that the key barrier to healthy foods access and consumption isn’t the lack of healthy foods at all, but the presence of too many unhealthy options in the food system. From this vantage point, the overabundance of cheap, ubiquitous and heavily marketed unhealthy foods — low on nutrients and calorie dense — make it difficult for healthy foods to gain a better foothold in people’s diets. Their widespread availability helps foster a cultural reality where unhealthy food is socially acceptable and associated with taste and pleasure. Unless there are sufficient efforts to limit access to and consumption of these sorts of foods and soft drinks — through such restrictions as marketing limits to children or by placing additional taxes on them — it will be difficult to convince enough people to choose healthier options for their lives.

Another strand of thinking embraced by some healthy food advocates emphasizes the role of state or local government involvement to incentivize the consumption of more healthy foods. These efforts could involve elimination of the sales tax on foods, or fresh produce specifically, or increasing availability through policy and additional funding. Strategies to accomplish this goal might include mandating that retail outlets carry healthier options through licensing requirements, increased outreach to improve participation in food assistance programs, the provision of free breakfasts in schools, providing more meals to students when school isn’t in session, increasing funding so schools can purchase healthier meals during school and providing incentives for grocery stores to locate in food deserts or support the development of new models of food distribution.
POSSIBLE PATHS TO PROGRESS

- INCENTIVIZE THE CONSUMPTION OF MORE HEALTHY FOODS
- INCREASE AVAILABILITY THROUGH POLICY AND ADDITIONAL FUNDING
- INCENTIVIZE MORE PRODUCTION OF HEALTHY FOODS
- MAKE BETTER USE OF THE HEALTHY FOODS ALREADY PRODUCED
- EFFECTIVELY UTILIZE SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGIES
- IMPROVE ECONOMIC CONDITIONS
- BETTER EDUCATE CONSUMERS, PRODUCERS, AND FOOD-RELATED BUSINESSES
- ADJUST CULTURAL EXPECTATIONS
- CONVENE MORE CIVIC CONVERSATIONS ABOUT FOOD
- FOSTER COORDINATION ACROSS MORE SECTORS
Some healthy food advocates also see the need to **incentivize more production of healthy foods**. This could be accomplished through methods that include: direct support for local or regional producers of fruits and vegetables, whole grains and lean meats or the expansion of community gardens and farmers markets, particularly focused on increasing the supply for those with lower-incomes. School wellness policies could be used to promote the use of healthy foods in fundraising and celebrations and subsidized community supported agriculture (CSA) programs could bring more healthy foods consumption into the workplace.

Another proposal would be making significant changes to government agricultural policy that would supply subsidies and crop insurance to fruit and vegetable producers that are on par with those received by commodity producers. Other ideas involve providing funding for farmers markets to start up that specialize in selling fruits and vegetables, programs that help people learn how to grow more of their own produce in gardens and provide funding for more organized, centralized production and distribution of community grown foods through food hubs.

Kansas could also **make better use of the healthy foods already available**. Since significant food waste occurs at both the consumer and food service levels, it may be possible to encourage more thoughtful use of foods to discourage waste. Although protecting the public’s health and well-being remains crucial, advocates of reducing food waste think it may be possible for government to work with food retailers and charities to revise regulations and procedures for collecting and distributing rescued foods. This approach might divert some of the food waste our state produces into providing more healthy options for those in need.

Large-scale production advocates – and others with a globalist view of agriculture production – feel the best course of action is to allow the deployment of resources that would allow the cost of food to remain as low as possible in the face of pressures forcing price increases. **Effectively utilizing science and technologies, such as genetically modified organisms (GMOs),** might help agriculture continue to increase its productivity and feed the world’s growing population. Large-scale producers also see the need to reduce government regulations to help make it easier for Kansas farms to thrive and remain in the hands of the families who built them.

Both community and large-scale production advocates also sense that improving economic conditions so Kansans have more money in their pockets to buy healthy foods would be an important step forward. But whereas community-focused stakeholders tend to see the need to address poverty and improve the pay of lower-income workers, large-scale production advocates tend to see the need to create a climate where it is easier for businesses to be profitable.

Since changing the current reality would likely involve factions to change their current modes of operation, some healthy food advocates foresee **convening more civic conversations about food involving a broad array of stakeholders**. Producers, processors, retailers and consumers of all different vantage points and political persuasions could be brought together more often to confront tough realities, acknowledge the complexities of the food production system and discuss their shared passion for feeding Kansans and how they might learn from each other and complement each other.

There is no shortage of tough topics to choose from for these discussions, such as the effects of climate change on agriculture and rural Kansas and what priorities should be addressed in the Farm Bill, the piece of legislation that sets the agricultural and food policy efforts of the federal government.
THE NEED TO BETTER EDUCATE CONSUMERS is a concept that tends to emerge from both community and large-scale production factions.
Other healthy food advocates see the need to look at the even bigger picture by factoring in factions both inside and outside food production and distribution itself and how they interact with each other. This could involve a focus on **creating more system-oriented approaches** and **fostering coordination across more sectors** with the idea that all Kansans have a stake in the issue. Efforts to address the system as a whole might involve including food systems as a consideration in all government planning efforts.

For example, zoning could be used as a restriction to reduce the density of fast-food retailers in lower-income areas or ordinances could be loosened to make it easier for individuals to produce their own healthy foods, such as raising their own chickens in a city or town. Establishing more food policy councils and coalitions statewide – another idea mentioned is a governor's task force on healthy foods – might result in elevating the issue of healthy foods access and consumption for a broader base of stakeholders than are currently working on the issue. For these efforts to be effective, however, they would also require a widespread understanding that there is no quick fix and that increasing access to and consumption of healthy foods requires a long-term vision and goals.

The need to **better educate consumers** is a concept that tends to emerge as a common thread among those who care about this issue. But there are different interpretations about what types of education would allow for sufficient healthy foods access and consumption. For some, it means requiring clear, understandable nutrient labeling in all restaurant venues. There is also a sense that increasing access to healthy foods will require efforts to help consumers better understand the long-term benefits of eating healthy, so they can more easily see beyond the short-term rewards that tasty, unhealthful food provides.

Suggestions along these lines include media campaigns to encourage healthy eating or specialized programs that teach nutrition, shopping, storing and preparing foods and cooking and gardening for various groups, particularly younger children in elementary and pre-school. Education could also involve cross-sector cooperative efforts that connect consumers with expertise on site at food retailers, such as making dietitians available in grocery stores and partnerships with hospitals.

Advocates also see the need to **educate producers and food-related businesses**. By providing information to producers about how they could lengthen their growing cycle, community producers of fruits and vegetables might be able to produce healthy foods during more months of the year. Businesses could be engaged to consider whether there would be benefits involved in promoting healthy foods in their advertisements. Furthermore, businesses could be more transparent about the efforts they are already involved in to increase access to and consumption of healthy foods – such as seeking out ways to better leverage those efforts in combination with other stakeholders.

An even more daunting challenge may lie in **adjusting the cultural expectations** Kansans have when it comes to healthy foods. This vision seeks to change the way Kansans think about and orient themselves to food and strike back against a highly appealing and prevalent culture of convenience. Encouraging families to share healthy food experiences, such as regular meal times, might be one way of helping elevate the value being placed on consuming nutritious foods. Other ideas include creating programs that offer models for healthy living or other measures that could make healthy lifestyles the norm in Kansas.
IMAGINING THE WAY FORWARD:
What Kind of Leadership Will it Take?
There are no shortages of big ideas about how the future could look in terms of access to and consumption of healthy foods in Kansas. However, few of these answers touch on how these big, lofty visions for the future will be brought closer to fruition.

Our food system is big and complex and the problems we face with increasing access to and consumption of healthy foods - with the purpose of helping Kansans lead healthier and more productive lives - are messy and complicated. The sheer scope of the problem and the wide variety of stakeholders with their own unique interests means there is probably not one, clear solution that will lead the way forward. Nor does it seem clear that anyone knows exactly what interventions will work and whether policies and approaches that lie closest to our hearts will be the right steps to pave the way forward.

Based on the insights of KHF Fellows VII participants, this brief has explored trends related to healthy foods in Kansas, described the views and values of various factions in broad terms, outlined a “working” definition for healthy foods, identified seven key factors to determining sufficient access to and consumption of healthy foods and outlined a wide scope of competing visions for pursuing a greater common good.

What remains unclear, however, is what kind of civic leadership it will take to navigate these different visions and implement a range of solutions that improve community and individual health in Kansas. Knowing what you know now, what conversations will need to take place to facilitate progress? How do you productively engage with someone whose values and vision for the future of our system clash with your own and may even threaten your own personal interests? What values must we weigh and what losses might be at play in creating a sustainable, effective coalition around the issue of access to healthy foods? The path to progress on this issue, as with so many others, runs through our efforts to begin defining the answers to these deep and daunting questions.

**KNOWING WHAT YOU KNOW NOW:**

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